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Institutionalizing Governance reforms for curbing corruption in Zimbabwe's State-Enterprises.

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ABSTRACT

This study develops a governance-based institutional framework to curb corruption in Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises (SOEs), where entrenched corruption has eroded service delivery, economic stability, and public trust. Despite numerous legal and institutional reforms, corruption remains pervasive, highlighting the ineffectiveness of current anti-corruption strategies. Drawing on qualitative content analysis of 30 empirical studies published between 2010 and 2025, this research integrates Principal agent theory, Institutional Theory, X-inefficiency Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Expectancy Theory to diagnose systemic corruption drivers and propose context-specific interventions. Studies were purposively selected based on their focus on corruption in SOEs, governance practices, and reform initiatives in resource-constrained settings. Key findings identify weak regulatory enforcement, political interference, limited funding of oversight institutions, and inadequate stakeholder participation as critical enablers of corruption. The study proposes a multi-theoretical framework combining legal reform, digital governance tools, stakeholder engagement, and performance-based accountability mechanisms. The resulting model offers a practical, theory-based framework reflecting Zimbabwe's governance realities. It provides actionable strategies to promote transparency and rebuild trust in SOEs, with potential relevance for governance reforms in other developing countries.

Key Words: Corruption, anti-corruption, Anti-corruption framework, state enterprises and governance approach

Introduction

Corruption within Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) remains a formidable barrier to sustainable development, public service delivery, and investor confidence. Despite successive institutional and legal reforms, these entities continue to exhibit deep-rooted governance failures manifested in procurement fraud, high-level corruption, political patronage, and administrative inefficiencies. These persistent challenges highlight a critical research gap: the lack of a contextualized, theory-informed framework that holistically addresses the structural and behavioural drivers of corruption in SOEs.

This study addresses that gap by proposing a governance-based institutional framework tailored specifically to Zimbabwe's socio-political realities. Guided by five complementary theories—Principal–Agent Theory, X-inefficiency Theory, Institutional Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Expectancy Theory—the research seeks to answer two key questions: (1) What systemic and institutional factors enable persistent corruption in Zimbabwe's SOEs? and (2) What kind of governance-based framework can effectively mitigate these factors and promote accountability?

Principal–Agent Theory illustrates how weak oversight, information asymmetry, and poorly aligned incentives allow SOE managers (agents) to prioritize self-interest over public mandates from the state (principal). X-inefficiency Theory highlights internal operational slack and resource misallocation caused by corruption and weak performance incentives. Institutional Theory explains how the erosion of formal rules and dominance of informal practices—such as selective enforcement and impunity—undermine governance structures. Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the need for inclusive governance mechanisms that engage civil society, employees, and minority actors to enhance transparency and legitimacy. Expectancy Theory explores how the lack of credible performance-linked rewards and sanctions demotivates ethical behaviour among public officials.

Using qualitative content analysis of 30 empirical and policy-based studies, the paper develops an evidence-based model emphasizing stakeholder engagement, regulatory reform, ethical leadership, and performance-driven incentives. The novelty of this framework lies in its integration of theoretical constructs with practical implementation strategies that are adaptable to other resource-constrained and post-colonial contexts. By grounding reform strategies in local governance dynamics, this study contributes both to anti-corruption theory and to the design of actionable policy tools for transforming Zimbabwe's public enterprises.

Background

Corruption within state-owned enterprises (SOEs) is a pervasive global issue undermining economic growth, governance integrity, and public trust. Across both developed and developing countries, major corruption scandals from Brazil's Petrobras (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.) to Malaysia's 1MDB (Mazumdaru, 2020) have revealed how SOEs can become vehicles for elite enrichment, political patronage, and fiscal mismanagement. Despite various international conventions and reform frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), the problem persists due to institutional weaknesses and political interference.

In the African context, the corruption crisis in SOEs is particularly severe. Countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa have witnessed high-profile cases involving billions of dollars in losses through mismanagement and fraudulent procurement practices. These failures have had dire developmental consequences, including deteriorating public services, eroded investor confidence, and reduced state capacity. While many African governments have enacted anti-corruption laws and established oversight institutions, implementation remains sporadic, often hindered by limited political will and systemic impunity.

Zimbabwe exemplifies the complex challenge of corruption in the public sector. Over the past two decades, its SOEs critical to delivering public services and supporting economic activity—have been plagued by persistent governance failures and rampant corruption. Enterprises such as the

Zimbabwe National Roads Administration (ZINARA), National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ), and the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) have all been linked to financial mismanagement, inflated contracts, nepotism, and unaccounted expenditures. Public confidence in these entities has plummeted, while their operational viability continues to decline. Although legal instruments such as the Public Entities Corporate Governance Act (2018) and ZIMCODE (2014) were introduced to strengthen oversight, enforcement has been weak and inconsistently applied.

This research focuses on institutionalizing governance reforms within Zimbabwe's SOEs by developing a tailored anti-corruption framework. It draws lessons from global and regional experiences while grounding its analysis in the Zimbabwean context. The goal is to identify practical, theory-informed solutions that can help restore accountability, improve service delivery, and rebuild trust in public institutions.

Current State of SOEs in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe, like many developing African nations, continues to grapple with pervasive corruption that obstructs sustainable development and good governance (Mutema & Kanyane, 2024; Chilunjika et al., 2022). Far from episodic misconduct, graft has become structural, infiltrating political, economic, and civil institutions. Its most common forms abuse of office, procurement favoritism, nepotism, bribery, embezzlement, and systematic mismanagement of public resources signal an entrenched culture of impunity (Dannaoui et al., 2024; Transparency International, 2018).

Empirical evidence underscores the depth of the problem. Afrobarometer's 2018 survey found that 81 % of Zimbabweans regarded corruption as a "very serious" national issue, while the 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked the country 160th of 180, indicating a governance crisis that distorts markets, erodes the rule of law, and constrains inclusive growth.

