

# Ethical Conduct in A Limpopo Provincial Government Department in South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

Public officials have a greater responsibility to account to citizens, therefore they are expected to execute their duties with professionalism, courtesy and integrity and they are projected to refrain from unethical conduct that cripple the moral fibre of society. It is imperative for government officials to conduct themselves ethically in executing their daily duties and again it is of great importance to annotate that professional ethics in public administration is vital to ensure moral values, obligation, attitudes and norms governing public functionaries. The aim of this study was to examine ethical conduct in the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development as a case study. The proposed study was used to make suggestions on how to rebuild government's integrity and also to address ethical challenges that South Africa's public service is facing. The mixed research methodology was utilised, with unstructured interviews and structured (self-administered) questionnaires as tools to collect primary data. A combination of probability and non-probability sampling methods were employed in selecting sample elements from the population. Furthermore, both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis were used for the purpose of this study. Based on the study findings although Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's officials were ethically behaving in their dealings with the public, not all community members were satisfied about their conduct. Evidence collected indicated that the citizens does not know the code of conduct for the department. Consequently, the paper recommends that the department should develop their own clear policies, procedures, code of conduct towards ethical conduct of officials.

## 1. Introduction

This study investigates ethical conduct in the public service focusing in the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Ethical conduct in the Public Service is required by the Constitution. Section 195 (1) of the Constitution requires a public administration that is governed in terms of democratic values and principles including a high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained. This requires a public service that is professional, ethical and performs its duties and tasks with integrity. According to the Public Service Commission News (2010:3), government has a duty to proactively promote a culture of honesty and good governance, which will in turn lead to effective and efficient service delivery. The need to build integrity derives from the Constitution which mandates the Public Service Commission to promote a high standard of professional ethics by amongst others, promoting and instilling values such as accountability and transparency. Thozamile (2012: 26) asserts that public institutions exist for the public good and employ public servants

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to render services to ensure a better life for all. Therefore, accountability and reliability is expected of them. Every government, therefore, must endeavour to promote the general welfare of its citizens (De Bruijn & Dickie, 2006:79). This actually emphasized that there is a need for efficient and effective administration system in the public service. And this is the ideal the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development would like to achieve. The major objective of the paper is to explore on how the respondents, particularly community members including department's clients perceive the nature and extent of ethical or unethical conduct by government officials within the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the nature and extent of ethical or unethical conduct by government officials within the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development?
2. What is the level of knowledge on ethical or unethical conduct amongst officials and the public?
3. To what extent are the codes of conduct perceived to be effective by role players and stakeholders?
4. What are some of the key factors influencing ethical or unethical conduct in the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development?

The article instigates by presenting the conceptualisation of ethics and other related concepts, consequently providing the relation surrounding the issue. The next area provides some theoretical framework on ethics which includes description of the Rule-Orientated Approach, Utilitarianism, Deontology Theory, Virtue Ethics Theory and Theory of Egoism, which are the theories guiding the study. The research methodology selected for this study is also outlined to provide a map as to how the research will be conducted. Presentation and analysis of the study are prepared, followed by a transient discussion of the findings. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are presented.

## **2. Conceptualisation of Ethics, Morals and Values**

### **2.1. Ethics**

Mainga (2012: xii) commented that ethics has long been an outstanding issue in the day to day running of organisations over the past decades. The issue has however become more scrutinized due to the globalization trend which has put more pressure on organisations and governments to be more accountable and responsive to their consumers and citizens. He further alluded that in Africa, the efforts towards recognizing ethical values within governments have been more emphasized due to the high corruption and governance issues and unethical behaviour evidenced in the public sectors. The concept of ethics can be defined in different ways depending on the point of view or type of approach followed. Kretzschmar, et al (2012:17) state that, the term ethics originates from the Greek word *ethikos*. When the Greek term was later translated into Latin, it was translated as *moralis*. The common origin of the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' explains why it has become fashionable to use the two terms interchangeably. According to Mafunisa (2001:335), ethics refers to a set of rules or standards governing the moral conduct of employees in an institution. Ethics deals with values relating to human conduct, with respect to rightness or wrongness of particular actions and to the goodness or badness of the motives and ends of such actions. Rossouw, et al (2006:3) refers to ethics as the character and manners of a person in his/her interaction with others. The study of ethics includes the study of morality, which generally refers to the moral tradition of a given religion or society (Preston, 2007:6-13). As an area of study, it contemplates the principles and rules that should govern the moral value of people's behaviour (Pauw et al., 2015:295). For the ancient Greeks ethics meant character. Plato indicated that ethics is based on a theoretical insight that one can gain by means of philosophical thought. This implies that a theoretical

