

The Effects of Corruption On Local Government Service Delivery In Sierra Leone: The Case of Bonthe District Council

Steven Mohamed Koroma¹, Mohamed Yusuf², Emmanuel Dauda³,
Joseph Gbondo Theophilus Gando⁴

^{1,4}School of Postgraduate Studies, Njala University Bo Campus

²Department of Peace and Development Studies, Njala University Bo Campus

³Institute of Social Studies, Administration and Management, Njala University Bo Campus

Abstract

This study looks at corruption in local government administrations, focusing on the Bonthe District Council in particular and Sierra Leone as a whole. Corruption has a significant negative influence on local government administrations' ability to provide services. Corruption causes resource misallocation, which leaves important services and infrastructure projects with insufficient funding. The study primarily uses qualitative research methods to review the subject matter and investigate how corruption at the Bonthe District Council is affecting the district's development, drawing heavily from primary and secondary sources as well as other available literature. Important members of the council as well as participants in the research community were interviewed. The study's conclusions reveal that corruption has resulted in administrative inefficiencies in the provision of services, the diversion of funds intended for public services to private individual projects, the creation of barriers to public service utilization, the stifling of economic growth and development, and a lack of accountability and transparency. The research recommended stepping up efforts to combat corruption, enforcing the law, and expediting court cases. It also suggested keeping a close eye on and assessing council initiatives, involving the public in raising awareness of the activities of councils, and safeguarding whistleblowers.

Keywords: Local Governance, Corruption, Service Delivery, Bonthe District Council

1. INTRODUCTION

Local governments in developing nations such as Sierra Leone are still facing challenges in achieving their full potential due to corruption and inadequate service delivery, which hinders the successful implementation of development projects at the community level, where most citizens interact directly with government entities (Brighton et al., 2023). Despite continuous efforts to improve transparency and accountability, the Bonthe District Council encounters persistent obstacles in addressing these concerns (Moses et al., 2023).

Corruption within local government administrations continues to pose significant challenges to service delivery and socio-economic development in many regions, including Bonthe District Council in Sierra Leone. Defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, corruption undermines public trust, distorts policy priorities, and erodes institutional capacity (Transparency International, 2023). In Bonthe District, where local councils are tasked with crucial responsibilities ranging from infrastructure development to social services provision, the impact of corruption on these mandates cannot be overstated.

Recent studies highlight a pervasive pattern where corruption diverts public resources away from essential services, perpetuating inefficiencies and compromising the quality of service delivery (World Bank, 2022). For instance, funds allocated for education and healthcare may be siphoned off through illicit means, leading to underfunded schools and inadequate healthcare facilities (Chêne et al, 2017). This diversion not only hampers the council's ability to meet community needs but also exacerbates socio-economic inequalities, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations.

Moreover, the consequences of corruption extend beyond financial mismanagement. They encompass a broader spectrum of governance failures, including weakened accountability mechanisms and reduced transparency in decision-making processes (UNDP, 2021). In Bonthe District Council, these shortcomings

manifest in delayed project implementations, substandard infrastructure, and a general erosion of public confidence in local government institutions (UNDP, 2021).

Furthermore, the persistence of corruption in local governance undermines efforts towards sustainable development and poverty alleviation, hindering the achievement of national and international development goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2020). In Bonthe District, where developmental progress hinges on effective and transparent governance practices, addressing corruption becomes imperative for fostering inclusive growth and improving the overall well-being of its residents.

This research endeavors to delve deeper into the specific mechanisms through which corruption impacts local government service delivery in Bonthe District Council. By examining case studies, conducting interviews with stakeholders, and analyzing empirical data, this study aims to provide actionable insights that will inform policy reforms and institutional changes necessary to combat corruption effectively. Through these efforts, it is hoped that Bonthe District Council and similar local administrations will mitigate the adverse effects of corruption and enhance their capacity to deliver essential services equitably and efficiently to all residents.

2. CONCEPTUALIZING CORRUPTION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The etymology of corruption can be traced back to the Latin words *corruptus*, signifying "spoiled", and *currumpere*, denoting "to ruin", "to break down to pieces", "to spoil" (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, UNODC, 2004). In this light, corruption is commonly defined as the tainting, distortion, or degradation of the purity of objects for self-interest.