State-owned enterprises (SOEs,central to service delivery and industrial participation,are among the hardest hit. Bonga (2021) identifies chronic capital misallocation, unchecked graft, obsolete infrastructure, limited access to finance, and unsustainable debt as mutually reinforcing pathologies that have left many SOEs effectively incapacitated. Corruption undermines operational viability, squeezes efficiency, and stifles innovation and accountability within these entities (Chigudu, 2021). Their under-performance ripples through the economy: essential goods and services go undelivered, poverty and inequality deepen, and public discontent intensifies.

The macro-economic drain is staggering. Transparency International Zimbabwe estimates that graft siphons almost US $1 billion from the fiscus each year, depriving priority sectors such as education, health, and infrastructure of vital resources, widening the fiscal deficit, and slowing capital formation. Lost revenue simultaneously deters foreign direct investment (FDI) by signalling high regulatory risk and opaque market conditions. In human terms, these leakages translate into overcrowded hospitals, poorly equipped schools, and deteriorating transport networks, all of which undermine labour productivity and entrench cyclical poverty.

Heightened risk perceptions also raise the cost of capital, forcing the government to rely on expensive short-term borrowing or concessional aid, further constraining fiscal space and long-term development planning. International creditors remain cautious, and domestic investors move funds into safer often unproductive assets, exacerbating capital flight and currency volatility.

Similar patterns are observed across Southern Africa, yet Zimbabwe's fiscal losses relative to GDP are among the most severe, underscoring the distinctive urgency of its governance crisis.

Beyond material losses, corruption corrodes public trust. Citizens increasingly view state institutions,including oversight bodies such as the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC)—as either complicit or ineffective because of political interference, inadequate funding, and weak prosecutorial powers (Hupile & Siambombe, 2024; Chosani et al., 2024; Mandisodza, 2024). Eroded confidence weakens the social contract: tax compliance falls, civic engagement wanes, and reform initiatives struggle for legitimacy. Unchecked corruption also distorts electoral incentives, enabling patronage networks that prize loyalty over competence.

Table 1 Summarises emblematic SOE corruption cases, illustrating the breadth of the challenge and underscoring the urgency of robust, targeted reforms.

Table 1: Corruption Scandals in Zimbabwe over the years

YEAR	CORRUPTION SCANDAL	AMOUNT (US$)
2005	ZISCO Steel	US$500 000
2007	Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) Mechanization Programme.	US$200 000 000
2015	Marange Diamonds	US$15 000 000 000
2016	Command Agriculture	US$3 000 000 000
2019	National Social Security Authority	US$90 000 000
2020	Drax International LLC	US$60 000 000
2022	COTTCO	US$5 000 000

Source: Author

An analysis of Table 1 reveals the widespread and deeply embedded impact of corruption within Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Marumahoko, 2021; Chidoko, 2023). Transparency International (2018) described corruption in Zimbabwe as "rapidly becoming a way of life," illustrating how unethical practices have become institutionalized. The frequent emergence of scandals suggests a severe breakdown in integrity and accountability mechanisms within public institutions (Matambo et al., 2022; Chosani et al., 2024).

To address this, the Zimbabwean government has implemented various anti-corruption strategies, including the Public Entities Corporate Governance Act (2018) and the Zimbabwe Corporate Governance Code (ZIMCODE, 2014). Despite establishing what appears to be a solid governance framework, the actual enforcement and implementation have been ineffective. Literature highlights several persistent barriers to reform, notably political interference, inadequate resources, and poor enforcement capabilities.

The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), tasked with enforcing accountability, has been criticized for underperformance and vulnerability to political manipulation. These shortcomings allow corruption to persist within SOEs, raising a pivotal question: What institutional model could effectively reduce corruption in this context? This study aims to critically assess the institutional environment and propose a governance-based framework specifically designed to tackle corruption in Zimbabwe's SOEs.

Problem Statement

Despite several reform initiatives, corruption in SOEs remains deeply rooted due to fragile institutional structures, patronage networks, and insufficient oversight mechanisms (Chiduku, 2021; Ndoma, 2021). These problems are exacerbated by recurring political and economic instability, which perpetuates institutional decay. This study seeks to contribute by proposing a new, context-specific institutional framework that integrates international anti-corruption best practices with Zimbabwe's local realities.

Aim

To design a governance-based framework for reducing corruption in Zimbabwe's state-owned entities.

Literature Review

Global Context of SOE Corruption

Globally, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) play a pivotal role in strategic sectors such as energy, transportation, and communication. However, they are also disproportionately vulnerable to corruption due to their hybrid nature, operating commercially while being politically controlled (OECD, 2019; World Bank, 2021). The OECD (2019) asserts that SOEs are often captured by political elites who manipulate procurement and appointments for personal gain. The 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal, where billions were siphoned off through fraudulent transactions facilitated by political appointees, illustrates the consequences of weak governance in SOEs (Wright & Hope, 2021). Similarly, the Petrobras scandal in Brazil involved systematic kickbacks from contractors to politicians and executives, highlighting the exploitation of SOEs as tools of political patronage and self-enrichment (Watts, 2017; Transparency International, 2023).

In Africa, notable scandals such as Eskom and Transnet in South Africa showcase how procurement fraud and cadre deployment have crippled service delivery and national economies (Zondo Commission, 2022). These cases demonstrate the commonality of issues such as nepotism, regulatory capture, and the politicization of oversight institutions across jurisdictions (AfDB, 2021). The implications of such corruption extend beyond financial loss, undermining public trust and eroding state legitimacy.

Zimbabwean Context: Corruption, Collapse, and Economic Deterioration

In Zimbabwe, SOEs have experienced prolonged institutional decay, undermining their capacity to contribute to national development. Once key drivers of employment and industrialization, entities such as the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ), Cold Storage Company (CSC), and

the Zimbabwe Iron and Steel Company (ZISCO) have collapsed under the weight of mismanagement and corruption (Chiduku, 2021; Mlambo & Sibanda, 2018). The Auditor General's Reports from 2016 to 2023 consistently point to massive irregularities, including inflated procurement, unaccounted expenditures, and poor contract management (Auditor General of Zimbabwe, 2023). Furthermore, board appointments in Zimbabwean SOEs are often politicized, with loyalty trumping competence. This has fostered an environment of impunity and bureaucratic inefficiency (Maibeki et al., 2021).