insight is necessary in order for one to carry out good actions (Edwards, 2007:30). According to Thonzhe & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2017:138-139), ethics can be defined as a system of moral principles relating to that branch of philosophy dealing with values on human conduct, with respect to rightness or wrongness of certain action and to the goodness and badness of the motives and ends of such action. It constitutes the basic principles of correct action undertaken based on rules of conduct. Van der waldt (2016:40) describes ethics as the norms, values and standards which guide the behaviour and actions of people. It is also defined as the systematic study of values (Starling, 2002:166).

According to Bauer (2002:166), ethics is internationally recognised as a prominent part of public administration and can within the context of Public Administration, be described as the outcome of relationships among various role players within the sphere of public administration. Gildenhuis (2004:13) defines ethics as “principles or standards of human conduct” which is sometimes referred to as morals and it essentially deals with what is right and wrong, good or bad and acceptable and unacceptable. It is therefore important to indicate that ethics are continuous efforts of striving to ensure that people, and the institutions they shape, live up to the standards that are reasonable and ethical.

## *2.2. Morals*

According to Denhardt & Denhardt (2009:127), moral is an action that is consistent with the group’s morality-that which expresses the group’s most basic commitments about what is right and wrong. Naude (2004:28) says that moral is related to principles of right and wrong. Thornhill, Van Dijk & Ile (2014:399) define moral as the motivation of public officials to be good and virtuous as evidenced by the endeavour to be honest, fair, impartial, and perform and display reasonable actions and behaviour (deontology). According to Meyer & Botha (2004: 311), the discipline of ethics includes rules of morality. Denhardt & Denhardt (2009:127) assert that to properly define ethics, we must first understand the meaning of morality. Morality is concerned with those practices and activities that are considered right or wrong; it is also concerned with the values those practices reflect and the rules through which they are carried out. Wassman & Stockhaus (2007:36) state that the main difference between ethics and morality lies in the ways it is studied. Ethics is the science of what is morally right or wrong, and morality is the practical application of moral rules and principles on the human conduct. “Morality” refers to the habits or customary traditions of people.

## *2.3. Values*

According to Kretzschmar, et al (2012:17) there is a close relation between ethics and values. ‘Values’ can be described as convictions about what is good or desirable. Thornhill, Van Dijk & Ile (2014:393), define values as enduring beliefs that specific modes of conduct or end-states of existence are personally or socially preferable to opposite or converse modes of conducts or end-state existence. According to Meyer & Botha (2004:308), values can be defined as abstract, collective representation of what people believe to be just, good and worthwhile to pursue. Values are general expectations and representations about human behaviour, which may be either conscious or so deeply embedded that they are not formulated verbally. Naude (2004:29) refers to values as core beliefs-the underlying thoughts that stimulate human behaviour. Raadschelders (2003:50) refer to value as a distinction between good and bad. He further asserts that as simple a distinction as this may seem, what is considered good or bad, useful or useless, valuable or not valuable, varies with time and place and from individual to individual. Thornhill, Van Dijk & Ile (2014:399) describe values as enduring beliefs that influence people’s attitudes and actions. Values determine what is right and what is wrong within a particular society and sector. Doing what is right or what is wrong as a group of officials or an

individual official (because values can also be personal) is what is meant by one of the aspects of ethics.

Moore in Uys (2012) argues that the public official's duty is to search for public value in their daily functioning. Although they are expected to be responsive to political guidance, their ethical responsibility is to search for and state their views about what is of public value, even to object to injustices or corruption on the part of politicians. Pauw, et al (2015:305) explain that issues that might promote a culture of honesty and dedication to the public interest include core values, standards of behaviour and putting values into effect. Core values includes values such as honesty, probity, impartiality, putting the People first (Batho Pele), legality, integrity, transparency and efficiency. These core values should identically be part of the corporate culture of the public sector and any code of ethical conduct should feature these core values. According to Morgan & Cook (2014:45), values can improve the performance of public officials across national boundaries, especially when undertaking the work of new public governance. Public Service Regulations also serve as a set of guidelines in terms of which public employees must perform their duties. When public servants do not perform as expected and neglect their duties, this is considered unethical and they could be charged with misconduct – the culmination of unethical conduct (Du Toit et al., 2002:112). It is therefore a challenge for the government to ensure that legislative framework, codes of conduct, norms and values and ethical awareness are prescribed to improve performance and for the smoothly running of government departments. Next, we provide a brief discussion of theoretical philosophies applicable to ethics.