In the words of Nweneka (2018), corruption refers to a departure from the regular obligations of a public role as a result of personal associations. This encompasses activities like bribery (using incentives to sway the judgment of someone in a position of trust); nepotism (awarding favors due to family ties rather than merit); and misappropriation (unlawfully diverting public resources for self-centered purposes (Nweneka, 2018).

The act of corruption can be seen as dishonorable when committed by an individual or a group, leading to significant negative consequences for other individuals, organizations, and societies (Adamu & Mohammed, 2022). Corruption within local government administration is a pervasive issue that undermines governance, erodes public trust, and hampers service delivery. In Sierra Leone, the conceptualization of corruption can be understood through various frameworks, including historical context, systemic factors, and the implications for public service.

Corruption in Sierra Leone has deep historical roots, exacerbated by the civil war and subsequent political instability. The legacy of corrupt practices dates back to the colonial era and has been perpetuated by successive governments that have engaged in patronage and misappropriation of public funds (Thompson & Potter, 1997). The All-People's Congress (APC) party, which ruled from 1968 to 1992, is particularly noted for its systemic corruption, where powerful officials embezzled state resources to enrich themselves and their allies (Kpundeh, 1999). When the first significant scandal, 'Vouchergate', broke out in 1982, signs of pervasive systemic corruption became apparent in Sierra Leone. Despite the revelation of further scandals, 'Squandergate' in 1984, and 'Milliongate' in 1987, the government was unable to come up with a plan to address what was turning into a pattern. The disclosures from the 1992 corruption investigations highlight the problem's profound impact and enduring nature (Kpundeh, 1999), and successive reports from Audit Service Sierra Leone and the Anti-Corruption Commission showcase how complex and systemic corruption has gotten hold of the country's public sector. The status quo of corrupt practices remains the same for all political parties that have formed a government including the Sierra Leone Peoples Party, and military regimes. Examining these shows that strong public participation and effective governance are essential to developing solutions. This historical backdrop is crucial for understanding the current state of corruption, as it has created an environment where corrupt practices are normalized and expected.

Additionally, the Institutional Theory emphasizes the role of institutional structures and norms in shaping corrupt behavior. In Sierra Leone, weak governance frameworks, inadequate legal enforcement, and a culture of impunity create fertile ground for corruption to thrive (Luo, 2005). For instance, the healthcare sector is severely affected, with reports indicating that healthcare workers often rely on bribes to supplement their low salaries, leading to significant barriers to accessing medical care (Wikipedia, 2023). This systemic corruption not only impacts service delivery but also erodes public trust in government institutions.

The implications of corruption within local government administrations are profound. Corruption leads to the misallocation of resources, resulting in inadequate public services such as healthcare and education. The

diversion of funds intended for essential services can lead to higher mortality rates and reduced economic productivity, as citizens suffer from preventable diseases due to a lack of access to quality medical care (Jalloh, 2023). Similarly, the education system is compromised by corrupt practices, including exam fraud and misappropriation of educational funds, limiting access to quality education and hindering human capital development (Jalloh, 2023).

Moreover, corruption creates an environment that deters investment and economic growth. Potential investors are often discouraged by the perception of widespread corruption, which distorts market competition and impedes entrepreneurship (Jalloh, 2023). This has long-term consequences for the country's development, as the mismanagement of natural resources, such as diamonds, further exacerbates the cycle of poverty and corruption (Wikipedia, 2023). In conclusion, the conceptualization of corruption within local government administrations in Sierra Leone is multifaceted, encompassing historical, systemic, and practical dimensions. Understanding these factors is essential for developing effective strategies to combat corruption and improve service delivery. By addressing the root causes of corruption and promoting transparency and accountability, Sierra Leone can work towards enhancing governance and restoring public trust in its institutions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Drawing heavily from both primary and secondary sources and other available pieces of literature, the study primarily employs qualitative research methods to review the literature and investigate how the prevalence and effects of corruption at the Bonthe District Council are impeding the district's development. We perform qualitative research, according to Creswell (2013), not just because we need to comprehend a topic or subject in-depth, but also because we need to explore it. The study heavily draws from several secondary sources of data, including magazines, newspapers, scholarly journal articles, and reports, to analyze and explain the endemic nature of corruption in local governance administration. To gain further insight into the issue, interviews were conducted with significant members of the Anti-Corruption Commission and some staff members of the Bonthe District Council. We also held focus group discussions in the research community with community members who were chosen through a simple random sampling method to participate in the discussions. The information gathered from these interactions was analyzed and ultimately formed the basis for the study's conclusion.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW ON CORRUPTION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The issue of corruption has emerged as a significant governance hurdle in Africa, notably in Sierra Leone following its independence (Osamba, 2019). Research conducted by Kayode et al (2013) underscores that corruption is indeed a global problem that has undermined and still poses a threat to the progress of development and the delivery of public services in various nations (Kayode et al, 2013).

