

Government Assurances in Zambia: An Analysis of Implementation and Challenges

Prof. Lawrence Mwelwa, PhD¹ & Prof. Gideon Mwanza, PhD^{2*}

^{1,2}Gideon Robert University, Lusaka, Zambia. Corresponding Author Email: vc@gideonrobertuniversity.com*



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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of government assurances in Zambia, with a focus on the key sectors of finance, energy, water development, and education. Government assurances represent formal commitments made by government officials in response to parliamentary queries and serve as critical tools for ensuring accountability and transparency in governance. The study primarily examines the 2023 Action-Taken Report (ATR) presented to the National Assembly of Zambia, which details the progress made in fulfilling these assurances. Drawing on Public Accountability Theory, the paper explores how parliamentary oversight mechanisms influence the implementation of public policy, particularly in developing contexts.

The research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing secondary data from the ATR, supplemented by relevant academic literature and government publications. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and recurring themes related to the implementation process, such as financial constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak inter-ministerial coordination. Through this method, the study seeks to answer key research questions, including the extent to which government assurances have been implemented, the challenges hindering their execution, and potential strategies for improving the effectiveness of public policy in Zambia.

The findings reveal that while progress has been made in some areas—such as the Zambia Growth Opportunities Programme and the Lusaka Sanitation Programme—significant barriers remain. Financial limitations due to Zambia's debt burden, coupled with delays in international funding, have constrained the government's ability to allocate sufficient resources for public projects. Additionally, bureaucratic inefficiencies, particularly in procurement processes and inter-ministerial coordination, have led to delays in project implementation, particularly in rural electrification and infrastructure development.

In response to these challenges, the paper proposes several recommendations aimed at improving the implementation of government assurances. These include enhancing domestic revenue mobilization to reduce reliance on external funding, strengthening inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms, and reforming procurement processes to improve efficiency. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of developing robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems to ensure timely tracking of project progress and to improve public accountability.

By contributing to the broader discourse on governance and public policy in Zambia, this paper offers valuable insights for policymakers, government officials, and scholars interested in improving the effectiveness of government assurances in developing contexts. It emphasizes the need for comprehensive public sector reform and suggests pathways to strengthen the capacity of government institutions to deliver on their promises, ultimately improving service delivery and fostering public trust in government institutions.

Keywords: Government assurances; Public policy implementation; Accountability; Action-taken report (ATR); Financial constraints; Bureaucratic inefficiencies; Public-private partnerships (PPPs); Inter-ministerial coordination; Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.

1. Introduction

Government assurances are formal commitments made by ministers or government officials during parliamentary sessions, often in response to questions or issues raised by Members of Parliament (MPs). These assurances typically address public policy issues, infrastructure development, and service delivery challenges, providing a mechanism for the government to outline its intended actions (Khan, 2020). In the context of democratic governance, government assurances serve as an important accountability tool, ensuring that the executive branch is held responsible for delivering on its promises to the electorate (Bovens et al., 2014).

In Zambia, the Committee on Government Assurances is a specialized parliamentary body responsible for overseeing the fulfillment of these commitments. The Committee's mandate is to monitor the implementation of assurances made by the executive, assess progress, and report findings to the National Assembly. This oversight function is critical for promoting transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in the Zambian government

(Musonda, 2021). Government assurances in Zambia span multiple sectors, including finance, energy, education, and water development. These commitments often focus on key public projects, such as rural electrification, infrastructure improvements, and policy reforms aimed at addressing national development goals.

However, the effectiveness of government assurances is heavily influenced by several factors, including the availability of financial resources, the efficiency of bureaucratic processes, and the capacity for inter-ministerial coordination (Chen, 2019). In many developing countries, including Zambia, the implementation of these assurances faces significant challenges, leading to delays in project execution, unmet public expectations, and a loss of trust in government institutions (Mumba & Chomba, 2020). This problem is exacerbated by Zambia's fiscal challenges, including high levels of debt and dependency on external funding, which further constrain the government's ability to allocate sufficient resources for public projects (World Bank, 2018).

This study seeks to analyze the implementation of government assurances in Zambia, with a particular focus on the 2023 Action-Taken Report (ATR) presented to the National Assembly. The ATR provides a detailed account of the actions taken by various ministries in response to assurances made during the Second Session of the Thirteenth National Assembly. By examining this report, the study aims to assess the extent to which these assurances have been implemented and to identify the key challenges that have hindered their successful execution.