#### *2.4. Theoretical Framework on Ethics*

According to Chonko (2012:1), ethical theories provide part of the decision-making foundation for decision making when ethics are in play because these theories represent the viewpoints from which individuals seek guidance as they make decisions. Panza & Potthast explains that ethical theory serves as the foundation for ethical solutions to the difficult situations people encounter in life. In fact, for centuries, philosophers have come up with theoretical ways of telling right from wrong and for giving guidelines about how to live and act ethically. According to Saha (2014:28), ethical theories arise in different contexts, so they address different problems. They also represent some ethical principles. There are many ethical theories but in general there are two major kinds of ethical theories, Deontological and Teleological ethical theories. Here are a few ethical theories:

#### *2.5. The Rule-Orientated Approach*

According to this approach, doing good means obeying the rules or doing our prescribed duty, irrespective of consequences or motives. Applying this point of view to public sector ethics obviously focuses on the regulations and codes governing public financial management (Pauw et al., 2015:296). According to Arthur, rule consequentialism is a theory that is sometimes seen as an attempt to reconcile deontology and consequentialism and in some cases, this is stated as a criticism of rule consequentialism. Like deontology, rule consequentialism holds that moral behaviour involves following certain rules. One of the most common objections to rule-consequentialism is that it is incoherent, because it is based on the consequentialist principles that what we should be concerned with its maximizing the good, but then it tells us not to act to maximize the good, but to follow rules (even in cases where we know that breaking the rule could produce better results). According to Phil, it is a deontological theory which accords logical priority to rules (e.g., "Do not lie"), rather than to particular judgements or to principles.

#### *2.6. Utilitarianism or Consequentialism Theory*

Pauw, et al (2015:296) explains that a better term for this would perhaps have been 'consequentialism'. Consequentialism is an action that is good or right depending on its

consequences; the extent to which it leads to an increase in the happiness or a decrease in unhappiness of those affected. Lee, Neeley & Stewart (2012:165) state that consequentialism as a normative paradigm of ethical decision making tells the decision maker to look to the potential consequences for a decision in order to determine what is ethical. Most of the useful consequentialist paradigm fall into the utilitarian school of thought, based on utility of a decision as predicted its consequences. Utilitarianism can be defined as the moral doctrine whereby everybody should act to produce the greatest possible balance of good over bad for everyone affected by the action (Meyer & Botha, 2004:318). For example, public officials can perform the acts that benefit society by delivering services effectively, regardless of personal feelings or the societal constraints such as laws, for example the code of ethics. Rule utilitarianism takes into account the law and is concerned with fairness (Chonko, 2012:2; Disoloane, 2012:40).

According to Saha (2014:29), utilitarianism is an ethics of welfare. Business guided by utilitarian approach focuses on behaviours and their results, not on the means of such actions. It can be described by the phrase, “the greatest good for the greatest number”. The utilitarian approach prescribes ethical standards for managers in the areas of organizational goals, i.e., maximization of profits; and having efficiency which denotes optimum utilization of scarce resource. Utilitarianism prescribes that the moral worth of an action is solely determined by its contribution to overall utility, that is, its contribution to the happiness and satisfaction of the greatest number. For example, one may be tempted to steal from a rich wastrel to give to a starving family. Hence, this approach is also referred as consequential approach. Utilitarianism is a general term for any view that holds that action and policies should be evaluated on the basis of the benefits and costs they impose on the society. Amundsen & Pinto de Andrade (2009:8) indicate that utility (the good to be maximized) has been defined by various thinkers as happiness or pleasure (versus sadness or pain). It has also been defined as the satisfaction of preferences. It may be described as a life stance with happiness or pleasure as ultimate importance. In general use of the term utilitarian often refers to a somewhat narrow economic or pragmatic viewpoint. However, philosophical utilitarianism is much broader than this; for example, some approaches to utilitarianism also consider non-humans (animals and plants) in addition to people. A rule utilitarian seeks to benefit most people but through the fairness and most just means available.

