



Work and Human Ethics in Public Service in Malawi

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Abstract: *The effectiveness of the public service in most of the least developed countries (LDCs) is highly questionable. Malawi is not an exception. The government of Malawi launched a code of ethics and conduct in 2013 basically to enhance the delivery of quality services to the public. Despite that, the media has been almost daily reporting a lot of misconduct and malpractices in the public service including non-adherence of the Public servants' work ethics, embezzlement of public resources, corruption, among others. This article discusses work ethics and human ethics in Malawi. A documentary research method was used in collecting relevant information from peer-reviewed journals, conference papers, and the media. Different search engines and databases were used in information search. The search strategy involved key words such as work ethics, human ethics, public service, Malawian public service, misconduct and malpractices in the public service, Public servants' work ethics, embezzlement of public resources, corruption, among others. The literature search identified a total of 2,132 references related to a set of specified search terms. Only Sixty (60) studies met the final criteria for review. The study found out that most of these misconducts are taking place because of the low salaries civil servants receive, lack of knowledge about the work ethics and code of conduct, weaker structures enforcing the code of ethics, shortage of staff, lack of resources in the government and also because of lack of proper channels for reporting unethical behaviour. Non-adherence to work ethics has resulted into poor services being delivered. This, therefore, calls for a need for the government for sensitization of staff on work ethics and improve working condition in the public service. In recruitment, the government has to make sure that it employs that have good reputation of work ethics in their previous employment and there has to be a routine performance appraisal.*

Keywords: *Ethics, work ethics, human ethics, public service, Malawi*

1.0 Introduction

Ethics is gaining fame in the course of doing government business nowadays both in public and private sector (Gilman, 2005; Fewings, 2009; Chilipunde and Kaima, 2015). It has been observed that standards in public service are going down. This raises questions about the costs of misconduct on the part of those who have been entrusted with guarding public interest and resources. Examples of such costs are losses in faith and sureness by the public in public institutions and losses of invaluable resources such as funds, which were intended to be used to support the economic and social development of the country and people. Civil servants' indignities have captured world attention these days, people are debating absolute corruption and dishonourable behaviour in the public service. Now the question is, are the civil servants held to higher standards of performance and conduct than others? If that is the case, why is it so? With the advent of the current state, civil servants are regarded as stewards of public resources and custodians of a distinct faith that the public has placed upon them. For this confidence, the public servants are anticipated to put the interest of the public above their interest (United Nations, 2000).

The public service is made up of the employees of the government and these employees are guided by national and subnational public service laws. They play an essential role

in the sustainable development and good governance of a country. The public service is an essential part of democracy because it serves as the impartial organizational structure which carries out the decisions of elected representatives of the people. The public service is expected to execute policy for the economic growth of a state and runs the programmes that function as the safety net for the most at-risk sections of society. In this context, a state expects its public service to exhibit high standards of professionalism and also ethics (United Nations, 2000).

There is a way certain comprehensive standards that outline how public servants should exercise judgement and decisions in doing their day to day official duties. Ethics has long been a debatable area of study in the profession of law, politics, philosophy, theology and public administration, and other study areas. Some practitioners, however, will let go any study of the theory of ethics as not relevant to their work, opting instead to bank on laws, personal manuals and job descriptions to define the bounds of public responsibilities. That thinking now appears to be losing ground to the viewpoint that public administrators are no longer, if they ever were, expert specialists simply executing the policy decisions of the policy makers. Rather, they exercise decision-making supremacy on their own, discretion that affects people's lives in direct, lasting and sometimes profound ways. Apart from this, there can be reasons to question the legality of the rules and the policy decisions that public administrators are implementing. Administrators and



civil servants cannot avoid making decisions, and as such they should attempt to make ethical decisions. Administrators have unrestricted powers that go further than the manuals, orders, job description and legal framework of their position and duties, and professional ethics will have to come in as procedures, in addition to the correct rules. (Amundsen, and Andrade 2009). To safeguard democracy and promote better governance, there is a move globally to reinstate a measure of trust and integrity in public institutions and officials. Ashour (2004), observed that a compromise has been established world-wide on the importance of restructuring the public sector to reinforce institutional ethics and professionalism and to avert and fight corruption.

The definition of what is fair, just, right, wrong, moral and equitable is diverse in modern pluralistic societies. Individual ethics, in a word, is essential but not substantial condition for dependable action in public sector management. Public servants need to put public interest above their own because of the public trust conferred upon them. What this mean is public servants should take cognisance of social and public values and not substitute their own value choices for those of the public. Ethics guides the civil servants in observing and resolving conflicts of principles in carrying out their official duties. The public service is there to accomplish the mandate of the government, which is to serve and bring citizens development by effecting the government policies (Matei and Camelia, 2015), this should remain an everlasting overall objective. The civil service is charged by the civil servants who by virtual of their positions, knowledge, skills, capabilities and ethical values make and implement the government policy decisions which affect directly or indirectly the necessities and wellbeing of people. Public administrators are obliged to make decisions on various matters of value to the people and the whole organization they serve, in pursuit of their daily obligations. And in making such decisions, public administrators use their ethical and moral values depending on the nature and circumstances of the substance to be decided. As such, they should be responsible and act in accordance with people's worry, rights and anticipations (Sebhathu and Pei-lin, 2016). As noted by Nagiah (2012), code of ethics and behaviours is usually an encouraging tool which defines the core ethical values of employee's conduct and moral decision-making.