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of the **Public Accountability Theory**, which posits that government commitments, such as parliamentary assurances, play a vital role in reinforcing public trust and ensuring the responsible use of resources. Public Accountability Theory emphasizes that for governance to be effective, mechanisms must be in place to monitor, evaluate, and enforce government promises (Bovens et al., 2014). In Zambia, the Committee on Government Assurances serves as a critical institution for maintaining this accountability, but its effectiveness has been limited by various systemic challenges (Musonda, 2021).

1.1. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

To what extent have the Zambian government's assurances, as outlined in the 2023 Action-Taken Report (ATR), been implemented?

What are the primary challenges hindering the successful implementation of these government assurances across different sectors?

How can the government's implementation process be improved to enhance accountability and ensure effective service delivery?

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The key objectives of this research are:

To evaluate the progress made in the implementation of government assurances, focusing on key sectors such as finance, energy, water development, and education.

To identify the main challenges—including financial constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and coordination issues—that impede the fulfillment of government assurances.

To provide recommendations for improving the implementation process, thereby enhancing public accountability and governance effectiveness in Zambia.

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the broader discourse on governance and public policy implementation in Zambia by providing an in-depth analysis of the government's performance in fulfilling its commitments. By highlighting the successes and challenges associated with implementing government assurances, the study sheds light on the structural issues that hinder effective public service delivery. Second, the research offers actionable recommendations that can help policymakers and government officials address these challenges and improve governance practices. Finally, the findings of this study have important implications for improving public trust in government institutions, as the fulfillment of government assurances is critical to ensuring transparency and accountability in the governance process (Singh & Bedi, 2021).

1.4. Structure of the Paper

The paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, the **Literature Review** explores the role of government assurances in public policy, with a focus on the theoretical underpinnings of Public Accountability Theory and an overview of existing studies on the challenges of public policy implementation in developing countries. The **Methodology** section outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical framework used to examine the 2023 ATR and relevant literature. The **Findings** section presents the key results of the study, including the progress made in implementing government assurances and the challenges encountered across various sectors. The **Discussion** section contextualizes these findings within the broader framework of public policy and governance, highlighting the implications for Zambia's public administration. Finally, the **Conclusion** provides a summary of the key findings and offers recommendations for improving the implementation of government assurances in Zambia.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Role of Government Assurances in Public Policy

Government assurances are essential components of parliamentary governance, functioning as formal commitments made by government officials in response to queries raised during parliamentary debates (Khan, 2020). These assurances cover a wide range of issues, including infrastructure development, public service delivery, and policy reforms.

Their primary purpose is to address immediate concerns raised by Members of Parliament (MPs) and to outline the government's intended course of action for solving specific public policy problems (Singh & Bedi, 2021). By providing these assurances, the executive branch demonstrates its responsiveness to legislative oversight, thus reinforcing democratic principles and maintaining public trust (Bovens et al., 2014).

The significance of government assurances extends beyond their formal presentation in parliament. They serve as a critical mechanism for holding the executive accountable to its commitments. According to Khan (2020), assurances act as a bridge between political promises made during election campaigns and the actual delivery of

public services. In this sense, they are integral to the broader governance framework, ensuring that promises made to the electorate are translated into tangible actions.

In Zambia, government assurances cover a broad spectrum of sectors, including education, energy, water development, and finance. These assurances often focus on long-term infrastructure projects aimed at improving public services, particularly in underserved areas. For example, assurances may involve the electrification of rural areas, the construction of new schools, or the improvement of water supply systems (Mumba & Chomba, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these assurances largely depends on the government's ability to mobilize the necessary resources and coordinate efforts across various ministries and agencies (Musonda, 2021).

2.2. Public Accountability Theory

This study is grounded in **Public Accountability Theory**, which provides a theoretical framework for understanding how government assurances function as tools for accountability in governance. Public Accountability Theory posits that for democratic governance to function effectively, mechanisms must be in place to ensure that government officials are held accountable for their actions and decisions (Bovens et al., 2014). In this context, government assurances serve as a formalized commitment by the executive branch to carry out specific actions. By making these assurances, government officials are expected to fulfil their commitments, with parliamentary bodies acting as oversight institutions to monitor and evaluate the implementation process.

According to Bovens et al. (2014), accountability mechanisms involve three key stages: **information**, **justification**, and **consequences**. First, the government must provide clear information about its commitments and the actions it intends to take. Second, government officials must justify their decisions and actions to the public, explaining any delays or deviations from the original commitments. Finally, if the government fails to meet its assurances, there must be consequences, such as parliamentary sanctions or public criticism. In the Zambian context, the **Committee on Government Assurances** plays a central role in this process by tracking the implementation of commitments made during parliamentary sessions and reporting the findings to the National Assembly (Musonda, 2021).