### *2.7. Non-consequentialist or Deontology Theory*

According to Arthur, deontological ethics is associated with the father of modern deontology, Immanuel Kant. The idea is that human beings should be treated with dignity and respect because they have rights. It could be argued that in deontological ethics, people have a duty to respect other people’s rights and treat them accordingly. For example, acts of lying, promise breaking, or murder are intrinsically wrong and therefore people have a duty not to do these things. According to Saha (2014:28), Kant’s moral theory emphasizes acting in accordance with and for the sake of duty. Kant believed that inclination, emotions and consequences should play no role in moral action. This means that motivation for action must be based on obligation. Morality should provide us with a framework of rational principles (rules) that guide and restrict action, independent of personal intentions and desires. Amundsen & Pinto de Andrade (2009: 8) assert that Deontological ethics looks at our fidelity to principle and disregards the consequences of a particular act, when determining its moral worth. Kantianism (or Kantian ethical theory) is deontological, revolving entirely around duty rather than emotional feelings or end goals. The core concept is “duty”, or what one ought to do in certain situations. Kantianism states that truly moral or ethical acts are not based on self-interest or the greatest utility, but on a sense of “duty” and a sense of what is right and fair on a wider level (despite the possible consequences for the individual and their usefulness for others).

Lee, Neeley & Stewart (2012:171) assert that non-consequentialist reasoning is otherwise known as deontology because it is based on a duty to uphold moral principles (the word deontology comes from the Latin term for duty). Chonko (2012:2); Disoloane (2012:41-42) allude that for instance, if the public official who must be on time to a meeting is running late, how is she supposed to drive? Is speeding breaking her duty to society to uphold the law or is the official supposed to arrive at the meeting late, not fulfilling the duty to be on time? Preston (2007:40) explains that a non-consequentialist ethic enjoins to do the right thing simply because it is intrinsically the right thing- no extrinsic justification is needed as with consequentialism. Chonko (2012:2) states that people should adhere to their obligations and duties when engaged in decision making when ethics are in play. This means that a person will follow his or her obligations to another individual or society because upholding ones' duty is what is considered ethically correct. For example, a doctor may have a duty to benefit a patient, and he or she may need to know what medical consequences would result from various treatments in order to determine what would and would not benefit the patient. A person who adheres to deontological theory will produce very consistent decisions since they will be based on the individual's set duties.

### *2.8. Virtue Ethics Theory*

According to Fieser (2017), historically, virtue theory is one of the oldest normative traditions in Western philosophy, having its roots in ancient Greek civilization. Virtue ethics, however, places less emphasis on learning rules, and instead stresses the importance of developing good habits of character, such as benevolence. Aristotle argued that virtues are good habits that we acquire, which regulate our emotions. In addition to advocating good habits of character, virtue theories hold that we should avoid acquiring bad character traits, or vices, such as cowardice, insensibility, injustice and vanity. Starling (2008:190) says that Aristotle calls courage, temperance and justice moral virtues and thought they are the best acquired through imitation, practice and habit.

Chonko (2012:3) asserts that virtue ethical theory judges a person by his or her character rather than by an action that may deviate from his or her normal behaviour. It takes the person's morals, reputation and motivation into account when rating an unusual and irregular behaviour that is considered unethical. According to Arthur, the consideration in virtue ethics is essentially "what makes a good person, 'or, "what makes a good public relations professional?" Virtue ethics require the decision-maker to understand what virtue are good for public relations and then decisions are made in light of those particular virtue. For example, if the virtue of honesty is of utmost importance to a good public relations professional, then all decisions should be made ethically to ensure honesty is preserved. Saha (2014:30) states that according to Aristotle, in his words "virtue is a character trait that manifests itself in habitual action". For example, honesty does not imply telling the truth once but has to be the trait of a person who tells the truth as general practice. Thus, we can define virtue as a trait of character that is essential for leading a successful life. Aristotle considers pride and shame to be virtues on the grounds that we should be proud of our accomplishments and ashamed of our failings. Virtue should contribute to the idea of good life. They are not merely means to happiness but are constituents of it. Amundsen & Pinto de Andrade (2009:7) state that Virtue ethics includes an account of the purpose of human life, or the meaning of life. To Plato and Aristotle, the purpose was to live in harmony with others, and the four Cardinal Virtues were defined as prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. The Greek idea of the virtues was later incorporated into Christian moral theology. Proponents of virtue theory sometimes argue that a central feature of a virtue is that it is universally applicable.