Theoretical Perspectives

Principal–Agent Theory (Incentive Misalignment Lens).

Recent work on SOE governance underscores how weak state oversight and opaque boards magnify agency loss in publicly owned firms (Zejnullahu, 2021). In Zimbabwe, qualitative evidence shows inflated procurement costs and limited consequence management for errant executives, confirming the same principal–agent pathologies (Muzapu & Murewa, 2021).

X-Inefficiency Theory (Internal-Efficiency Lens).

Contemporary efficiency studies find that stronger corruption control reduces technical inefficiency across countries (Kutlu & Mao, 2023). Mixed-ownership reforms have also been found to curb agency costs and improve investment efficiency inside SOEs (Huo, Zhao, & Dong, 2024). These findings validate Leibenstein's original insight while providing up-to-date, empirical evidence.

Institutional Theory (Structural–Normative Lens).

Recent evaluations highlight that selective enforcement, patronage, and politicised appointments remain core institutional weaknesses that enable SOE corruption (OECD, 2023). These findings mirror Zimbabwe's experience.

Stakeholder Theory (Governance-Inclusivity Lens).

OECD guidance stresses that bringing minority investors, employees, and civil-society observers onto SOE boards improves transparency and reduces undue influence affirming stakeholder theory's call for inclusive governance (OECD, 2023).

Expectancy Theory (Motivational Lens).

A recent survey of 2,710 public servants shows that clear, credible rewards and whistle-blower protection significantly increase intentions to report corruption. This supports expectancy theory's assumptions about motivation in the public sector (Potipiroon, 2024).

Integrative Insight.

Together, these five lenses trace corruption across multiple levels:

- *Micro* – Principal–agent and expectancy theories explain why public officials deviate when honest effort is not rewarded.
- *Meso* – X-inefficiency theory shows how such deviations lead to operational slack and inefficiency.
- *Macro* – Institutional and stakeholder theories expose regulatory failure and the exclusion of critical governance voices.

The proposed anti-corruption framework therefore combines hard controls (e.g., digital procurement dashboards, performance-linked contracts) with soft institutional reforms (e.g., merit-based appointments, whistle-blower protection, multi-stakeholder boards), offering a theory-informed, context-sensitive intervention strategy for Zimbabwe's SOEs.

4.4 Legal and Institutional Anti-Corruption Frameworks

To address SOE corruption, Zimbabwe introduced legal and institutional reforms. The Zimbabwe Corporate Governance Code (ZIMCODE, 2014) set out principles of transparency, accountability, and integrity for public and private entities. It was followed by the Public Entities Corporate Governance Act (2018), which mandates performance contracts, board evaluations, and compliance reporting (Muzapu & Murewa, 2021). These frameworks aim to professionalize SOE governance and eliminate political interference.

On the institutional front, Zimbabwe has established multiple anti-corruption bodies. The Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) has a constitutional mandate to investigate, educate, and prevent corruption. The Special Anti-Corruption Unit (SACU), established in the Office of the President, focuses on high-level corruption cases. Zimbabwe also set up anti-corruption courts in all provinces to expedite prosecutions and reduce judicial delays (The Herald, 2023).

Internationally, Zimbabwe is party to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and the SADC Protocol against Corruption, signaling its intent to align domestic efforts with global standards (UNODC, 2021). Despite this extensive legal architecture, corruption remains rampant, suggesting a disconnect between policy and implementation.

Implementation Challenges and Critical Gaps

A major impediment to the success of anti-corruption frameworks is inconsistent political will. Investigations are often selective and fail to secure convictions, eroding public confidence. Between 2019 and 2023, ZACC opened hundreds of cases but secured very few high-profile convictions (Transparency International Zimbabwe, 2023).

The commission's operational autonomy is compromised by budgetary dependence. Between 2011 and 2014, ZACC received only a fraction of its requested budget, constraining its investigative and outreach capacities (Kamhungira, 2017). The situation has not improved significantly, with reports of staff shortages and inadequate investigative tools (Chosani et al., 2025).

Moreover, overlapping mandates among anti-corruption bodies have led to turf wars and duplication of effort. For instance, the police, ZACC, SACU, and National Prosecuting Authority sometimes conflict over jurisdiction, creating loopholes that suspects exploit (Machakaire, 2017).

Worryingly, ZACC itself has been embroiled in corruption scandals. Its former CEO was convicted of embezzling operational funds (Nemukuyu, 2015), and other officials have faced suspension over similar allegations. These internal breaches of integrity have deepened public cynicism and raised questions about the credibility of anti-corruption institutions.

Critical Appraisal and Knowledge Gaps

Although numerous studies detail corruption in SOEs, few examine how governance reforms can be institutionalized in politically charged environments. The literature tends to focus on descriptive analyses, with limited attention to the interplay between political economy dynamics and institutional reform outcomes (Dandaratsi et al., 2022). There is also a paucity of longitudinal studies evaluating the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks such as the Public Entities Corporate Governance Act.

Moreover, studies rarely explore the lived experiences of whistleblowers, civil servants, or compliance officers within SOEs. Their insights could enrich understanding of the operational challenges and informal power structures that sustain corruption. Additionally, while international case studies (e.g., Petrobras, Eskom, 1MDB) are instructive, comparative studies focusing on how similar economies have successfully implemented SOE reforms are scarce.

This study contributes to closing these gaps by proposing a governance model rooted in institutional theory, emphasizing accountability, merit-based leadership, and the depoliticization of oversight bodies. It also adds empirical depth by analyzing case-specific challenges and successes within Zimbabwe's SOE sector.

Towards a Coherent Governance Reform Agenda

Effective SOE reform must go beyond paper-based compliance and address root causes. This includes reforming the appointment process for board members to prioritize competence over patronage, strengthening ZACC's independence through direct parliamentary funding, and harmonizing the mandates of anti-corruption agencies to improve coordination.