Public Accountability Theory is particularly relevant in the study of government assurances because it highlights the importance of oversight and monitoring in ensuring that public officials fulfil their commitments. In many developing countries, including Zambia, the absence of robust accountability mechanisms often results in delayed or incomplete project implementation (Chen, 2019). This study applies Public Accountability Theory to examine how effectively the Zambian government has implemented its assurances, with a focus on the role of the Committee on Government Assurances in fostering transparency and accountability.

2.3. Challenges in Policy Implementation in Developing Countries

The implementation of public policy in developing countries is fraught with challenges that significantly affect the government's ability to deliver on its promises. These challenges include financial constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak inter-ministerial coordination. According to Chen (2019), developing countries often struggle with limited financial resources, which restrict their capacity to fund large-scale infrastructure projects and public services. In Zambia, financial constraints are a major issue, as the country faces a high level of public debt

and dependence on external funding (World Bank, 2018). These financial limitations have a direct impact on the implementation of government assurances, as projects are often delayed or scaled back due to budgetary shortfalls (Mumba & Chomba, 2020).

In addition to financial constraints, **bureaucratic inefficiencies** are another significant challenge in policy implementation. Chen (2019) argues that slow decision-making processes, delays in procurement, and a lack of capacity within government agencies often impede the timely execution of public projects. In Zambia, these inefficiencies are particularly evident in sectors such as energy and education, where projects have been delayed due to challenges in securing contractors and procuring the necessary materials (Musonda, 2021). These bureaucratic hurdles not only delay project completion but also increase the cost of implementation, as projects often suffer from cost overruns due to extended timelines and mismanagement.

Weak inter-ministerial coordination is another challenge commonly faced by governments in developing countries. Public policy implementation often requires collaboration across multiple ministries and government agencies, but poor communication and coordination can lead to fragmented efforts (Alam & Teicher, 2016). For example, Zambia's Rural Electrification Master Plan has experienced delays due to difficulties in coordinating efforts between the Ministry of Energy, the Rural Electrification Authority (REA), and local authorities (Musonda, 2021). The lack of clear communication and alignment of goals between these entities has resulted in fragmented efforts, with some projects remaining incomplete for extended periods.

2.4. Comparative Insights and Best Practices

Comparative studies from other developing countries offer valuable insights into how the challenges of policy implementation can be addressed. In India, for example, the Committee on Government Assurances has implemented a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework that tracks the progress of assurances made in the parliament (Singh, 2019). This committee regularly publishes reports that highlight areas where progress has been made and identifies cases where assurances have not been fulfilled. The success of this system lies in its ability to ensure that government commitments are consistently monitored and evaluated, thereby increasing public accountability.

Similarly, countries like South Africa have implemented innovative public-private partnership (PPP) models to overcome financial constraints in public policy implementation. According to Alam and Teicher (2016), PPPs provide an effective mechanism for leveraging private sector investment and expertise in sectors such as infrastructure, energy, and water development. By adopting similar approaches, Zambia could address its financial limitations and accelerate the implementation of its government assurances.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative research approach** aimed at exploring the effectiveness of government assurances in Zambia, focusing on key sectors such as finance, energy, water development, and education. The research is based on a thematic analysis of the 2023 Action-Taken Report (ATR) presented to the National Assembly, along with secondary data sources including government publications and academic literature. By employing a qualitative approach, this study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the successes and challenges

involved in the implementation of government assurances and to generate practical recommendations for improving governance practices in Zambia.

3.1. Research Design

This research follows a **descriptive and exploratory design**. The descriptive aspect of the study focuses on cataloguing and summarizing the content of the ATR, which contains updates from different ministries regarding the implementation of specific government assurances. The exploratory component seeks to identify patterns and themes related to the implementation of these assurances, as well as the barriers to successful project completion. Through this design, the study aims to assess the extent to which government assurances have been fulfilled, identify the major challenges in their implementation, and provide recommendations for improving policy execution.

The study's theoretical foundation is based on **Public Accountability Theory**, which emphasizes the importance of transparency, oversight, and accountability in the governance process (Bovens et al., 2014). By analyzing the data through this theoretical lens, the research aims to assess how effectively Zambia's accountability mechanisms—particularly the Committee on Government Assurances—have facilitated the monitoring and implementation of government commitments.