The concept of corruption involves complex indicators, connections, and procedures, making it difficult to establish a universally accepted comprehensive description. Transparency International (2018) describes it as the abuse of delegated power for personal benefit, which includes rationalization, opportunity, and need (Karsono & Syauket, 2021). Corruption is an unethical behavior committed by either an individual or a group, and its consequences can be extremely detrimental to other individuals, institutions, and communities (Adamu & Mohammed, 2022).

The research conducted by Dikmen and Çiçek (2022) revealed that corruption in Africa, particularly in Sierra Leone, is pervasive across different tiers of government establishments, including local, provincial, and national levels. The multifaceted nature of corruption in society is evident through practices like obstruction of justice, money laundering, bribery, embezzlement, absenteeism, deception, drug trafficking, influence peddling, illegal wealth accumulation, abuse of authority, and informal payments (Hussmann & Naher, 2020). The World Bank's approximation suggests that the annual cross-border circulation of global revenues derived from corruption, misappropriation, and tax evasion falls within the range of \$1 trillion to \$1.6 trillion (Hunter, 2018). Corruption has become a prevalent transnational phenomenon, with instances of corrupt practices being observed in various countries across the globe (Kichwen, 2017).

The issue of corruption presents a unique challenge to the effective provision of public services and raises doubts about the significance of public institutions, particularly local government administrations, in society (Mwesigwa, 2021). Despite the public's expectation of decent and high-quality services, the prevalence of corruption in various forms, such as nepotism, fraud, embezzlement, bribery, false accounting, and influence

peddling, can disrupt administrative processes (Krylova, 2018). According to Chêne. M. (2014), certain forms of corruption in service delivery, such as clientelism, patronage, and bribery, not only violate the human right to equal access to public services but also exacerbate fundamental inequalities, disproportionately affecting the most marginalized and underrepresented segments of the population.

Furthermore, the prevalence of corruption in public institutions, particularly within local government administration as identified by the United Nations (2003), can result in disruptions in the service delivery chain, causing the state apparatus to be incapable of fulfilling its duties in protecting its citizens. The United Nations (2003) report also points out that the failure to address corruption in public institutions can be interpreted as a failure by governments to adequately ensure human rights - including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as the right to development - by denying citizens access to public services. This exacerbates societal disparities and inequality, as individuals with financial resources can access private services (United Nations, 2003).

In the United States, corruption in local government administrations remains a significant issue, undermining the integrity and effectiveness of public service delivery. According to a study by Fazekas and Kocsis (2017), corruption manifests in various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism, which distort the allocation of resources and impede efficient service delivery. The misuse of public funds and resources for personal gain by local officials not only leads to financial losses but also erodes public trust and reduces the quality of essential services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure maintenance (Fazekas & Kocsis, 2017).

A recent analysis by E. Wittberg, et al (2023) highlights the systemic nature of corruption in certain local government administrations, pointing out that it often involves complex networks of patronage and collusion among public officials and private sector actors. These corrupt practices significantly hamper the delivery of public services by diverting funds intended for public projects into the pockets of corrupt officials. As a result, communities suffer from inadequate services and infrastructure, which exacerbates social inequalities and hinders local development (Wittberg, E. et al, 2023).

The detrimental impact of corruption on service delivery is further evidenced by the findings of Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016), who argue that corruption in local governments leads to inefficiencies and increased costs in public service provision. For instance, procurement processes may be manipulated to favor certain contractors, leading to substandard work and inflated costs. This does not only affects the quality of public services but also strains local government budgets, limiting the ability to fund other essential services (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). Moreover, the research by Rajh et al (2020) indicates that corruption undermines the accountability mechanisms within local governments, making it difficult to hold officials accountable for their actions. This lack of accountability fosters an environment where corrupt practices can flourish, further degrading the quality of public services. The study emphasizes the need for robust anti-corruption measures and increased transparency to combat these issues effectively (Rajh et al, 2020).