Digital technologies such as e-procurement and blockchain for audit trails offer promising avenues to reduce human discretion in decision-making (World Bank, 2021). Rwanda's adoption of performance contracts (Imihigo) for public officials and Ethiopia's institutional auditing reforms provide examples of how African countries can tailor governance innovations to local contexts (AfDB, 2021).

Ultimately, Zimbabwe must foster a culture of integrity that transcends leadership changes. This requires ethical leadership, civic engagement, and the institutionalization of anti-corruption education from primary to tertiary levels. By aligning governance reforms with both international best practices and domestic political realities, Zimbabwe can build resilient institutions capable of withstanding elite capture and driving sustainable development.

Methodology

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This study adopted a literature-based approach, analyzing 30 peer-reviewed articles published between 2018 and 2024. Articles were included if they: (1) were from reputable journals; (2) addressed corruption, governance, or public sector reform in developing or resource-constrained contexts; (3) applied qualitative, conceptual, or empirical methods relevant to framework development; and (4) provided full-text access. Excluded articles: (1) focused solely on private-

sector corruption; (2) were not in English; (3) lacked methodological rigor; or (4) were editorials/opinions without empirical grounding. A database search using keywords like "corruption," "state-owned enterprises," and "governance" on Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar yielded 76 articles. Screening by title, abstract, and full-text review based on criteria narrowed this to 30.

Content Analysis Approach

Qualitative content analysis was chosen for its strength in unpacking complex, context-specific issues like corruption (Krippendorff, 2018). It allows systematic coding of text into content categories using explicit rules (Neuendorf et al., 2016).

The process involved:

a. Data Familiarization- Close reading of all articles to understand context.
b. Initial Coding-Inductive identification of key issues (e.g., "political interference," "lack of enforcement").
c. Theme Development- Grouping codes into overarching themes such as governance, legal frameworks, institutional integrity, and innovation.
d. Framework Construction – Identifying recurring patterns and relationships among themes to build a conceptual framework specific to SOEs in resource-constrained settings.

This approach builds on methods used by Boyko et al. (2024), Magakwe (2024), and Hope (2024), who synthesized complex literature in low-resource, politically sensitive contexts.

Limitations

Being literature-based, this study is limited by the quality and availability of existing work. Selection bias may arise from database restrictions and the exclusion of non-peer-reviewed literature. Subjectivity in coding, though minimized through systematic analysis, remains a potential issue. Empirical validation of the framework is recommended in future research.

Results and Discussion

The study identifies a network of interlinked drivers sustaining corruption in Zimbabwean SOEs, including weak governance, poor oversight, and normalization of unethical behavior.

Root Causes of Corruption in SOEs

Transparency and Accountability Deficits

74% of SOE employees reported a lack of financial or procurement disclosures. Studies (Machivenyika, 2017; OECD, 2020) confirm that irregular reporting and opaque systems enable corruption. Borges & Kraimer (2019) noted that 61% of SOEs lacked formal procurement protocols. Only 18% had accessible audit reports (Abbasi, 2023), undermining public oversight.

Weak Oversight and Controls

Only 27% of SOEs conduct regular internal audits, and fewer than 40% implement recommendations. Oversight mechanisms suffer from resource and training gaps (Zimunya et al., 2022; Makinde, 2023). Political interference affects 43% of board appointments, weakening control systems (Transparency International, 2019).

Poor Compensation for Employees.
71% of public servants earn below the poverty line (Ruwende et al., 2023). Mpofu (2023) found 67% engage in informal income sources. Low pay correlates with corruption tolerance (Bure, 2018; r = 0.68). In Brazil and Zimbabwe, underpaid public workers were 3.2 times more likely to rationalize corruption (Da Costa et al., 2023).

Weak Enforcement and Judicial Inefficiency.
Only 15% of SOE-related corruption cases led to prosecution (ZACC, 2023), mostly targeting junior staff. With just 28 specialized investigators for over 100 SOEs (Makinde et al., 2023), enforcement capacity is stretched. Court delays average 3.7 years per case (Chitiyo & Makaudze, 2022).

Patronage and Political Appointments.
52% of executives were appointed without open competition (Matebese, 2024). Zinyemba (2022) found that patronage-linked SOEs had poor performance records. Promotions are widely perceived as non-meritocratic (82%), contributing to 37% turnover in key departments. Similar issues are reported in Pakistan and Albania (Abbasi et al., 2019; Tahiraj, 2014).

Ethics Training Deficiency.
Only 19% of SOEs provide regular ethics training (Mpofu, 2023). Most employees (63%) have never received any anti-corruption training. Institutions with annual ethics programs showed 28% fewer misconduct cases (Hejeebu & George, 2020), highlighting the value of structured training.

Limited Access to Information & Whistleblower Protection.
Only 9% of SOEs offer online access to financial or procurement records (Auditor-General, 2024). 78% of staff fear retaliation for whistleblowing (Septiningsih, 2024). Where protection laws exist, reports increase 3.5 times (Makinde & Le Billon, 2023). In Zimbabwe, only four whistleblower cases were prosecuted in five years.

Failure to Prosecute Senior Officials.
Despite the National Prosecuting Authority's mandate, high-ranking officials rarely face charges. Less than 10% of SOE corruption probes implicate senior actors (Zinyama, 2018; Muguchu & Maja, 2019). The Afrobarometer (2022) found 71% of respondents believed senior officials are "above the law." High-profile arrests often lack follow-through, reducing public trust.

Institutional Framework for Curbing Corruption
Tackling corruption in SOEs requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy rooted in governance reform and stakeholder collaboration.

Enhancing Transparency and Accountability
Transparency and accountability must form the foundation of any anti-corruption strategy. Collaboration among public institutions, private entities, and citizens is vital (Fagbadebo, 2020). Drawing on international corporate governance standards can help build robust systems that monitor compliance, penalize misconduct, and restore public confidence.

Advancing Research and Data-Driven Solutions
There is a significant knowledge gap in corruption-related data. Research is essential for identifying trends, measuring impact, and informing targeted responses (Kariuki & Misaro, 2013; World Bank, 2022). A national corruption information management system would support evidence-based planning and policy development.