3.2. Data Collection

The study relies on **secondary data**, primarily drawn from the 2023 Action-Taken Report (ATR) presented to the National Assembly of Zambia. The ATR is a government document that consolidates updates provided by various ministries regarding their progress in fulfilling the assurances made during parliamentary sessions. The report covers multiple sectors, including finance, energy, education, and water development, providing details on:

- The nature of the assurance (e.g., infrastructure development, policy implementation).
- The ministry responsible for implementing the assurance.
- The reported progress of each assurance (e.g., completed, ongoing, delayed).
- Challenges or obstacles identified during the implementation process.

In addition to the ATR, the study draws on academic literature and government publications relevant to public policy implementation and accountability in Zambia. This combination of sources ensures that the analysis is grounded in both empirical data from the ATR and broader academic insights on governance challenges in developing countries.

3.2.1. Data sources

- The 2023 Action-Taken Report (ATR).
- Academic articles on public policy implementation, accountability, and governance in developing countries.
- Government publications related to public expenditure, procurement processes, and sectoral development plans in Zambia.

3.3. Analytical Framework

The data collected from the ATR and supplementary sources were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a qualitative method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen because it allows for a systematic examination of the qualitative data presented in the ATR, facilitating the identification of key challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of government assurances.

The thematic analysis process followed several key steps:

1. **Familiarization with the Data:** The first step involved thoroughly reviewing the ATR and relevant academic literature to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. This stage involved taking preliminary notes on recurring issues and challenges related to the implementation of government assurances.
2. **Coding:** During the coding phase, the data were systematically categorized into themes, such as financial constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, inter-ministerial coordination issues, and project delays. The assurances were also grouped by sector, enabling a sectoral analysis of progress and challenges.
3. **Identifying Themes:** Once the data were coded, broader themes were identified by grouping similar codes together. For example, themes such as "funding challenges" and "procurement delays" were prevalent across multiple sectors, indicating recurring barriers to the successful implementation of government assurances.
4. **Reviewing and Refining Themes:** The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately captured the key issues. Some themes were merged or divided into sub-themes as necessary to provide a more nuanced understanding of the data.
5. **Interpreting the Data:** The final step in the analysis involved interpreting the themes in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework. This stage involved drawing connections between the identified challenges and the broader governance issues highlighted in the literature review, with a particular focus on the implications for public accountability and policy implementation in Zambia.

3.4. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent have the Zambian government's assurances been implemented, as outlined in the 2023 Action-Taken Report (ATR)?
2. What are the major challenges hindering the successful implementation of government assurances across various sectors in Zambia?
3. How can the implementation process of government assurances be improved to enhance accountability and service delivery in Zambia?

3.5. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the implementation of government assurances in Zambia, several limitations must be acknowledged:

1. **Reliance on Secondary Data:** The study relies exclusively on secondary data from the ATR and other government publications. While the ATR provides detailed updates on the progress of government assurances, the data are self-reported by government ministries and may be subject to bias or incomplete reporting. Future research could benefit from incorporating primary data collection methods, such as interviews with government officials or field observations, to provide additional context and verify the accuracy of the reported data.
2. **Incomplete Information:** Some projects and initiatives covered in the ATR are still ongoing or delayed, meaning that the final outcomes of these assurances were not captured at the time of reporting. As a result, the study may not provide a complete picture of the implementation process for long-term projects. Future research could address this limitation by conducting follow-up studies once the projects are fully completed.
3. **Sectoral and Geographic Focus:** The study focuses on key sectors—finance, energy, water development, and education—but does not provide a comprehensive analysis of all sectors covered by the ATR. Additionally, the study does not conduct a geographic analysis of the implementation challenges in different regions of Zambia. Future research could explore regional variations in the implementation of government assurances to identify location-specific obstacles and opportunities.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

This study is based entirely on secondary data obtained from publicly available government reports and academic literature. As such, there are minimal ethical concerns related to data collection. The analysis was conducted with a commitment to transparency, objectivity, and accuracy, ensuring that the findings are reported in a fair and balanced manner. Proper citations and references have been provided for all sources used in the study, in compliance with ethical standards for research involving secondary data (Creswell, 2014).

4. Findings

The analysis of the 2023 Action-Taken Report (ATR) revealed a mixed performance in the implementation of government assurances across key sectors in Zambia. While certain initiatives showed promising progress, several recurring challenges—such as financial constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak inter-ministerial coordination—significantly hindered the effective execution of government policies. This section presents the key findings, organized by sector, and highlights the common challenges that emerged across different ministries.