According to Pauw, et al (2015:296) this view sees the good as not residing in individual action but in the character of a person. For instance, if a Personal Assistant to the Director concerned

has submitted a wrong report, and was later detected by the Director, the Director who knows the P.A well will understand the P.A 's character and will judge her accordingly. If the P.A normally follows the rules and has good standing amongst his colleagues, the Director who encounters the wrong report may be able to judge the P.A. more leniently. Perhaps the P.A had too many reports on her desk and simply took the wrong report instead of the correct one. Contrariwise, the P.A who has a reputation for continuous mistakes is more likely to be judged harshly for her mistakes because of his past consistent errors (Chonko, 2012:3; Disoloane, 2012:42-43). The task of ethics is then to contribute to a virtuous disposition in individuals and organizations. If officials are virtuous, corrupt and dishonesty will be something of the past.

## *2.9. Theory of Egoism*

According to Saha (2014:30), egoism is derived from the Latin word 'ego' meaning 'I'. The theory of egoism holds that the good is based on the pursuit of self-interest. This model takes into account harms, benefits and rights for a person's own welfare. Under this model an action is morally correct if it increases benefits for the individual in a way that does not intentionally hurt others, and if these benefits are believed to counterbalance any unintentional harms that ensue. For example, a company provides scholarship for education to needy students with a condition that the beneficiary is required to compulsory work for the company for a period of 5years. Although, the company is providing scholarship benefits to the needy students, ultimately it is in the company's self-interest. According to Moseley, in philosophy, egoism is the theory that one's self is, or should be, the motivation and the goal of one's action. Egoism has two variants, descriptive or normative. The descriptive (or positive) variant conceives egoism as a factual description of human affairs. That is, people are motivated by their own interests and desires, and they cannot be described otherwise. The normative variant proposes that people should be motivated, regardless of what presently motivates their behaviour. Ethical egoism is the normative theory that the promotion of one's own good is in accordance with morality. In the strong version, it is held that it is always moral to promote one's own good, and it is never moral not to promote it. In the weak version, it is said that although it is always moral to promote one's own good, it is not necessarily never moral to not. That is, there may be condition in which the avoidance of personal interest may be a moral action.

Shaver (2014) states that ethical egoism claims that it is necessary and enough for an action to be morally right that it maximises one's self-interests. (There are possibilities other than maximization. One might, for example, claim that one ought to achieve a certain level of wealth, but that there is no requirement to achieve more. Ethical egoism might also apply to things other than acts, such as rules or character traits. Since these variants are uncommon, and the arguments for and against them are largely the same as those concerning the standards version, we set them aside.) Meyer & Botha (2004: 316) used South Africa's racial policies of the past as an example to illustrate this theory. Many US companies, such as Coca Cola, stayed in South Africa during the apartheid years because these companies could through social programmes contribute to the upliftment of the oppressed people at that time. According to the Egoism theory, this was only done to secure long-term benefits (most probably because large capital investments were made) and not because of social responsibility. Take note that not all theories may be applicable to this study. For example, theories like, rule-orientated approach, utilitarianism or consequentialism and non-consequentialist or deontology theory are found to be more relevant and useful in this study.

The rationale behind rule –orientated approach holds that moral behaviour involves following certain rules. Applying this point of view to public sector ethics obviously focuses on the regulations and codes governing public financial management. As compared to rule-orientated, utilitarianism is based on moral doctrine whereby everybody should act to produce the greatest possible balance of good over bad for everyone affected by the action. For example, public

officials must perform the acts that benefit society by delivering services effectively, regardless of personal feelings or the societal constraints such as laws, for example the code of ethics. With deontology theory, the idea is that human beings should be treated with dignity and respect because they have rights. It could be argued that in deontological ethics, people have a duty to respect other people's rights and treat them accordingly. This means that a person will follow his or her obligations to another individual or society because upholding one's duty is what is considered ethically correct. Generally, this implies that public officials must follow certain rules, regulations and codes governing them and everybody should act ethically to produce the best possible balance of good action. Moreover, they have an obligation to respect other people's rights and treat them accordingly as expected.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The mixed research methodology was utilised, with unstructured interviews and structured (self-administered) questionnaires as tools to collect primary data. Mixed methods approach refers to a separate methodology in which both qualitative and quantitative approaches, methods and procedures are combined or "mixed" to come up with a more complete picture of the research problem (De Vos et al., 2011:434). Mixed methods approach was adopted because it presented a fuller picture, better explanation and depiction of a phenomenon because it is a combination of two different methods. De Vos, et al. (2011:435) assert that they need to be "mixed" in some way so that together they form a more complete picture of the problem than they do when standing alone. In this study the researcher settled for probability and non-probability sampling which is, stratified random sampling method, simple random sampling and convenience sampling. Stratified random sampling method was used preferably to divide government officials into ranks that is, Chief Directors, Directors, and Deputy Directors and Assistant Directors. Simple random sampling was preferably used to members of the community because they are entitled to receive services from the department and they are the ones who are directly affected by the ethical or unethical conduct of government officials. Having picked community members randomly, a convenience sampling technique was also applied to identify the elements and to select respondents who were nearer and most easily available, particularly department's clients who are supposed to have regular contacts with the department.