Strengthening Legal and Regulatory Frameworks
Reform efforts should focus on harmonizing laws, eliminating loopholes, and enforcing anti-corruption statutes consistently. Current inconsistencies in legislation enable offenders to evade justice. Policies should also support and protect whistleblowers (World Bank, 2018).

Investing in Education and Ethics Training
Training is vital for fostering ethical cultures in the public sector. Successful models from South Africa, such as the DPSA program, demonstrate the value of structured training for public servants at all levels (Van der Merwe, 2006; DPSA, 2010). Training should use diverse delivery methods, including digital platforms and local languages.

Empowering Civic Participation
Community involvement can pressure institutions to uphold accountability. Public campaigns and grassroots activism, as seen in Sudan and Nigeria, demonstrate the potential of civil society to demand reform (Kirby, 2019; Gladstone & Specia, 2020; Aina, 2020). A passive population enables corruption; active participation can disrupt it.

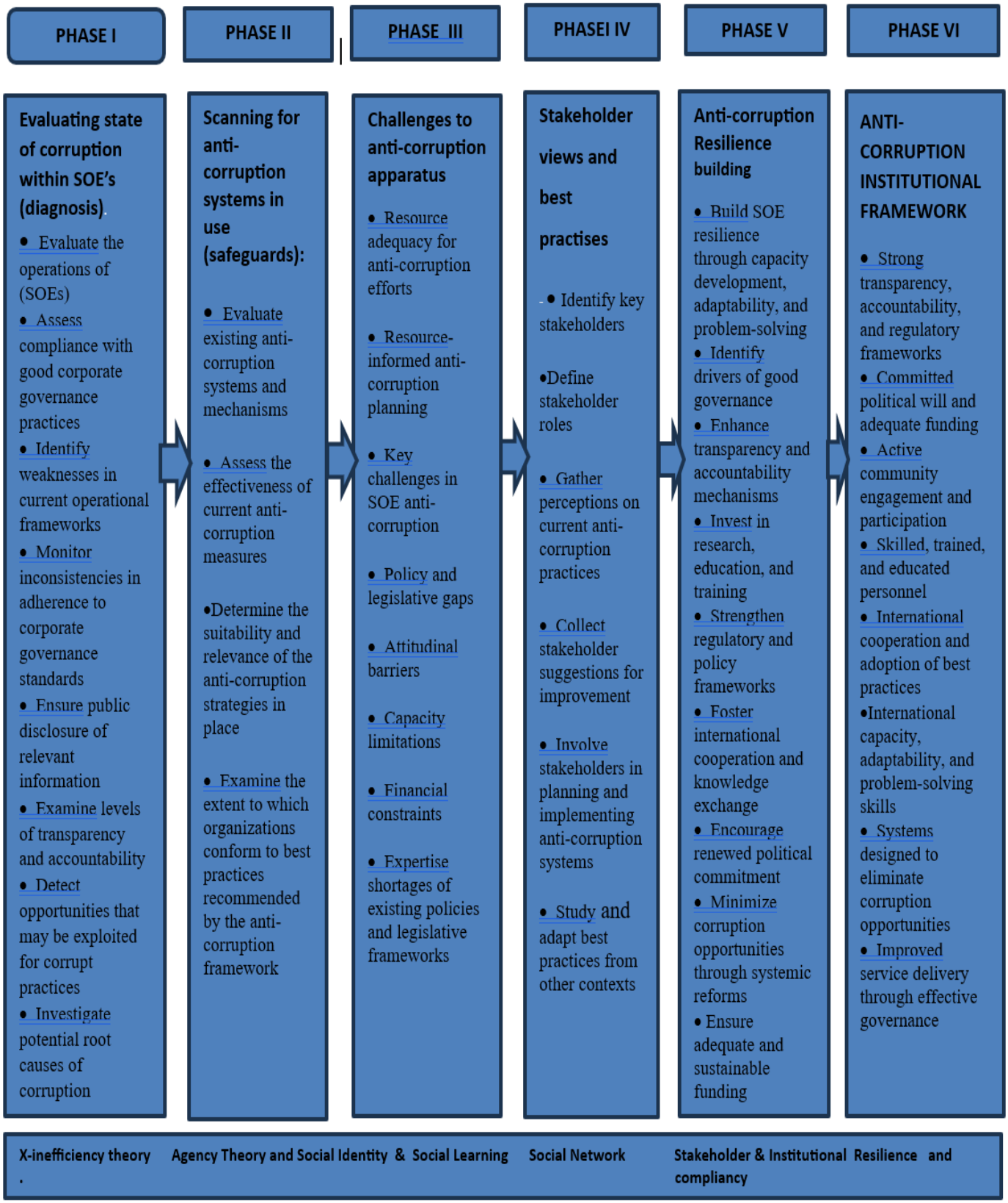
Strengthening International Cooperation
International actors can provide technical support, resources, and legal assistance, especially in cross-border corruption cases. Global partnerships can enhance Zimbabwe's compliance with international anti-corruption norms.

Reviving Political Will
According to Zinyama (2018), strong political will is critical to anti-corruption success. Sustainable reforms require leaders to commit to zero tolerance for corruption and to hold both peers and subordinates accountable.

Increasing Financial Support for Anti-Corruption Bodies
Underfunding of anti-corruption agencies hampers progress. Adequate resourcing is essential for recruitment, capacity building, and the deployment of investigative tools. Without this, frameworks remain symbolic and ineffective.

The Proposed Institutional framework for effectively curbing corruption in state-owned entities in Zimbabwe

a. **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, **Phase VI**: Anti-corruption Institutional framework.


