

## AN INVESTIGATION IN THE GOVERNANCE AT THE NORTHERN CAPE DEPARTMENT OF ROADS AND PUBLIC WORKS. 2019-2024

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### Abstract

This study investigates governance practices within the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works from 2019 to 2024, focusing on their alignment with the Twelve Principles of Good Governance. Using secondary data from Auditor General reports, annual performance reviews, and related governance evaluations, the research identifies critical governance strengths and weaknesses. Transparency initiatives, although evident through the publication of performance reports, were undermined by delayed dissemination and limited follow-up on audit findings. Financial irregularities, totaling R120 million in irregular expenditures in 2020/2021, highlighted persistent lapses in accountability and compliance with regulatory frameworks. Operational inefficiencies, exacerbated by high staff turnover and inadequate project monitoring, significantly impaired service delivery, eroding public trust. The study emphasizes the role of Auditor General reports as pivotal tools in evaluating governance practices and driving accountability. However, limited capacity to implement corrective measures points to systemic deficiencies requiring strategic reforms. Recommendations include the adoption of automated financial management systems, capacity-building programs, enhanced oversight structures, and the integration of stakeholder engagement mechanisms to foster collaborative governance. The findings underscore the broader implications for public sector governance, offering insights into improving institutional accountability, efficiency, and responsiveness in similar contexts. By addressing systemic governance challenges, the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works could enhance service delivery and rebuild public trust. This study contributes to the discourse on governance reform in South Africa's public sector and highlights the importance of aligning governance practices with established principles for sustainable development.

**Key Words:** Governance, Accountability, Auditor General, Transparency, Service Delivery, Public Sector Reform

## **1. Background**

Public institution governance manages resources and provides services to achieve socioeconomic goals. The Council of Europe (2022) defines good governance as transparent decision-making, efficient public resource usage, and accountability. Includes democracy, administrative ethics, and rule of law. Gaghman (2020) says governance fosters national development by connecting public sector activities with equity and sustainability. Inclusion, responsiveness, and budgetary responsibility are public sector governance values. Democratic principles and public institution trust require these concepts (Munzhedzi, 2021). Good governance, service delivery, and public confidence require accountability and openness, according to UCLG ASPAC (2021). The South African Auditor General evaluates and suggests improvements to these standards. Public institution governance guides administrative activities and impacts inhabitants' lives.

The Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works is vital to infrastructure development in South Africa's largest province. It manages provincial roads, public buildings, and other critical infrastructure for commerce and society. In its 2019–2024 Annual Performance Reports, the department seeks to improve service delivery, resource use, and stakeholder engagement. Despite these aspirations, governance concerns hampered the agency. 2019–2024 Auditor General reports repeat financial mismanagement, internal control failures, and procurement irregularities. Munzhedzi and Makwembere (2019) say wrong priorities and low capacity limit South African governments service delivery efforts. The 2020 Vhembe District Municipality IDP report also cites governance framework inefficiencies, mirroring Northern Cape Department shortcomings. A special inquiry is needed to fix these governance concerns, which hinder the department's work.

Audit opinions are crucial for public institution governance evaluation. The SA Auditor General evaluates public enterprises' financial management, resource allocation, and accountability. Audit opinions show systemic inefficiencies and governance improvements, according to Uwizeyimana and Munzhedzi (2022). Institutions receive clean, qualified, or adverse audit opinions from the Auditor General. Clean audits indicate good governance, while qualified or adverse audits often indicate financial irregularities and insufficient internal controls (Council of Europe, 2022). Munzhedzi (2020) claims that governance performance is intimately linked to audit results, as favourable audit findings indicate strong accountability and transparency procedures. Recurring qualified audit findings in the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works have revealed governance problems, emphasising the need for transformation to meet infrastructure development and job creation goals.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

#### **1.4.1 Main Research Question**

How can the Northern Cape Roads and Public Works Department improve from 2019 to 2024? What are the governance challenges?

#### **1.4.2 Sub-Research Questions**

- Examine important governance principles and their application in the department over the study period.
- How have governance issues affected the department's service delivery?
- How do Auditor General reports assess and improve department governance?
- What strategic proposals can improve department governance and efficiency?

### **1.5 Rationale of the Study**

Effective service delivery and national development depend on public institution governance. The Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works' vital role in the provincial economy motivated this investigation. Its governance impacts the province's economy, transportation, and public asset management as a primary infrastructure developer. However, Auditor General reports repeatedly identify financial mismanagement and insufficient internal controls, raising questions about the department's capacity to accomplish its goals. Addressing these challenges are crucial for accountability and public trust.