In the United Kingdom, corruption in local government administrations manifests in various forms, including bribery, nepotism, embezzlement, and fraud. Despite being perceived as one of the least corrupt countries globally, the UK is not immune to corrupt practices at the local level. Recent studies highlight the complexity of corruption in local governments, where officials may exploit their positions for personal gain or to benefit associates (Meza & Chiques, 2020). Such actions undermine public trust and lead to significant inefficiencies in service delivery. Instances of corruption often involve the manipulation of procurement processes and the misallocation of public funds. For example, Abdou, O. et al (2022) discuss how local councils have been implicated in awarding contracts to preferred suppliers without transparent bidding processes, thereby inflating costs and compromising the quality of public services. This lack of transparency not only leads to financial losses but also affects the delivery of critical services, such as housing and social care, as resources are diverted away from their intended purposes (Abdou, O. et al, 2022).

The impact of corruption on service delivery in local government administrations is profound. Corruption leads to the misallocation of resources, resulting in inadequate funding for essential services and infrastructural projects. This is particularly evident in the allocation of social housing, where corruption can result in the unfair distribution of homes, leaving the most vulnerable populations without necessary support (Transparency International UK, 2023). Such practices exacerbate social inequalities and hinder efforts to provide equitable public services. Moreover, corruption in local government can demoralize public sector employees, leading to reduced efficiency and productivity. Studies have shown that when employees perceive

their workplace as corrupt, it negatively affects their motivation and commitment to service delivery (Charron et al 2015). This demotivation can lead to a decline in the quality of services provided, as employees are less likely to go above and beyond in their roles.

Corruption in local government administrations across Europe has manifested in various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism. This pervasive issue significantly undermines the efficacy and quality of public service delivery. For instance, a study by Charron, Dahlström, and Lapuente (2021) highlights that local governments with higher levels of perceived corruption tend to have lower levels of citizen satisfaction with public services. The study, which covered multiple European countries, found a clear correlation between corruption and the inefficiency of service delivery, suggesting that corruption erodes public trust and reduces the effectiveness of government institutions (Charron et al., 2021).

In particular, the misuse of public funds is a common form of corruption in local government administrations. According to a report by Transparency International (2022), embezzlement of public resources in local governments across Europe leads to significant financial losses and hampers the delivery of essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. The report emphasizes that local governments in countries with weaker regulatory frameworks are more vulnerable to such practices, which exacerbates inequalities and undermines development efforts (Transparency International, 2022).

Furthermore, the prevalence of nepotism in local government hiring practices can severely impact service delivery. A study by Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) points out that nepotism often results in the employment of unqualified personnel, which diminishes the quality of public services. The study notes that in several European regions, nepotistic practices have led to inefficiencies and a lack of professionalism in local administrations, ultimately affecting the population's access to reliable and high-quality services (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Within the contingent of Africa, corruption in local government administrations is a pervasive issue that significantly impacts the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. The nature of corruption in these administrations often involves embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, and favoritism, which undermine public trust and the quality of services provided. According to Olken and Pande (2012), corruption in local governments can be attributed to weak institutional frameworks, lack of accountability mechanisms, and insufficient transparency in financial management and procurement processes (Olken and Pande, 2012).

The prevalence of corruption varies across African countries, but it is particularly high in regions where governance structures are weak and oversight institutions lack the power to enforce anti-corruption measures. A study by the World Bank (2020) highlights that in many African countries, local governments are more susceptible to corrupt practices due to their proximity to citizens and the substantial discretion they have over resources and service delivery. This local-level corruption not only diverts resources away from essential public services but also creates an environment where citizens are compelled to pay bribes to access basic services, further entrenching poverty and inequality (World Bank, 2020).

The effect of corruption on service delivery in local government administrations is profound. It leads to the misallocation of resources, resulting in inadequate infrastructure, poor healthcare, substandard education, and unreliable public utilities. For instance, a report by Transparency International (2021) found that corruption in the procurement of health services in several African countries has led to inflated costs and compromised the quality of medical supplies and equipment, ultimately affecting the delivery of healthcare services. This inefficiency exacerbates the challenges faced by vulnerable populations who rely heavily on public services (Transparency International, 2021).