PHASE I
PHASE II
PHASE III
PHASEI IV
PHASE V
PHASE VI
Evaluating state of corruption within SOE's (diagnosis).
• Evaluate the operations of (SOEs)
• Assess compliance with good corporate governance practices
• Identify weaknesses in current operational frameworks
• Monitor inconsistencies in adherence to corporate governance standards
• Ensure public disclosure of relevant information
• Examine levels of transparency and accountability
• Detect opportunities that may be exploited for corrupt practices
• Investigate potential root causes of corruption
Scanning for anti-corruption systems in use (safeguards):
• Evaluate existing anti-corruption systems and mechanisms
• Assess the effectiveness of current anti-corruption measures
•Determine the suitability and relevance of the anti-corruption strategies in place
• Examine the extent to which organizations conform to best practices recommended by the anti-corruption framework
Challenges to anti-corruption apparatus
• Resource adequacy for anti-corruption efforts
• Resource-informed anti-corruption planning
• Key challenges in SOE anti-corruption
• Policy and legislative gaps
• Attitudinal barriers
• Capacity limitations
• Financial constraints
• Expertise shortages of existing policies and legislative frameworks
Stakeholder views and best practises
• Identify key stakeholders
•Define stakeholder roles
• Gather perceptions on current anti-corruption practices
• Collect stakeholder suggestions for improvement
• Involve stakeholders in planning and implementing anti-corruption systems
• Study and adapt best practices from other contexts
Anti-corruption Resilience building
• Build SOE resilience through capacity development, adaptability, and problem-solving
• Identify drivers of good governance
• Enhance transparency and accountability mechanisms
• Invest in research, education, and training
• Strengthen regulatory and policy frameworks
• Foster international cooperation and knowledge exchange
• Encourage renewed political commitment
• Minimize corruption opportunities through systemic reforms
• Ensure adequate and sustainable funding
ANTI-CORRUPTION INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK
• Strong transparency, accountability, and regulatory frameworks
• Committed political will and adequate funding
• Active community engagement and participation
• Skilled, trained, and educated personnel
• International cooperation and adoption of best practices
•International capacity, adaptability, and problem-solving skills
• Systems designed to eliminate corruption opportunities
• Improved service delivery through effective governance
X-inefficiency theory .
Agency Theory and Social Identity & Social Learning
Social Network
Stakeholder & Institutional Resilience and compliancy

Expanded Six-Phase Anti-Corruption Framework for SOEs in Zimbabwe

Phase I: Evaluating Corruption State

- Objective: Establish corruption baseline in SOEs
- Actions: Conduct surveys, review audits, analyze media reports
- Stakeholders: Internal Audit, ZACC, Auditor-General, CSOs
- Outcomes: Corruption heat map, prioritized risk list, policy data
- Challenge/Mitigation: Management resistance / Use legal mandates, ensure anonymity

Phase II: System Assessment

- Objective: Evaluate existing anti-corruption mechanisms
- Actions: Audit policies, assess technology use, evaluate governance compliance
- Stakeholders: SOE Integrity Committees, Corporate Governance Unit, Anti-Corruption Courts
- Outcomes: System inventory, gap identification, compliance indexing
- Challenge/Mitigation: Superficial policies / Verify with usage data

Phase III: Diagnosing Challenges

- Objective: Identify operational, institutional, legal constraints
- Actions: Conduct interviews, analyze capacity gaps, review failed cases
- Stakeholders: Integrity Officers, Parliament, Judiciary, Law enforcement
- Outcomes: System gap report, reform priorities
- Challenge/Mitigation: Reprisal fears / Use independent evaluators, anonymous tools

Phase IV: Stakeholder Input & Best Practices

- Objective: Integrate stakeholder insights and global practices
- Actions: Hold roundtables, benchmark successful models, review international guidelines
- Stakeholders: Researchers, ZACC, donors, business/community groups
- Outcomes: Stakeholder map, adaptable practices, multi-sectoral support
- Challenge/Mitigation: Token participation / Implement feedback loops, co-design

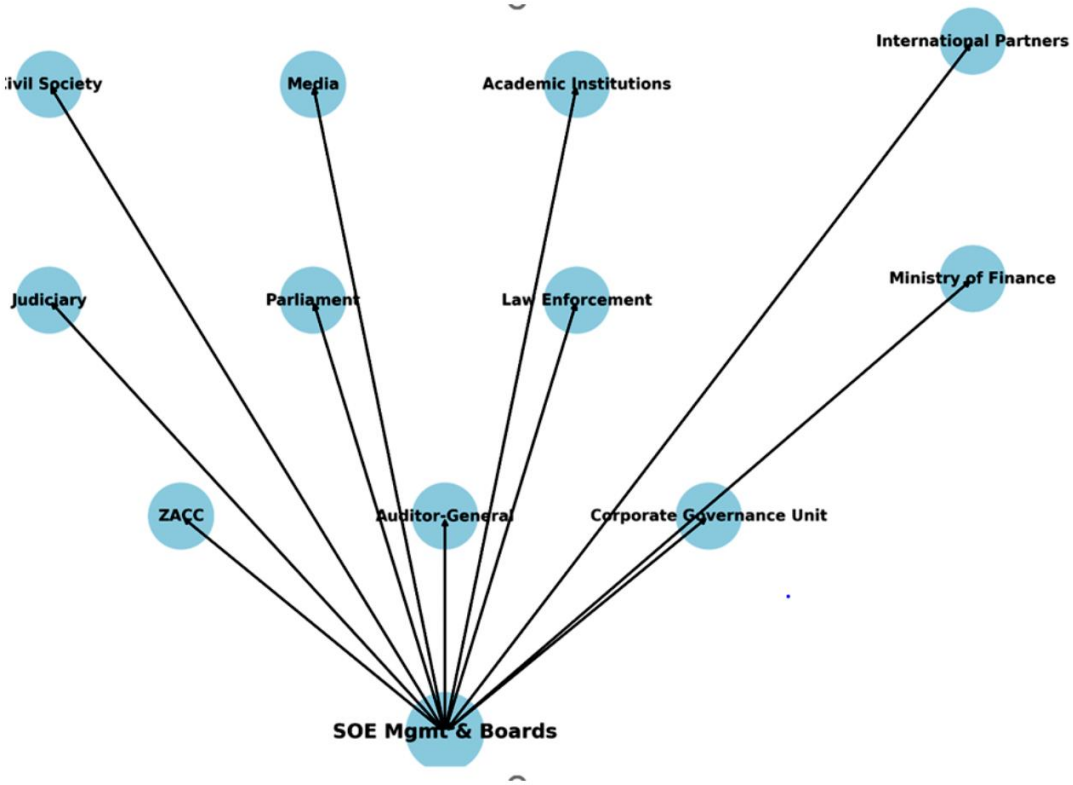
Phase V: Building Resilience

- Objective: Embed systems to prevent corruption recurrence
- Actions: Institutionalize ethics training, digitize high-risk processes, incentivize compliance
- Stakeholders: SOE HR/training units, ICT departments, Ministry of Public Service
- Outcomes: Integrity culture, reduced manual procedures, governance commitment
- Challenge/Mitigation: Technology misuse / Integrate training and monitoring