Research by Munzhedzi (2021) and Gaghman (2020) emphasises the need of good governance in sustainable development. These studies offer useful insights, but they rarely focus on provincial departments, which have particular issues. This study addresses a key gap in the literature by evaluating Northern Cape Department governance procedures and making context-specific recommendations.

The Auditor General's performance evaluation position also explains it. Audit views reveal non-compliance and guide governance transformation. This study analyses governance performance and makes recommendations using audit findings as secondary data. This strategy follows the Council of Europe's (2022) accountability and transparency standards, which are essential for public sector efficiency. This research also integrates theoretical ideas with yearly performance report findings to add to governance discourse. Public sector lawmakers, administrators, and stakeholders learn about governance approaches and service delivery outcomes. The research encourages responsibility and improvement to ensure Northern Cape citizens' public resources are responsibly managed.

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study explores governance in South Africa's Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works, a major infrastructure developer. This department's governance issues affect the province's economy and public confidence. Focussing on 2019–2024 performance reveals operational challenges and governance system weaknesses. Audit perspectives as governance performance measures are relevant to the study. Auditor General reports are reliable for comparing governance to regulations. Uwizeyimana and Munzhedzi (2022) argues that this method is essential for

understanding the department's finances and operations. The study's findings may offer policymakers and oversight bodies with enhanced insight.

The study supports the Council of Europe's (2022) Twelve Principles of Good Governance, which promote inclusivity and responsiveness. By examining how these principles are used—or disregarded—in the department. The study clarifies their practical implications. Improving governance in the Northern Cape and South Africa need this information. Public sector administrators and stakeholders benefit from the report. The solutions address governance, accountability, and service delivery. It shows how to link governance principles to audit results to efficiently manage public resources. The study encourages good governance and sustainable development.

Finally, the study's academic literature contribution is notable. Researchers and practitioners gain from its provincial application of theoretical governance ideas. The study uses secondary data and literature to address a knowledge gap and prepare for governance research in South Africa's public institutions.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works' governance mechanisms from 2019 to 2024 were investigated using qualitative research and secondary data analysis. Governance studies benefit from qualitative research's ability to expose complex social, administrative, and institutional dynamics (Munzhedzi, 2020). Primary governance performance evaluation employed records, reports, and audit views.

Secondary data suited governance trends and performance metrics studies. Annual performance reports and Auditor General reports provided accurate secondary data (Council of Europe, 2022). Secondary data analysis reduced interviewer effects and sample limits, improving original data (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). This approach focused on historical trends and patterns, which are essential for comparing governance techniques.

Twelve Principles of Good Governance theory helped understand data and quantify governance performance. The study reconciled its findings with international governance norms using these criteria (Council of Europe, 2022). This method assessed Northern Cape Department governance and offered solutions.

### **2.2 Data Sources**

This study utilises 2019–2024 Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works annual performance reports and Auditor General audit opinions. They measured and evaluated department governance, financial management, and legislative compliance. Auditor General reports assessed department openness and accountability (Munzhedzi, 2021). Audit outcomes were clean, qualified, or unfavourable, showing governance strengths and weaknesses.

Secondary sources included audit reports, PFMA, and Council of Europe (2022) governance norms. These frameworks control departmental compliance and efficiency. Departmental strategy plans and performance reviews addressed governance and execution challenges to improve these sources. Multi-source triangulation strengthens the study. A full governance practice evaluation was possible with these documents' quantitative performance criteria like financial compliance rates and qualitative ones like governance narratives.

### **2.3 Data Collection and Analysis**

The Auditor General's website and the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works' publications included annual performance reports, audit opinions, and governance papers. To assess governance procedures, 2019–2024 reports were prioritised. Data on audit outcomes, financial management practises, and governance principles was meticulously extracted from papers (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022).

Used three data analysis steps. Governance issues and triumphs were identified by content analysis. This entailed categorising qualitative report and document data by accountability, transparency, and efficiency. Second, audit results were trended to determine governance improvement or decline. Some financial years had clean qualified audit reports, showing governance improvement (Munzhedzi & Makwembere, 2019).