A representative sample size of 140 individuals were selected for this study, composed of 20 government officials and 120 community members including department's clients. Hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were administered to community members and the return rate was 85% as a total of 102 completed questionnaires were secured. For interviewees, out of twenty (20) government officials only seventeen (17) were interviewed. These interviews targeted officials from different management levels based on their experiences and capabilities towards ethics within the department and on the basis that they were manageable and accessible. Of the envisaged 140 respondents of the research study, only one hundred and nineteen (119) respondents participated in the study.

Given the nature of data collection instruments used in this study two forms of data analysis methods, qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods were used. For qualitative data obtained through interviews, data was organized in a form of text, written words, phrases, content and emerging themes for analysis. Quantitative data collected through questionnaires was analysed through the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software. Where in raw data was captured into the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet which was later copied into the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software, which assists in processing and producing reports, in different formats, such as tables, charts, graphs, summaries, descriptive stats and complex statistical analysis. The study was ethically sound because an approval by the Department of Public Management, Faculty of Humanities, at the



Tshwane University of Technology was granted. Yet again the permission to conduct the research from the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development was also granted. The participation of respondents was voluntary and respondents were thoroughly informed and guided about the purpose of the survey. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity as well as the right to withdraw from participation if they felt uncomfortable.

#### **4. Results**

This section presents an overview of the key findings of the paper. The study is interested in establishing how the code of conduct developed by the Public Service Commission was received and applied to governmental departments specifically, Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The findings are presented according to the objectives of the study which were to assess the extent of ethical or unethical conduct by government officials in the department.

##### *4.1. The nature and extent of ethical or unethical conduct*

In terms of the nature and extent of ethical or unethical conduct by government officials within the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The respondents acknowledged that ethics deals with what is right and wrong those who strongly agreed accounted to 56.9%, agreed were 31.4% compared to 11.8% who said they don't know and those who strongly disagreed and disagreed were at 0%. The researcher was also keen to establish whether public officials in the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development were ethical in their dealings with the public and found that 44.1% of community members strongly agreed, 37.3% agreed while 18.6% disagreed that departmental staff members are not ethical with their dealings with the public compared to 0% who don't know and strongly disagreed.

The study also sought to establish whether unethical behaviour is a negligent of conduct given in a situation where 48.0% strongly agreed, 42.2% agreed, don't know for 9.8% and 0% who strongly disagreed and disagreed. The researcher also found that unethical behaviours of government officials lead to poor service delivery with 75.5% of respondents who strongly agreed, 24.5% who agreed and 0% for don't know, strongly disagree and disagree. Respondents who strongly disagreed that unethical behaviours can be contained accounted for 40.2%, who agreed were 36.3%, who said they don't know were 23.5% compared to 0% who disagreed and strongly agreed. This may mean that the public is losing confidence in government's ability to correct the negative image that it has. This is because the public is losing trust and hope to government officials and government as a whole. For example, the Zuma and Guptas saga, the former President Jacob Zuma has been accused of having a corrupt relationship with members of the Indian- born Gupta family, and even letting them interfere in ministerial appointments.

##### *4.2. The level of knowledge on ethical or unethical conduct*

The researcher sought to determine the level of knowledge and understanding on ethical and unethical behaviour where 37.3% indicated that ethics is about what is right and wrong, 33.3% said ethics is acting in a manner defined as acceptable and those who don't know accounted for 29.4%. From the analysis the common types of unethical behaviours observed in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development was also asked where 44.1% of the respondents indicated that coming to work late and knocking off early, 32.4% mentioned that promising services but not delivering in time, whereas 23.5% indicated incompetency and unfaithfulness such as using government property for personal purposes and disclosing confidential information like awarding of tenders and filing of posts.