Furthermore, the presence of corruption erodes public trust in local government institutions, which is essential for fostering civic engagement and participatory governance. Studies by Fjeldstad (2004) and De Maria (2008) reveal that citizens who perceive high levels of corruption are less likely to participate in local governance processes and more likely to distrust government initiatives, thereby weakening the social contract between the state and its citizens. This erosion of trust hampers efforts to implement community-driven development projects and reduces the overall effectiveness of governance.

In Sierra Leone, corruption in local government administrations manifests through various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, and misallocation of funds. It is a pervasive issue that significantly hampers governance and development (BTI Transformation Index: Sierra Leone Country Report, 2024). The lack of transparency and accountability mechanisms exacerbates the problem, making it difficult to curb these corrupt practices. According to Sesay (2023), local officials often misuse public resources for personal gain, which

undermines the trust of the citizenry in local governance structures. This situation is compounded by weak legal frameworks and inadequate enforcement of anti-corruption laws, creating an environment where corruption can thrive unchecked (Kabba & Conteh, 2023).

In the Bonthe District Council, corruption is particularly rampant, affecting various sectors of local governance. The misuse of funds intended for public services, such as education and healthcare, is a common issue. A study by Maureen Lewis (2006) found that a significant portion of the budget allocated for infrastructure development is often siphoned off by corrupt officials, leading to substandard or incomplete projects. Additionally, the appointment of unqualified individuals to key positions due to nepotism and favoritism further degrades the efficiency of the council's operations (Kaufmann, 2023). The prevalence of these corrupt activities not only hampers the council's ability to deliver essential services but also erodes public confidence in local government institutions.

Corruption in local government administrations severely impacts service delivery, particularly in the Bonthe District Council. The diversion of funds meant for public services leads to inadequate provision of essential amenities, such as clean water, education, and healthcare (World Bank, 2023). For instance, the misappropriation of resources allocated for healthcare results in a lack of medical supplies and poorly maintained health facilities, which directly affects the quality of healthcare available to residents (Jullien, 2023). Furthermore, the inefficiency caused by corrupt practices in administrative processes delays service delivery and increases operational costs, further straining limited resources (Ezzat Al-rubaye, 2022). Consequently, the primary objective of the study is to analyze the implications of corruption on the capacity of the local government to effectively deliver services in the Bonthe District Council.

5. IMPACT OF CORRUPTION ON PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIONS

The consequences of corruption in Sierra Leone are severe. These include underdevelopment, inadequate infrastructure such as clean water and road networks, misuse of national resources resulting in widespread poverty, ineffective leadership and lack of professionalism, poor leadership outcomes, high levels of unemployment and despair among the youth, a growing disparity between the wealthy and the impoverished, and declining educational standards leading to the emergence of subpar graduates (Waziri, 2010). In the context of this review, the following section explores the effects of corruption on the delivery of public services in the context of local government administration in Sierra Leone.

Diversion of Funds Meant for Public Services

The diversion of funds meant for public services to private pockets is a critical issue that significantly impacts public service delivery within local government administrations in Sierra Leone, particularly in the Bonthe District Council. Corruption in this context manifests through various forms, including embezzlement, misallocation of resources, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, all of which severely undermine the effectiveness of essential services. Corruption directly affects the quality and availability of public services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. When funds intended for these services are siphoned off by corrupt officials, the consequences are dire. For instance, in the healthcare sector, the misappropriation of funds leads to inadequate medical facilities and a lack of essential supplies, resulting in poor health outcomes for the population (Jalloh, 2023). Citizens in Bonthe District often report needing to pay bribes to access basic healthcare services, which exacerbates health disparities and increases mortality rates (Transparency International, 2023).

The diversion of funds also severely impacts infrastructure development in Bonthe District. Corruption in procurement processes often results in contracts awarded to unqualified contractors who deliver substandard work or fail to complete projects altogether (Jalloh, 2023). As a result, vital infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and sanitation facilities remain in disrepair, hindering economic activities and reducing the quality of life for residents. Poorly maintained roads, for instance, can lead to increased transportation costs and reduced access to markets, further entrenching poverty in the region (ACC, 2021).