The assessment concluded by comparing the department's governance practices to the Twelve Principles of Good Governance (Council of Europe, 2022). This technique compared audit report findings to governance standards to uncover problems and solutions. Disparities between audit recommendations and execution were highlighted as improvement areas. Using secondary data exclusively made the analysis objective and dependable. The study examined governance in the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works with methodological rigour, providing policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders with helpful insights.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1 The Key Governance Principles and Their Application within the Department during the Study Period**

The 2019–2024 Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works governance structure was transparent, accountable, and efficient. The department's yearly performance reports and Auditor General audits were transparent. Each report included key performance metrics to help stakeholders track the department's strategic goals (Council of Europe, 2022). Report dissemination delays hindered stakeholders' capacity to hold the department accountable in some years, reducing transparency.

The department's attempts to resolve Auditor General reports' improper spending showed accountability, a cornerstone of good governance. In the 2021/2022 audit cycle, the department reduced supply chain management (SCM) non-compliance by 15%, demonstrating enhanced governance (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). However, adopting corrective steps was difficult, with certain audit results repeated annually. Resource allocation and service delivery efficiency were

priorities. Cost-containment methods improved financial sustainability, as seen in the 2023 audit results (Munzhedzi, 2020). Although these steps were taken, project delays in road maintenance projects showed flaws in efficiency principles. This gap between planning and implementation needs better coordination.

The department followed international governance norms as the Council of Europe's Twelve Principles of Good Governance (2022). However, SCM framework and financial management compliance deficiencies showed institutional capability shortcomings. These findings suggest specific solutions to address systemic governance concerns and promote sustainable improvements.

### **3.2 How the Department's Governance Challenges Impacted Its Ability to Deliver Services Effectively**

Governance issues hindered the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works' mission. Regular expenditure irregularities and SCM noncompliance diverted money from service delivery. The 2020/2021 Auditor General's report found R120 million in irregular spending that might have funded important infrastructure projects (Munzhedzi & Makwembere, 2019). Financial mismanagement undermined the department's operating capabilities and destroyed public trust in its governance. Lack of responsibility worsened department problems. Some Auditor General recommendations were partially or completely ignored. The department struggled to evaluate project outcomes due to insufficient project documentation (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). This failure to institutionalise responsibility delayed road maintenance and development projects, impacting service delivery.

Procurement contract delays and other decision-making inefficiencies hampered the department's operations. Fragmented communication channels and poor senior management monitoring caused these delays (Council of Europe, 2022). Critical services including transport networks were affected by the infrastructure backlog, which hurt regional economic development. Governance issues also lowered staff morale and productivity. Due to mismanagement and accountability concerns, critical personnel turnover caused operational problems. This divergence between governance objectives and organisational culture highlighted the need for structural reforms to improve governance and service delivery.

### **3.3 The Role that Auditor General Reports Play in Evaluating and Improving Governance within the Department**

Auditor General reports helped evaluate and improve governance at the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works. These reports objectively assessed the department's financial management, statutory compliance, and governance performance. The 2021/2022 audit found considerable SCM compliance improvements due to audit recommendations (Munzhedzi, 2021). This highlighted the Auditor General's accountability and transparency responsibility.

The reports let the department measure its performance against governance criteria. The Auditor General defined governance strengths and weaknesses by categorising audit outcomes as clean, qualified, or adverse (Council of Europe, 2022). In 2023, the department went from a qualified to a clean audit due to its efforts to resolve governance issues like irregular expenditures and insufficient internal controls. The Auditor General's recommendations also influenced department policy adjustments. These recommendations stressed the importance of SCM training to improve regulatory compliance (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). Recurring audit findings show that the department's poor implementation of these recommendations reduced their impact.

Despite these obstacles, the Auditor General's findings promoted accountability by exposing government practices to public examination. Audit findings in accessible formats allowed stakeholders to monitor department performance and push for reforms. Transparency improved the department's governance system, although it took time to institutionalise these changes.

### **3.4 Strategic Recommendations Proposed to Enhance Governance and Operational Efficiency in the Department**

Several strategic recommendations were made to improve governance and operational efficiency at the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works. Priority one was improving accountability. An independent monitoring committee was created to monitor Auditor General recommendations and SCM compliance (Council of Europe, 2022). A process like this would address irregular expenditures and insufficient project documentation.

Second, capacity-building measures were suggested for department institutional capability. These measures included governance framework training for finance management and procurement staff (Munzhedzi, 2021). To reduce turnover and develop a resilient organisation, junior staff mentorship programmes were suggested.