4.1. Finance Sector

The finance sector demonstrated notable progress in certain areas, particularly with regard to the **Zambia Growth Opportunities Programme**. This initiative, aimed at fostering economic diversification, sustainability, and job creation in the agro-food sector, successfully secured USD 300 million in funding from the World Bank for a five-year period (2023-2027). The program focuses on interventions such as the development of farm block infrastructure, rehabilitation of feeder roads, and farmer training in climate-smart agricultural practices.

However, despite this progress, several challenges slowed implementation. The ATR reports delays caused by the complexity of coordinating activities between various ministries. The project steering committee, composed of Permanent Secretaries from key ministries, faced difficulties in aligning priorities and executing planned activities

in a timely manner. Additionally, inconsistencies in the disbursement of funds from both the Zambian government and international donors created uncertainty and slowed the pace of progress.

These findings indicate that while there is potential for success in the finance sector, inter-ministerial coordination and financial management remain critical barriers to the efficient implementation of government assurances.

4.2. Energy Sector

The energy sector encountered significant challenges in meeting its government assurances, particularly with respect to rural electrification projects. The ATR highlights delays in several electrification projects due to **limited financial resources** and **slow procurement processes**. For instance, the electrification project in **Kalabo District** experienced substantial delays, with only 33 out of the planned 162 connections completed by the time of reporting. The Ministry of Energy cited logistical difficulties, including the unavailability of connection materials and challenges in accessing remote areas.

The electrification of schools in **Feira Constituency** faced similar obstacles. Although the Rural Electrification Authority (REA) allocated funds for the electrification of multiple schools and rural health centers, delays in procurement and contractor mobilization slowed progress. The ATR noted that while over 80% of planned connections had been completed, several projects remained unfinished and were expected to be completed by the end of 2023.

The challenges in the energy sector highlight the importance of improving procurement efficiency and logistical planning, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

4.3. Water Development Sector

The water development sector reported mixed results, with some projects experiencing significant delays while others showed positive progress. For example, the **Makululu Water Project** in **Kabwe**, which aims to provide clean water to over 35,000 people, was delayed due to financial constraints. The project, originally scheduled to begin in 2022, faced funding shortfalls, with only 10 million Kwacha allocated in the 2022 budget—an amount insufficient to complete the project. This delay prolonged the water shortage crisis in the **Makululu Compound** and surrounding areas.

Conversely, other initiatives in the water sector, such as the borehole drilling project in **Milanzi Constituency**, demonstrated more promising outcomes. As of November 2022, 15 out of the planned 30 boreholes were completed, with additional boreholes expected to be finalized in the following months. Despite some delays caused by the contractor drilling dry boreholes, the project remained largely on track, with most of the remaining boreholes scheduled for completion by mid-2023.

The findings from the water development sector underscore the significant impact of financial resources on the timely completion of infrastructure projects. Financial constraints and poor project planning were key factors contributing to delays in major projects like the Makululu Water Project.

4.4. Education Sector

The education sector also faced considerable challenges in the implementation of government assurances, particularly with regard to infrastructure development and the electrification of rural schools. The ATR highlighted

delays in several rural schools in **Mulobezi Constituency**, which were part of the **Rural Electrification Master Plan**. According to the plan, some schools, including **Sanembo** and **Kamanga Primary Schools**, were scheduled for electrification in 2027, with feasibility assessments planned for 2026. However, stakeholders expressed concern about the long wait times for these projects, which are critical for improving educational infrastructure in rural areas.

Furthermore, infrastructure projects aimed at expanding educational facilities in urban and semi-urban areas also encountered delays. For example, the construction of new secondary schools in **Bwana Mkubwa Constituency** was postponed due to budgetary shortfalls and slow procurement processes. These challenges were exacerbated by bureaucratic inefficiencies within the Ministry of Education, which hindered the timely mobilization of contractors and procurement of building materials.

The education sector's performance in meeting government assurances highlights the importance of addressing both financial limitations and bureaucratic inefficiencies to ensure that infrastructure projects are completed in a timely and effective manner.

4.5. Common Challenges across Sectors

Several recurring challenges were identified across multiple sectors, reflecting broader governance issues that hinder the implementation of government assurances:

1. **Financial Constraints:** A major obstacle across all sectors was the limitation of financial resources. Zambia's debt burden and ongoing fiscal challenges have severely impacted the government's ability to allocate sufficient funds for public projects. Many infrastructure projects, particularly in the energy and water development sectors, faced delays due to funding shortfalls. International funding, while crucial, was also subject to delays in disbursement, adding uncertainty to the implementation process (World Bank, 2018).
2. **Bureaucratic Inefficiencies:** Delays in procurement processes, slow decision-making, and inefficiencies within government agencies were commonly cited as reasons for the slow pace of implementation. These inefficiencies reflect deeper issues within Zambia's public administration, where complex bureaucratic procedures and a lack of capacity hinder timely project execution (Chen, 2019). For example, delays in securing contractors for electrification and school infrastructure projects contributed significantly to the delays observed in the ATR.
3. **Inter-Ministerial Coordination:** Effective collaboration between different government ministries and agencies is crucial for the successful implementation of government assurances. However, the ATR highlighted several instances where poor coordination between ministries resulted in fragmented efforts and delays. In particular, the **Zambia Growth Opportunities Programme** suffered from delays due to difficulties in aligning the priorities and activities of different ministries (Musonda, 2021).
4. **Logistical and Geographical Challenges:** Many government assurances involve projects in rural and remote areas, where access to infrastructure and resources is limited. These geographical challenges, combined with logistical difficulties in transporting materials and mobilizing contractors, contributed to delays, particularly in the energy and water development sectors. Rural electrification projects and borehole drilling initiatives faced significant logistical barriers, further complicating the implementation process.

4.6. Positive Developments

Despite the challenges identified, the ATR reported several positive developments that highlight areas where progress has been made. For example, the **Lusaka Sanitation Programme**, funded by the African Development Bank, demonstrated significant progress in addressing urban sanitation issues. Key phases of the project were completed by the end of 2022, benefiting approximately 65,000 residents of Lusaka.

In addition, the government successfully procured medical equipment and expanded health infrastructure in several regions, reflecting progress in improving healthcare delivery. These successes underscore the importance of adequate financial planning and efficient project management in achieving successful outcomes.

5. Discussion

The findings from the 2023 Action-Taken Report (ATR) reveal significant insights into the state of governance and public policy implementation in Zambia. While there have been notable successes in some areas, persistent challenges—such as financial constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak inter-ministerial coordination—undermine the government’s ability to fulfil its commitments.

This section contextualizes the findings within the broader framework of Public Accountability Theory and public policy literature, examining the implications for Zambia’s governance system.

5.1. Financial Constraints and Public Policy Implementation

One of the most prominent challenges identified in the ATR is the **financial constraints** that Zambia faces. The country’s high levels of debt and reliance on international funding have had a direct impact on the government’s ability to finance large-scale infrastructure projects and other key initiatives. In line with the findings of the World Bank (2018), developing countries often operate within tight fiscal spaces, limiting their ability to implement public policy effectively.

In Zambia, this problem has been exacerbated by the inconsistency in fund disbursement from international donors and the government’s own fiscal limitations. For example, the delayed disbursement of funds for the Zambia Growth Opportunities Programme has slowed the progress of this critical initiative. According to Public Accountability Theory, financial transparency and efficient resource allocation are critical for maintaining public trust and ensuring accountability in governance (Bovens et al., 2014). When financial constraints delay the delivery of essential services, such as electrification and clean water provision, public trust in government institutions erodes, undermining the democratic process.

To address these financial challenges, Zambia must explore innovative approaches to public financing. One potential solution is to **increase domestic revenue mobilization** by broadening the tax base, improving tax collection mechanisms, and reducing tax evasion. By strengthening its domestic revenue base, the government can reduce its reliance on external funding and ensure more stable financial resources for public projects (Mumba & Chomba, 2020). Additionally, the use of **public-private partnerships (PPPs)** can help attract private sector investment, particularly in sectors like energy and water development, where private expertise and resources can complement government efforts.

5.2. Bureaucratic Inefficiencies and Project Delays

The ATR identifies **bureaucratic inefficiencies** as another major obstacle to the successful implementation of government assurances. Delays in procurement processes, contractor mobilization, and decision-making have slowed the pace of project execution across various sectors. These inefficiencies are not unique to Zambia and are common in many developing countries, where public administration systems often struggle with complex procedures and limited capacity (Chen, 2019).

Public Accountability Theory emphasizes the need for **effective governance structures** to ensure that public officials fulfil their commitments. Inefficient bureaucratic processes hinder transparency and accountability, making it difficult for government bodies to meet their obligations to the public (Bovens et al., 2014). In Zambia, delays in the electrification of rural areas and the construction of educational infrastructure are clear examples of how bureaucratic inefficiencies can disrupt public service delivery. For instance, the delayed electrification of schools in Feira Constituency was largely due to slow procurement processes and logistical challenges in accessing remote areas.