The continuous diversion of public funds to private pockets erodes public trust in local government institutions. When citizens perceive that their leaders are corrupt and that public resources are mismanaged, they become disillusioned with the government and less likely to engage in civic activities (Transparency International, 2023). This lack of trust can lead to apathy towards governance and a reluctance to report

corruption, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates the problem. In conclusion, the diversion of funds meant for public services to private pockets has a profound impact on public service delivery within local government administrations in Sierra Leone, particularly in the Bonthe District Council. The consequences of corruption are felt across healthcare, education, and infrastructure, leading to inadequate services and diminished quality of life for citizens. To address these challenges, it is essential to strengthen anti-corruption measures, promote transparency and accountability, and foster a culture of integrity within local government institutions.

Administrative Inefficiencies in Service Delivery

Corruption within local government administrations in Sierra Leone, particularly in the Bonthe District Council, has a profound impact on public service delivery, primarily through administrative inefficiencies and delays. These issues arise from a combination of systemic corruption, weak institutional frameworks, and a culture of impunity, which collectively hinder the effective provision of essential services.

Corruption leads to significant administrative inefficiencies within local government, as public officials often exploit their positions for personal gain. For instance, the demand for bribes to expedite services creates a bureaucratic environment where delays are common (U4 Helpdesk, 2023). Citizens frequently encounter obstacles when seeking essential services, such as healthcare and education, which can lead to prolonged waiting times and inadequate access (Jalloh, 2023). The lack of transparency in administrative processes further complicates these inefficiencies, as funds intended for public services are often misallocated or siphoned off by corrupt officials (Chêne, 2010). This misallocation not only delays project completion but also results in substandard service delivery, as seen in various sectors, including healthcare and infrastructure (Transparency International, 2023).

Moreover, the procurement process in Sierra Leone is fraught with inefficiencies due to corrupt practices. Poor procurement practices often lead to delays and waste, and they are frequently cited as a primary cause of government inefficiencies (National Public Procurement Authority, 2023). When contracts are awarded based on favoritism rather than merit, the quality of public services suffers, resulting in incomplete or poorly executed projects (BTI Transformation Index, 2024). For example, infrastructure projects in Bonthe District may remain unfinished or poorly constructed, further exacerbating the challenges faced by local communities. The delays in service delivery caused by corruption have significant repercussions for the population. Citizens often find themselves waiting extended periods to access basic services, which can have dire implications for their well-being (U4 Helpdesk, 2023). For instance, in the healthcare sector, the diversion of funds meant for medical supplies and facility improvements leads to inadequate healthcare services, contributing to higher morbidity and mortality rates among the population (Jalloh, 2023).

The continuous diversion of public funds to private pockets erodes public trust in local government institutions. When citizens perceive that their leaders are corrupt and that public resources are mismanaged, they become disillusioned with the government and less likely to engage in civic activities (Transparency International, 2023). This lack of trust can lead to apathy towards governance and a reluctance to report corruption, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates the problem (BTI Transformation Index, 2024).

Barriers in Accessing Public Services

Corruption within local government administrations in Sierra Leone, particularly in the Bonthe District Council, creates significant barriers for disadvantaged groups to access essential public services. The diversion of funds meant for public services to private pockets, administrative inefficiencies, and delays in service delivery collectively undermine the ability of marginalized communities to access healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Disadvantaged groups, such as the poor, women, and children, bear the brunt of corruption's impact on public service delivery. In the healthcare sector, the misallocation of funds leads to inadequate medical facilities and a lack of essential supplies, resulting in poor health outcomes for vulnerable populations (Jalloh, 2023). Citizens in Bonthe District often report needing to pay bribes to access basic healthcare services, which exacerbates health disparities and increases mortality rates among the poor and marginalized (Transparency International, 2023). The perception that corruption is rampant within local government can lead to a lack of trust in public institutions, further discouraging disadvantaged groups from seeking help through legitimate channels (BTI Transformation Index, 2024).