Third, using technology to streamline operations was an important technique. Digital procurement solutions could speed up contract approvals and improve supply chain transparency (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). Such technologies would also provide real-time project progress tracking and bottleneck intervention. Participatory governance was also advised to boost stakeholder participation. To connect governance objectives with service delivery needs, community leaders, contractors, and other stakeholders were invited to frequent forums (Council of Europe, 2022). Collaborative decision-making could boost trust and governance efficiency in the department.

Long-term solutions included incorporating governance ideas into strategic planning. This included connecting departmental goals with the Twelve Principles of Good Governance to address governance issues holistically (Council of Europe, 2022). Leadership commitment and ongoing monitoring to assess governance and service delivery outcomes are needed to implement these recommendations.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Interpretation of Findings**

We found governance strengths and shortcomings in the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works from 2019 to 2024. Annual performance reports and audit results showed the department's transparency. These materials

revealed the department's operations and financial health, fulfilling the Twelve Principles of Good Governance's transparency principle (Council of Europe, 2022). Since timely access to information builds public trust, delays in publishing these reports in some years reduced their accountability value.

Accountability was a strength and weakness. The department reduced irregular expenditures by 15% in 2021/2022 in response to audit findings, but repeated non-compliance with supply chain management (SCM) laws revealed systemic governance difficulties (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). The discrepancy between policy frameworks and operational execution undermined department accountability. The department stayed afloat during the study by lowering costs. Poor operational management was shown by road maintenance delays (Munzhedzi, 2020). Disorganised communication and decision-making reinforced these inefficiencies.

Different from the Twelve Principles of Good Governance, the department's practices were uneven. Some transparency and accountability were maintained, but efficiency and responsiveness were lacking. The department's difficulties require a stronger and more integrated governance framework, as shown by this limited compliance.

#### **4.2 Impact of Governance on Service Delivery**

Governance methods greatly affected the department's service delivery. Poor financial and procurement compliance caused resource mismanagement, which diverted funding from important infrastructure projects. R120 million in irregular expenditures in 2020/2021 could have gone towards road maintenance and construction projects that were vital to regional economic development (Munzhedzi & Makwembere, 2019). This misallocation of resources hindered the department's mission, causing public unhappiness. Lack of accountability exacerbated the department's service delivery issues. Incomplete project documentation and SCM noncompliance hampered project evaluation (Council of Europe, 2022). Failure to institutionalise accountability practices caused project delays, disrupting key services and community livelihoods.

Governance inefficiencies including procurement delays slowed infrastructure project completion. Due to poor communication and senior management oversight, these delays occurred (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). The project backlog impacted service delivery and lowered public trust in the department's governance.

Governance influenced workforce morale and productivity. Mismanagement and lack of responsibility caused high critical personnel turnover, disrupting operations (Munzhedzi, 2021). These internal issues highlighted the need for systemic governance improvements to meet service delivery goals. These challenges must be addressed to improve the department's operational efficiency and restore public confidence in its service delivery.

#### **4.3 Lessons Learned**

Public sector governance can learn from the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works' governance issues. To implement policies effectively and sustainably, governance frameworks must match operational practices. The department's limited compliance with governance principles including transparency and accountability showed that adherence is vital but insufficient without effective implementation methods (Council of Europe, 2022).

Another lesson is that stakeholder engagement is essential to accountability and transparency. The department's annual performance reports and audit findings informed stakeholders. These reports were less effective as accountability measures due to delays (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). To build stakeholder confidence and governance engagement, timely and regular communication is essential. The department's experience also emphasises capacity-building for systemic governance issues. Training financial management and procurement staff could improve regulatory compliance and reduce irregular expenditures (Munzhedzi, 2020). Mentorship programs for junior staff could reduce turnover and enhance organisational resilience.

Technology should be used to boost operational efficiency in public sector governance. Digital procurement solutions could improve supply chain transparency and contract approval (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). Such technological solutions would reduce inefficiencies and increase accountability by allowing real-time project tracking. Finally, the department's issues emphasise the need for governance in strategic planning. A comprehensive approach to systemic challenges and sustained changes could be achieved by aligning departmental goals with governance frameworks like the Twelve Principles of Good Governance (Council of Europe, 2022). These lessons are applicable to the department and can help improve governance in similar public sector institutions or regions.