Addressing these inefficiencies requires **public sector reform** aimed at streamlining bureaucratic procedures and improving decision-making processes. Implementing **e-procurement systems**, as suggested by Alam and Teicher (2016), could help automate procurement processes, reducing delays and minimizing opportunities for corruption. Additionally, **capacity-building programs** for public officials are needed to enhance their ability to manage complex projects and coordinate efforts across different government departments.

5.3. Inter-Ministerial Coordination and Fragmentation of Efforts

Another critical challenge highlighted in the findings is the **lack of effective inter-ministerial coordination**. Public policy implementation often requires collaboration between multiple ministries, local authorities, and stakeholders. However, in Zambia, the absence of clear communication and coordination between government entities has led to fragmented efforts and delays in project implementation.

Public Accountability Theory underscores the importance of **collaborative governance**, where different branches of government work together to fulfil public commitments (Bovens et al., 2014). The failure to achieve effective coordination in Zambia, as seen in the Zambia Growth Opportunities Programme, has hampered progress and undermined the government's ability to deliver on its promises. Ministries often work in silos, with overlapping responsibilities and misaligned goals, resulting in inefficiencies.

One solution to this problem is to establish a **central coordination unit** within the Office of the President, tasked with overseeing the implementation of government assurances. This unit could ensure that all relevant ministries are aligned in their efforts and that projects are implemented in a coordinated and timely manner. Additionally, regular **inter-ministerial meetings** and **joint task forces** could facilitate better communication and collaboration between government agencies (Musonda, 2021).

5.4. Geographical and Logistical Challenges in Service Delivery

The findings also indicate that **geographical and logistical challenges** are significant barriers to the implementation of government assurances, particularly in rural and remote areas. Projects such as rural

electrification and water supply often involve difficult-to-reach locations where infrastructure and resources are limited. These logistical challenges have contributed to delays in the completion of several key projects, including the electrification of households and schools in rural constituencies.

Addressing these challenges requires **investment in rural infrastructure**, particularly in road construction and maintenance, to improve access to remote areas. Enhanced road networks would facilitate the transportation of materials and mobilization of contractors, helping to reduce delays in project execution. Additionally, innovative technologies, such as **solar-powered infrastructure** and **decentralized water systems**, can help overcome logistical barriers by providing localized solutions for rural communities (Alam & Teicher, 2016).

5.5. Positive Developments and Lessons for Improvement

Despite the challenges outlined above, the ATR also reported **positive developments** in several sectors, particularly in urban areas where projects have been more successfully implemented. For example, the **Lusaka Sanitation Programme**, funded by the African Development Bank, demonstrated considerable progress in addressing urban sanitation issues, benefiting over 65,000 residents. These successes offer important lessons for improving the implementation of government assurances in Zambia.

First, the successful completion of projects like the Lusaka Sanitation Programme highlights the importance of **adequate financial planning and project management**. When sufficient funds are allocated, and efficient coordination is achieved, projects can be completed on time and within budget. Second, the collaborative approach taken in this project—working with multiple stakeholders, including international donors—shows that effective **cross-sectoral coordination** can significantly enhance project outcomes.

5.6. Broader Implications for Governance in Zambia

The findings of this study have broader implications for **public policy and governance** in Zambia. The challenges identified in the ATR—financial constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak inter-ministerial coordination, and logistical difficulties—reflect deeper structural issues within the public administration system. Addressing these issues will require comprehensive public sector reforms, improved governance practices, and a commitment to strengthening accountability mechanisms.

The **Committee on Government Assurances** plays a vital role in holding the executive accountable for its commitments. However, as the findings indicate, the Committee's effectiveness is limited by its capacity to monitor and evaluate government performance in real-time. Strengthening the Committee's oversight powers, improving data collection systems, and fostering collaboration with other parliamentary oversight bodies could improve the monitoring and implementation of government assurances (Musonda, 2021).

Improving **monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems** across government ministries is also critical for ensuring that project implementation is tracked in real-time. These systems should include clear performance indicators, regular reporting mechanisms, and feedback loops that allow for timely adjustments when issues arise.

6. Conclusion

The 2023 Action-Taken Report (ATR) on the implementation of government assurances in Zambia offers valuable insights into both the successes and challenges of public policy execution across various sectors. While notable

progress has been made in certain areas—such as the Zambia Growth Opportunities Programme and the Lusaka Sanitation Programme—persistent obstacles, including financial constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak inter-ministerial coordination, have hindered the timely and effective realization of many government commitments.