In the education sector, corruption manifests through the misallocation of educational funds and resources, limiting access to quality education for children from low-income families. Reports indicate that funds meant for school improvements or teacher salaries are often embezzled, leading to poorly maintained schools and a lack of qualified teachers (Chêne, 2010). This not only widens the education gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups but also perpetuates the cycle of poverty, as children from marginalized communities are less likely to receive the skills and knowledge needed to improve their socioeconomic status (Jalloh, 2023). Moreover, corruption in infrastructure development disproportionately affects disadvantaged communities. When funds intended for vital projects like roads, bridges, and sanitation facilities are siphoned off by corrupt officials, the consequences are most severe for those living in remote or impoverished areas (Jalloh, 2023). Poor infrastructure can lead to increased transportation costs, reduced access to markets, and limited economic opportunities, further entrenching poverty in marginalized regions like Bonthe District (ACC, 2021). To address these barriers and ensure equitable access to public services, it is crucial to tackle corruption at the local government level. Strengthening transparency and accountability measures, enhancing the capacity of anti-corruption institutions, and promoting civic engagement can help restore trust in government and ensure that public resources are allocated fairly (Chêne, 2010). By prioritizing the needs of disadvantaged groups and investing in inclusive development, Sierra Leone can work towards creating a more just and equitable society.

Corruption Stifles Economic Growth and Development

Corruption within local government administrations in Sierra Leone, particularly in the Bonthe District Council, significantly stifles economic growth and development. The diversion of public funds, administrative inefficiencies, and the erosion of public trust collectively hinder effective service delivery, which is essential for fostering economic progress and improving the quality of life for citizens. Corruption directly impacts economic growth by misallocating resources that could otherwise be used for development. Public funds intended for essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure are often siphoned off by corrupt officials, leading to inadequate service provision (Jalloh, 2023). This misallocation not only drains the economy of vital resources but also perpetuates a cycle of poverty, as citizens are deprived of the services necessary for improving their livelihoods (Transparency International, 2023). The lack of investment in public services results in poor health outcomes and limited educational opportunities, which stifles human capital development—an essential driver of economic growth (Olusegun Sotola et al, 2023).

Administrative inefficiencies exacerbated by corruption further impede economic development. Bureaucratic processes become convoluted when public officials engage in bribery and favoritism, creating significant delays in service delivery (Chêne, 2010). For instance, citizens often face prolonged waiting times to access basic services, such as healthcare and education, which can have dire implications for their well-being (BTI Transformation Index, 2024). These inefficiencies discourage investment, as potential investors are deterred by the perception of a corrupt and inefficient public sector (Jalloh, 2023).

In the Bonthe District, the impact of corruption is particularly pronounced in infrastructure development. Corruption in procurement processes often leads to contracts awarded to unqualified contractors who deliver substandard work or fail to complete projects altogether (National Public Procurement Authority, 2023). This not only results in wasted public funds but also leaves critical infrastructure projects unfinished, further hindering economic activities and reducing the quality of life for residents (U4 Helpdesk, 2023).

Weak Oversight and Lack of Transparency in Service Delivery Processes

Corruption within local government administrations in Sierra Leone, particularly in the Bonthe District Council, significantly undermines public service delivery through weak oversight and a lack of transparency in service delivery processes. These issues create barriers that disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups and hinder economic development. One of the primary barriers to effective service delivery is the weak oversight mechanisms in place to monitor public funds and services. The Audit Service Sierra Leone, while mandated to audit public institutions, often lacks the political will and resources to enforce accountability effectively (BTI Transformation Index, 2024). Reports indicate that audits frequently reveal serious deficiencies in procurement processes and resource management, yet these findings rarely lead to significant political consequences or corrective actions (U4 Helpdesk, 2023). This lack of accountability allows corrupt

practices to continue unchecked, resulting in the misallocation of resources intended for essential services such as healthcare and education (Chêne, 2010).

Moreover, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has been criticized for focusing on lower-level corruption while failing to hold senior officials accountable for large-scale corruption (Sierra Leone's Anti-Corruption Revolution, 2023). This selective enforcement creates a perception of impunity among public officials, further eroding trust in government institutions and discouraging citizens from reporting corrupt practices (Transparency International, 2023). The absence of robust oversight not only perpetuates corruption but also diminishes the quality of public services, as funds are diverted away from their intended purposes.