Mafunisa (2000:5) indicated that which is construed to be unethical behaviour includes the protection of, covering up of, incompetence; lack of responsiveness to the needs of clients; tardiness in the discharge of assigned and accepted duties; the manifestation of inefficiency and effectiveness; corruption; incompetence; fraud; bribery; sexual harassment; nepotism; favouritism, victimization; subjective and arbitrary decisions; disclosing of confidential information; tax evasion and speed money. In relation to the instrument to ensure ethical conduct 58.8% respondents indicated dismissals, 31.4% imprisonment and 9.8% mentioned fines.

#### *4.3. The extent of codes of conduct perceived to be effective by role players and stakeholders*

The third objective was to determine the extent of codes of conduct perceived to be effective by role players and stakeholders. The study sought to establish whether community members know the code of conduct in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and established that 44.1% don't know the code of conduct of the department, 30.4% disagreed, 25.5% agreed they know the code of conduct of the department and there were no respondents who strongly disagreed and who strongly agreed. A combined 74.5% doesn't seem to know about the department's code of conduct. This is worrying because how will the public hold the public officials accountable when they are not aware of the standards such as the code of conduct. A code of conduct fulfils a primary function in the fight against corruption and unethical conduct on the part of public officials and political office-bearers and should be regarded as being among the most important measure to combat corruption. The researcher wanted to determine whether the department has a code of conduct where 38.2% indicated don't know, 32.4% agreed compared to 29.4% who disagreed with the statement and there were no respondents who strongly disagreed and strongly agreed. The researcher also found that officials are not complying with the code of conduct with 47.1% of respondents indicating strongly agree, 31.4% agreed as compared to 21.6% who disagreed and 0% were on strongly disagreed and I don't know.

The finding is surprising since in the previous section a majority indicated that they did not know about the department's code of conduct. The explanation could be that respondents may have just answered the question without due consideration. In regard to honesty and accountability of the officials, respondents strongly agreed with 51.0%, compared to 33.3% who agreed that they were honest and accountable when dealing with the public, 15.7% disagreed and 0% on strongly disagreed and I don't know. The idea is that human beings should be treated with dignity and respect because they have rights. It could be argued that in deontological ethical theory, people have a duty to respect other people's rights and treat them accordingly. For example, acts of lying, promise breaking, or murder are intrinsically wrong and therefore people have a duty not to do these things. Among the sample 41.2% agreed that officials are executing their duties in a professional manner, 31.4% disagreed, only 27.5% strongly disagreed and there were no respondents who strongly agreed and don't know. A combined 58.9% doesn't think officials are executing their duties in a professional manner. Although this is a negative finding, the department and management must not sit back and relax while things are getting out of hands, precautionary and enforced measures like disciplinary actions must be taken against officials who are not executing their duties effectively.

#### *4.4. Key factors influencing ethical or unethical conduct*

In relation to the key factors influencing ethical or unethical conduct of officials, research shows that 57.8% respondents indicated low salaries, underpaid public servants, financial worries and indebted employees causes unethical behaviours, According to Thozamile (2012:31), most public servants suffer from stress and addictive behaviours resulting from being trapped in financial debt. Financially indebted employees become vulnerable to unethical

behaviour. If one considers the financial management system's weaknesses and challenges in various departments, one can observe that some of the weaknesses are deliberately unattended to so as to allow space for corrupt tendencies to manifest themselves. Some 7.8% mentioned dissatisfied working conditions and poorly organized public service compared to 34.3% who said greed and dishonesty push officials to compromise values and act immorally. In regard to types of actions taken against corrupt officials, the types were found to be disciplinary actions and warnings from responses which stood at 11.8% and through severe punishment and dismissals which was presented at 34.3% and 53.9% mentioned imprisonment.

Maluleke (in Mafunisa 2000:64) was of the opinion that imprisonment without the option of a fine should be the minimum sentence for those involved in corruption. From the analysis the most method to improve unethical behaviours of officials was argued to be through training and workshops with 43.1% whereas 19.6% said regular briefing sessions. Some respondents 37.3% indicated that education and training must be put in place to improve unethical behaviour. Malan & Smit (2001:102-103) states that an introduction of ethical training including the application and compliance of Code of Conduct of Public Servants, ethical principles, the handling of misconduct cases, the content of the Disciplinary Code and Procedures for Public Servants can be pursued to improve professional ethics. The mechanism to combat unethical conduct was found to be through internal investigations such as warnings, suspensions and dismissals from responses which stood at 36.3% and through imprisonment and fines which was represented at 43.1% compared to 20.6% who mentioned whistleblowing mechanism. Malan & Smit (2001:102-103) attest that developing appropriate effective whistleblowing mechanism, and ensuring that employees understand the need for, as well as the consequences of whistle blowing can be pursued to improve professional ethics.