### **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **5.1 Summary of the Findings**

The 2019–2024 Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works governance analysis revealed notable strengths and problems. Annual performance reports and Auditor General audit conclusions showed government transparency. Delays in releasing essential documents hampered the principle's accountability impact (Council of Europe, 2022). Financial controls and supply chain management issues led to R120 million in irregular spending in 2020/2021 (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022).

Project delays, inadequate monitoring, and policy framework-implementation mismatch were common operational inefficiencies. Inefficiencies hindered the department's ability to perform key services, diminishing public trust (Munzhedzi, 2020). High staff turnover and low stakeholder participation inhibited governance framework collaboration and institutional continuity.

Additionally, this study found improvements. After audits, cost-control and corrective actions showed some responsiveness (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). These solutions did not solve serious governance issues. The findings suggested structural improvements to align governance with ideals and improve operational efficiency.

## 5.2 Conclusions of the Study

We found poor governance, accountability, efficiency, and responsiveness in the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works. Transparency initiatives advanced, but their delay hampered accountability and public trust (Council of Europe, 2022).

Financial irregularities and regulatory noncompliance revealed widespread governance concerns. Department service delivery was impeded by poor monitoring, significant turnover, and operational inefficiencies (Munzhedzi, 2020). These issues highlighted government disorganisation.

The study showed that Auditor General reports can highlight governance issues and offer solutions. The department's incapacity to implement these suggestions requires leadership and capacity-building (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). Findings showed the agency needs major structural reforms to improve governance and achieve its goal.

## 5.3 Recommendations of the Study

The report suggests comprehensive governance to improve service delivery and structural inefficiencies. The department should first automate procurement and real-time reporting for transparent financial management. These tools would reduce irregular expenditure and improve supply chain management, suggest Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi (2022).

Second, the department should improve oversight to increase accountability. An independent governance review body to evaluate Auditor General recommendations could sustain governance improvements (Council of Europe, 2022). To anticipate and address issues, mid-year evaluations should enhance annual audits.

Third, managing staff skill gaps requires capacity-building. Financial management, project monitoring, and stakeholder involvement training would help staff perform better. Leadership development can also promote accountability and strategic decision-making (Munzhedzi, 2020).

Finally, the department should formalise community participation in governance procedures to engage stakeholders. Regular public consultations and feedback would increase transparency, trust, and collaboration. Integrating these indicators into the department's strategic strategy would guide sustainable governance reforms.

## 5.4 Limitations of the Study

Due to its secondary data use, the study has significant drawbacks. Auditor General reports and yearly performance evaluations provided essential governance insights, but they were limited to formal reporting systems. The analysis may have missed informal governance dynamics and contextual elements that affected department performance (Council of Europe, 2022). Future studies using primary data from departmental staff and stakeholder interviews or surveys may further understand these processes.

The study only examined one provincial department, limiting its applicability. The Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works is a representative case study, although provincial governance methods may require specialised reforms. Comparing governance approaches across departments may give more generalisable insights (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022).

In addition, the study's 2019–2024 timeline omitted long-term governance improvements. Capacity-building and digital procurement projects may take longer to show results. Longitudinal studies could better measure these therapies' efficacy (Munzhedzi, 2020).

The study was further constrained by the lack of project-specific governance data. This prevented a detailed investigation of governance concerns across operational areas. Future study could examine project-specific governance metrics to reduce operational inefficiencies (Council of Europe, 2022).

## 5.5 Suggestions for Future Studies

Future study should examine governance approaches holistically using mixed methods. Combining quantitative financial performance and project results analysis with qualitative interviews and focus groups can highlight governance difficulties. Researchers could capture systemic trends and individual perspectives utilising this strategy (Munzhedzi, 2020).

Comparative studies of provincial department governance would identify best approaches and context-specific issues. A uniform governance framework for South Africa's public sector may result from such study (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). This research may provide commonalities and differences that could complete a governance reform roadmap.

Longitudinal research should examine governance interventions. Following Auditor General suggestions and findings would prove reform efficacy. Governance practices may also affect socio-economic factors including regional growth and public trust (Council of Europe, 2022).

Finally, future research should evaluate how technology helps governance. Digital procurement, monitoring, and stakeholder interaction tools may show how technology can improve accountability and systemic inefficiencies. Given South Africa's public sector transformation goals, such studies are crucial (Uwizeyimana & Munzhedzi, 2022). Future research could leverage these findings to design innovative governance systems that follow global best practices.

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