Phase VI: Framework Institutionalization

- Objective: Establish robust legal anti-corruption system
- Actions: Legislate compliance frameworks, create oversight boards, implement ISO 37001
- Stakeholders: Parliament, Ministry of Justice, ZACC, Corporate Governance Unit
- Outcomes: National framework, accountability mechanisms, corruption reduction
- Challenge/Mitigation: Legal loopholes / Align with international standards, establish penalties

b. Stakeholder Roles and Interactions – Visual Guide



Source: Author

First layer – Direct Oversight Bodies

- **ZACC**: Investigates corruption and promotes integrity within SOEs.
- **Auditor-General**: Audits financial statements and operations for accountability.
- **Corporate Governance Unit**: Ensures adherence to governance frameworks.

These bodies have **direct, frequent, and regulatory engagement** with SOEs.

Second layer – Institutional Oversight

- **Judiciary**: Handles corruption cases and legal disputes.
- **Parliament**: Holds SOEs accountable through committees and audits.
- **Law Enforcement**: Investigates and enforces laws around SOE misconduct.
- **Ministry of Finance**: Provides funding, sets financial controls, and enforces compliance.

This ring supports **policy-level oversight and legal enforcement**.

Outer layer – External Stakeholders

- **Civil Society**: Advocates for transparency and public accountability.
- **Media**: Exposes corruption and informs the public.
- **Academic Institutions**: Provide research and capacity-building insights.
- **International Partners**: Offer technical support, funding, and demand reforms.

These actors influence SOEs through **advocacy, whistleblowing, and research**.

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Plan

Tools:

- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for corruption reduction
- Annual scorecards by independent assessors
- Public reporting dashboards
- Mid-term and end-term evaluations using theory of change

Feedback Loops:

- Quarterly reviews with stakeholders
- Digital complaint channels feeding into M&E systems
- Periodic stakeholder forums for adaptive reforms

Indicators:

- Reduction in reported cases
- Improved audit scores
- Increased public trust (Afrobarometer surveys)

Theoretical Reflection

❖ **X-Inefficiency Theory Applied to Zimbabwe's SOEs**

X-inefficiency arises when firms (or entities) do not produce output at minimum cost due to lack of competitive pressure or managerial discipline. In Zimbabwe's SOEs, this inefficiency is often reflected in inflated procurement costs, ghost workers, idle equipment, and redundant staffing outcomes that result from corrupt practices enabled by weak oversight and political patronage. For instance, audits of entities like ZESA and NRZ have revealed significant inefficiencies in procurement and human resource deployment, directly traceable to corrupt networks within management and procurement units.

Framework Intervention

The framework addresses these inefficiencies by embedding mechanisms such as:

- **Mandatory performance audits**,
- **Digital procurement systems** (e.g., e-procurement platforms),
- **Whistle-blower protections**, and
- **Performance-based incentives** aligned with **Expectancy Theory** to motivate efficient and honest behaviour.

These strategies help reduce slack and inefficiency by increasing accountability, aligning incentives with performance, and discouraging rent-seeking behaviour.

❖ **Institutional Theory Applied to Zimbabwe's SOEs**

Application in Context

Institutional theory posits that the behaviour of organizations is shaped by formal rules (laws, regulations) and informal norms (culture, traditions). In Zimbabwe's SOEs, corruption persists partly due to weak enforcement of existing anti-corruption laws, institutional fragmentation, and politicized leadership appointments. For example, entities like the Zimbabwe National Roads Administration (ZINARA) have suffered from repeated rule violations in procurement and

financial management, despite the presence of legal frameworks such as the Public Finance Management Act. This indicates that institutions exist in form but not in function.

Framework Intervention

To counter these weaknesses, the framework strengthens institutional environments through:

- **Legal harmonization** across SOEs to eliminate regulatory loopholes,
- **Independent anti-corruption units** within each SOE to enforce compliance,
- **Transparent recruitment processes** to de-politicize leadership roles,
- **Institutional capacity-building** through training and system upgrades.
  By reinforcing both formal rules and enforcement mechanisms, the framework ensures that institutions evolve from passive rule-bearers to active corruption deterrents.

❖ **Stakeholder Theory Applied to Zimbabwe's SOEs**

Application in Context

Stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of identifying and balancing the interests of all parties affected by an organization's actions. In Zimbabwe, SOEs often operate in ways that neglect key stakeholders such as communities, civil society, and honest private contractors. For instance, public input is rarely sought in procurement decisions, leading to non-transparent contracts and infrastructure projects that do not meet public needs—fueling distrust and enabling collusion between officials and private suppliers.

Framework Intervention

The framework activates a multi-stakeholder approach by:

- **Institutionalizing community feedback loops** (e.g., citizen scorecards, public hearings),
- **Partnering with NGOs** to monitor and audit public projects,
- **Establishing Public–Private Integrity Pacts** to reduce collusion and promote transparency in public procurement,
- **Creating multi-stakeholder anti-corruption councils** in each SOE.
  This inclusive design empowers neglected actors, fosters transparency, and cultivates a culture of shared responsibility in governance.

❖ **Expectancy Theory Applied to Zimbabwe's SOEs**

Application in Context

Expectancy theory suggests that individuals engage in behaviours based on the expected outcomes whether the rewards are worth the effort. In SOEs, the perceived low risk of detection and weak consequences for corruption, combined with minimal rewards for honest behaviour, create a system where corruption is often a rational choice. For instance, junior officers at GMB and ZINWA may see corrupt acts as a way to supplement low wages, especially when senior managers engage in large-scale graft with impunity.