## **5. Discussion**

The study demonstrates a depiction that although Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's officials seem to be ethically behaving in their dealing with the public, not all clients are satisfied or convinced about their ethical conduct. There is a need for ethical awareness within every organization to guide and improve ethical conduct of officials. In situations where officials are found to be unethical, the government must make sure that strict measures like dismissal and imprisonment are enforced to curb unethical conduct of officials. Ethical understanding and knowledge are recognized as a critical element to the accomplishment of ethical initiatives within the organization. Ethical knowledge is very much significant to increase the level of knowledge and to make sure that ethics basis is recognized and adopted. It is therefore important for the government and the department to engage the officials and public on ethical issues. Code of conduct is crucial to guide and direct officials of what is expected of them in relation to ethical conduct. According to Bauer (2002:181-182), a code of conduct serves as an instrument for the prevention of corruption and it contains guidelines for serving the public and mechanism that can prevent the occurrence of situations that can lead to corruption practices. Hanekom, Rowland & Bain (2001:163) explain that codes of ethics become necessary in order to guide the public official in rendering service to society, to safeguard the official against unjustified claims from society, and also to improve the view people have of the public service. Although findings show that citizens do not know the code of conduct for the department and if the department has a code of conduct. How will the public hold the public officials accountable when they are not aware of the standards such as code of conduct? It is therefore imperative for the department to develop their own clear policies, procedures, code of conduct or ethics towards ethical conduct of officials. Education and training in a work situation is crucial to capacitate the officials with ethical issues. This implies that government officials need to be retrained to be able to cope with new responsibilities involved in reforming rules and regulations (Mafunisa, 2000:5).

Education and training are important to necessitate the adoption and improvement of ethical conduct of officials in the organization. Zitha & Mathebula (2015:22) agree that there must be a sense of urgency for government to invest more on training and workshops on ethical conduct of public servants.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study found that most respondents indicated that although Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's officials are ethically behaving in their dealings with the public, not all the clients and community members are satisfied about their conduct. Some clients are satisfied about official's behaviour in the department, others are not, for various reasons. Furthermore, there has been an indication that community members also acknowledged that ethics deals with what is right and wrong. This may indicate the extent to which community members are aware and familiar with the nature of ethical conduct. While this may be the case, a considerable number of community members still disagree that unethical conduct can be contained. This is because the public is losing confidence in government's ability to correct the negative image that it has. It is therefore necessary that the government should enforce strict measures such as imprisonment to curb unethical conduct in the public service. With reference to determining the level of knowledge on ethical or unethical conduct by officials and the public. As reflected by the data collected from the study, it is however satisfying that community members indicated their personal knowledge and understanding about ethical or unethical conduct.

Based on the study findings the study concludes that there is a general knowledge of the perception ethical conduct or ethics which deals with what is right or wrong. While the level of public awareness is evident not all members are knowledgeable in terms of ethics. Even though this is a positive outcome, in this regard the department must ensure that road shows are conducted to increase the level of understanding. In relation to the extent of code of conduct perceived to be effective by role players and stakeholders. The evidence collected indicated that the citizens do not know the code of conduct for the department and if the department has a code of conduct. While this may be the case, a considerable number of community members strongly agreed that officials are not complying with the code of conduct. This finding is surprising since in the previous section a majority indicated that they did not know about the department's code of conduct. This could be that respondents may have just answered the question without consideration. Significantly organizational leaders and staff members alike should be guided by the organizational policy documents and codes such as the code of conduct of their organization. Therefore, it was deduced that code of conduct should be considered as an effective document to enhance ethical conduct. In terms of some key factors influencing ethical or unethical conduct in the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The study also concludes that Individual, organizational, psychological and social factors like financial worries, dissatisfied working conditions, greed and honesty push officials to compromise values and act immorally. The study deduced that imprisonment and dismissals must be taken against corrupt officials. It is therefore recommended that the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development should develop their own clear policies, procedures, code of conduct or ethics towards ethical conduct of officials. Moreover, the implementation of training and development through workshops and training and education for staff members should be enhanced to necessitate the adoption of ethical behaviour and also to improve ethical conduct of officials. This would enable the Limpopo Provincial Government, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to improve its strategy in terms of implementing an improved ethical conduct amongst officials in the department.

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