6.1. Summary of Key Findings

The analysis of the ATR revealed several important findings:

1. **Financial Constraints:** Zambia's high levels of debt and reliance on external funding have limited the government's capacity to allocate sufficient resources for key projects. This issue was particularly evident in the energy and water sectors, where funding shortfalls caused significant delays in rural electrification and water supply projects. The reliance on international donors, while crucial, has introduced further delays due to inconsistent disbursement schedules.
2. **Bureaucratic Inefficiencies:** Slow procurement processes, contractor mobilization, and decision-making have led to project delays across multiple sectors, particularly in energy and education. These inefficiencies reflect deeper structural issues within Zambia's public administration system, which complicate the implementation of government assurances.
3. **Weak Inter-Ministerial Coordination:** The lack of effective coordination between ministries and government agencies has fragmented efforts and delayed project execution. This issue was particularly problematic in the Zambia Growth Opportunities Programme, where ministries struggled to align their priorities and coordinate their activities.
4. **Geographical and Logistical Challenges:** Projects in rural and remote areas faced logistical challenges, including difficulties in accessing project sites and transporting materials. These challenges significantly delayed the completion of rural electrification projects and water infrastructure initiatives.
5. **Positive Developments:** Despite the challenges, the ATR highlighted several successful projects, including the Lusaka Sanitation Programme and healthcare infrastructure expansion. These successes demonstrate that when adequate financial resources and effective coordination mechanisms are in place, government assurances can be implemented efficiently.

6.2. Implications for Public Policy and Governance

The findings of this study have broader implications for public policy and governance in Zambia. The challenges identified in the ATR—particularly financial constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak inter-ministerial coordination—are indicative of deeper structural issues within the public administration system. Addressing these issues is critical for improving the implementation of government assurances and ensuring that the government delivers on its commitments to the public.

The study highlights the importance of **Public Accountability Theory** in understanding the role of government assurances in fostering transparency and accountability. The **Committee on Government Assurances** plays a central role in monitoring the government's performance, but its effectiveness is limited by the lack of robust data

collection systems and the absence of real-time monitoring. Strengthening the capacity of the Committee and improving coordination between oversight bodies will be crucial for ensuring that government assurances are implemented effectively and within the stipulated timelines.

6.3. Recommendations for Future Focus

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations emerge for improving the implementation of government assurances in Zambia:

1. **Strengthen Domestic Revenue Mobilization:** Zambia must explore ways to reduce its reliance on external funding by broadening the domestic tax base, improving tax collection mechanisms, and reducing tax evasion. Increasing domestic revenue will provide the government with more predictable funding sources for public projects.
2. **Leverage Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Public-private partnerships can provide additional financial resources and technical expertise for infrastructure projects. The government should encourage PPPs, particularly in sectors such as energy and water development, where private sector investment can help accelerate project execution.
3. **Streamline Bureaucratic Processes:** The government should prioritize reforms aimed at streamlining procurement processes and improving decision-making within ministries. The adoption of **e-procurement systems** could reduce delays and improve transparency in project implementation.
4. **Enhance Inter-Ministerial Coordination:** Establishing a central coordination unit within the Office of the President could help improve collaboration between ministries, ensuring that government assurances are implemented in a more coordinated and efficient manner. Regular **inter-ministerial meetings** and the creation of **joint task forces** would further facilitate collaboration between government entities.
5. **Improve Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Systems:** The government should develop comprehensive M&E frameworks that include clear performance indicators, regular reporting mechanisms, and feedback loops to track the progress of government assurances in real-time. Strengthening the role of parliamentary oversight bodies, such as the Committee on Government Assurances, will also enhance accountability and ensure that projects remain on track.
6. **Address Logistical Challenges in Rural Areas:** Investing in rural infrastructure, including roads and transportation networks, is essential for improving access to remote areas and facilitating the timely delivery of materials and services. Innovative technologies, such as **solar-powered infrastructure** and **decentralized water systems**, should be considered as solutions to overcome logistical barriers in underserved communities.

6.4. Vision for the Future

Looking ahead, Zambia has the potential to significantly improve the implementation of government assurances by addressing the structural challenges identified in this study. By enhancing public sector efficiency, strengthening inter-ministerial coordination, and improving financing mechanisms, the government can ensure that its commitments are fulfilled in a timely and effective manner.

Furthermore, adopting innovative solutions, such as public-private partnerships and enhanced monitoring systems, will help the government overcome financial and logistical challenges. Ultimately, the successful implementation of government assurances will not only improve service delivery across Zambia but also enhance public trust in government institutions, reinforcing the foundations of democratic governance.

Declarations

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the work presented in this paper.

Consent for publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' contributions

Both the authors took part in literature review, analysis and manuscript writing equally.

Data Availability

There is no research data outside the manuscript file.

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