The lack of transparency in service delivery processes exacerbates the impact of corruption on public services. Citizens often face bureaucratic hurdles when attempting to access essential services, leading to delays and additional costs (U4 Helpdesk, 2023). For instance, public officials may demand bribes to expedite service delivery, effectively making essential services unaffordable for many, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Kaufmann et al., 2008). This situation is particularly evident in the healthcare sector, where patients may be required to pay unofficial fees to receive necessary medical attention (Jalloh, 2023).

In Bonthe District, the lack of transparency in procurement processes often results in substandard services and infrastructure. Corrupt officials may award contracts to friends or family members rather than qualified contractors, leading to poorly executed projects that fail to meet community needs (National Public Procurement Authority, 2023). This mismanagement wastes public resources and leaves communities without the infrastructure necessary for economic development and improved quality of life (Investing in Sierra Leone, 2023). The consequences of corruption and lack of transparency disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups, including women, children, and the poor. Research shows that low-income households are more likely to pay bribes to access basic services than wealthier households, exacerbating existing inequalities (Transparency International, 2013). The erosion of public trust in government institutions further alienates these groups, making them less likely to engage with local authorities or seek assistance (Chêne, 2010). This cycle of corruption and disenfranchisement perpetuates poverty and limits opportunities for social mobility.

6. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Public service delivery in Sierra Leone is severely impacted by corruption in local government administrations, especially in the Bonthe District Council. This is because administrative inefficiencies and delays are caused by a combination of institutional weaknesses, systemic corruption, and a culture of impunity that all work against the efficient delivery of the services needed.

A summary of the study's findings indicates that money intended for public services is frequently misappropriated to support private endeavors. In this context, corruption takes several forms, such as misappropriation of funds, inefficient bureaucracy, and embezzlement, all of which seriously impair the efficacy of vital services. The availability and quality of public services including infrastructure, healthcare, and education are all directly impacted by corruption. When money meant for these services is embezzled by dishonest authorities, the results are disastrous. These inefficiencies are made worse by the lack of transparency in administrative procedures since money meant for public services is frequently misappropriated or embezzled by dishonest officials (Chêne, 2010).

The Bonthe District Council in Sierra Leone is a prime example of the corruption that seriously impedes the ability of marginalized communities to receive basic public services. The effects of corruption on the provision of public services are most severe for marginalised groups, including the underprivileged, women, and children. Misallocation of finances in the healthcare sector results in unsatisfactory medical facilities and a shortage of necessary supplies, which negatively impacts the health of disadvantaged populations (Jalloh, 2023).

Economic growth and development are severely hindered by corruption in Sierra Leone's local government administrations, especially in the Bonthe District Council. Economic progress is further hampered by corrupt practices that worsen administrative inefficiencies. When public officials participate in bribery and favouritism, bureaucratic procedures become complicated and cause major delays in the provision of services (Chêne, 2010). Through lax oversight and a lack of transparency in service delivery procedures, corruption within local government administrations in Sierra Leone, especially in the Bonthe District Council, seriously

jeopardizes the provision of public services. Weak supervision procedures to keep an eye on public monies and services are one of the main obstacles to providing effective services.

Despite having a mission to audit public institutions, the Audit Service Sierra Leone frequently lacks the political will and funding necessary to successfully impose accountability (BTI Transformation Index, 2024). According to reports, audits often uncover severe inadequacies in resource management and procurement procedures, but these conclusions hardly ever result in meaningful political repercussions or remedial measures.

7. CONCLUSION

Due to corruption and poor service delivery, local governments in developing countries like Sierra Leone continue to struggle to reach their full potential. This makes it difficult to successfully implement development projects at the community level, where the majority of citizens interact with government agencies (Brighton et al., 2023). The Bonthe District Council faces persistent difficulties in resolving these issues despite ongoing efforts to increase accountability and openness (Moses et al., 2023).

When resources are misallocated due to corruption, public services like healthcare and education are rendered insufficient. The misappropriation of monies meant for basic services can result in increased death rates and decreased economic productivity when people die from diseases that could have been prevented because they cannot afford high-quality healthcare (Jalloh, 2023). The study's conclusions show that funds meant for public service delivery are embezzled, making the council incapable of delivering essential social services and creating unnecessary barriers to service delivery. Corruption in local councils has impeded Bonthe District's development and economic progress. It has also compromised regular monitoring and assessment of initiatives carried out within local government administration.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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