Framework Intervention

To reshape motivational structures, the framework proposes:

- **Merit-based promotion systems** to reward integrity and performance,
- **Corruption risk allowances** tied to ethical compliance,
- **Clear and consistently applied penalties** for corrupt acts at all levels,
- **Recognition and protection of whistle-blowers**, to encourage ethical reporting.

These interventions shift the cost-benefit analysis for public officers, aligning ethical conduct with professional advancement and job security.

Summary

This study draws on five interrelated theoretical lenses to explain and address the persistent corruption within Zimbabwe's State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). Principal–agent theory exposes the incentive misalignments and weak oversight structures that allow managers to pursue self-interest with impunity. X-inefficiency theory highlights the internal inefficiencies and resource wastage resulting from corruption-fueled operational slack. Institutional theory underscores how formal rule systems are undermined by informal norms that tolerate impunity and weaken enforcement. Stakeholder theory emphasizes the exclusion of key voices such as civil society, employees, and minority investors from governance processes, which erodes transparency and legitimacy. Finally, expectancy theory illustrates how low motivation among public officials due to inconsistent rewards and politically driven appointments fuels disengagement and rent-seeking behavior. Together, these frameworks inform a multi-dimensional anti-corruption model that addresses the micro, meso, and macro layers of SOE governance failure. The proposed framework integrates hard governance mechanisms with soft institutional reforms tailored to Zimbabwe's context, thereby offering both theoretical contributions and practical pathways for curbing public-sector corruption.

Conclusion

This study developed a comprehensive, context-sensitive institutional framework to combat corruption in Zimbabwe's SOEs. Grounded in five key theoretical foundations, the framework responds directly to Zimbabwe's unique governance challenges:

- Principal–agent theory informed reforms to strengthen accountability and align managerial incentives with public interest.
- X-inefficiency theory shaped operational interventions to reduce internal slack and increase performance efficiency.
- Institutional theory guided proposals to rebuild credibility in enforcement mechanisms and restore rule-based governance.
- Stakeholder theory supported the integration of inclusive, participatory oversight structures.
- Expectancy theory informed human resource reforms to improve public officials' motivation and ethical conduct.

By translating these theoretical insights into actionable reforms, the framework contributes a novel, integrated approach to the governance of SOEs. It moves beyond fragmented solutions by addressing root causes at structural, organizational, and behavioral levels, offering a viable model for curbing corruption in other resource-constrained environments as well.

a. Key findings include:

- Corruption in SOEs is perpetuated by institutional inefficiencies, weak enforcement, lack of stakeholder inclusion, and poor incentive structures.
- The framework proposes integrated interventions such as mandatory performance audits, digital procurement systems, stakeholder-driven oversight mechanisms, and incentive-based integrity management.

- A multi-theoretical approach ensures that the framework is not only diagnostic but also prescriptive connecting theory to actionable reforms.

b. Implications for Policymakers and Stakeholders:

- **For Government**: The framework serves as a blueprint for developing a national anti-corruption strategy specific to SOEs, with emphasis on legal reform, institutional accountability, and technology-driven transparency.
- **For Development Partners**: The model highlights areas for technical and financial support, including digital systems, civic empowerment programs, and capacity-building initiatives.
- **For SOE Boards and Executives**: The framework emphasizes internal reforms such as ethical leadership, results-based management, and stakeholder engagement.
- **For Civil Society and Communities**: It outlines channels for constructive engagement in oversight and whistle-blowing, fostering a culture of participatory governance.

c. Future Research Directions

While this study offers a foundational framework, further research is critical to refine and validate its practical application. Priority areas include:

i. **Pilot Implementation Studies**
   - Test the framework in selected SOEs (e.g., ZESA, NRZ, GMB) to evaluate feasibility, institutional responsiveness, and stakeholder adaptability.

ii. **Longitudinal Impact Assessments**
   - Conduct studies over time to assess the sustained impact of implemented anti-corruption interventions on organizational performance, service delivery, and public trust.

iii. **Comparative Analysis**
   - Apply and adapt the framework in other African or post-colonial contexts to assess transferability and to identify contextual enablers and barriers.

iv. **Behavioural Studies**
   - Examine the motivational and psychological dimensions of corruption among SOE employees, using Expectancy Theory as a guiding lens.

v. **Technology and Innovation in Anti-Corruption**
   - Investigate the role of emerging digital tools (e.g., blockchain, AI-driven audits) in enhancing transparency and accountability in SOEs.

Future research should continue to bridge the gap between academic theory and policy practice, ensuring that anti-corruption efforts remain responsive, adaptive, and rooted in local realities.

10. Recommendations

❖ **Depoliticize Board Appointments:**

Zimbabwean authorities should implement merit-based, transparent selection processes for SOE board members to reduce patronage and increase accountability. Independent nomination committees and clear qualification criteria should be mandated (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2020).

❖ **Strengthen Oversight Institutions:**

Empower regulatory bodies and parliamentary committees with adequate resources and legal authority to monitor SOE operations and enforce compliance with governance standards (IMF, 2022).

❖ **Promote Ethical Leadership and Performance Culture:**

SOEs must institutionalize codes of ethics and conduct, accompanied by regular training and a zero-tolerance approach to corruption. Leadership should model integrity and embed performance-based incentives linked to ethical behavior (World Bank, 2021).

- **Enhance Transparency and Public Reporting:**

Require SOEs to regularly publish audited financial statements and operational reports to enable public scrutiny and build trust among stakeholders (OECD, 2019).

- **Leverage Technology for Accountability:**

Implement digital tools such as e-procurement systems, real-time monitoring, and whistleblowing platforms to detect and prevent corrupt practices efficiently (Transparency International, 2023).

- **Foster Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:**

Encourage partnerships between government, civil society, private sector, and international organizations to design and implement anti-corruption initiatives tailored to Zimbabwe's context (Mlambo & Sibanda, 2018).

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