This paper is analysing work and human ethics in the public service in Malawi. It specifically assesses its effectiveness in helping the public service achieve its vision and mission. It also highlight the possible factors reasons to diversions for being effective or ineffective in helping public service achieve its vision and mission.

2.0 Theoretical Debates

2.1 Ethics and Ethical Issues

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines ethics as 'the discipline of morals, treatise on this, moral ideologies or guidelines of conduct' (1964: 415). It is a Greek word, *éthikos* to mean 'of or for morals'. The same dictionary defines morals as being concerned with 'the difference between right and wrong'. Moral comes from the Latin word *mos* (pl. mores) and it means 'a measure or regulatory rule of life; as determined not by the law but by people's drive and pleasure' (Lewis and Short, 1900).

Christians *et al* (1998) define Ethics as: the liberal arts discipline that appraises voluntary human behaviour insofar as it can be judged right or wrong in reference to formative principles. Ethics is in practice, a way of studying morality which permits judgements to be made when. Workplace ethics is defined as the set of values, moral doctrines, and principles that need to be followed by both employers and employees in the workplace. It is the set of rules and regulations that ought to be followed by all civil servants of that workplace. Ethics are applied by employers to nurture both employee-employee relationship and employee-customer dealings. The ethics may be put into writing or not by a working organization but whichever the case, they are have to be followed.

There are some general workplace ethics that do not require to be defined by the working organization, but are common ethical conducts employees need to demonstrate. And there are also some organization-specific ethics that may need to be defined in an organization handbook.

If there was only one person living in the world, we would not need to be ethical. If no other person existed and we were completely alone, our day-to-day existence would not encompass any need to change our behaviour in order to do what was ethically right. There would be no stealing. There would be no cases of murder or rudeness. In fact the only person offended by our violence, bad language and conducts would be ourselves. For those who trust in a divinity would of course still say that morality was significant, that God had laid down moral rules which must still be followed. However, even those who do not trust in God would find it morally unacceptable to do some things. Even if no one else was existing, cutting down all trees in the world would be an act that many would look at it to be immoral. Standards would still be an imperative consideration in life in such situations; it would just have very different instructions. There would be far fewer moral problems to solve if there was no-one anyone else. Moral problems are the penalty of our connection with society, the price we pay for the benefits of existing in close vicinity with other people. At one end of the spectrum this involves obeying the law; at the other, being gallant and polite to other people. Ethics is concerned with what is good for people and society and is also defined as moral viewpoint. Ethics is concerned with: how to live a noble life; duties, rights and responsibilities; the language of right and wrong; moral decisions - what is good and bad? (Chilipunde and Kaima, 2015).

2.2 Approaches to Ethics

The ethical theories tend to be divided into three areas by philosophers nowadays and these areas are: meta-ethics; normative ethics and applied ethics.

- Meta-ethics is ethics that deals with the nature of moral ruling. It also looks at the origins and connotation of ethical principles.
- Normative ethics is ethics that is concerned with the content of moral verdicts and the criteria for what is right or wrong.
- Applied ethics is concerned with provocative topics like war, animal rights and capital punishment.



3.0 Methodology

This paper is based on desk review of literature in exploring human and work ethics in Malawi. A documentary review (documentary research method) was used in collecting relevant information for this article. The documentary method is described as the technique used to categorize, investigate, and interpret written documents whether in the private or public domain; it is the analysis of documents that contain information about the phenomenon under a study (Scott, 1990; Bailey, 1994; Mogalakwe, 2006; Muhanga and Malungo, 2017).

Different search engines and databases were used in information search to collect relevant information from peer-reviewed journals, conference papers, and the media. The review excluded articles that were not in English language. The search strategy involved key words such as work ethics, human ethics, public service, Malawian public service, misconduct and malpractices in the public service, Public servants' work ethics, embezzlement of public resources, and corruption in Malawi. The literature searched identified a total of 2,132 references related to a set of specified search. Of the 2,132 articles and published abstracts retrieved, only 60 met inclusion criteria.

4.0 Work Ethics and Human Ethics in Malawi Public Service

4.1 The Public Service/civil service in Malawi

Public service described as any services directly or indirectly provided by the government as a result of using public resources or any public interest activity that falls directly under the authority of government. Government institutions and their employees are also part of the public service, (GoM 2018). As provided for in the constitution of the Republic of Malawi (1994), the public service includes the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, which are the three arms of the government. The chief secretary of the government is the administrative head of the public service while the president is the political head. The chief secretary to the Government is the also oversees the management of the public service, (GoM, 2018).

The vision 2020 which stated that "by the year 2020 Malawi as a God fearing nation will be secure, democratically mature, environmentally sustainable, self-reliant with equal opportunities for and active participation by all, having social services, vibrant cultural and religious values and being a technologically driven middle income country," which was formulated in the year 2000 defined the aspirations of the public in Malawi. This vision was implemented through a 5 year medium term development approaches. A number of development policies and strategies since the independency of Malawi were implemented by the government of Malawi. These included the 10 year development strategies of the first Statement of Development Policies (1971-1980) and also the Second Statement of Development Policies (1987- 1996). After which, the government of Malawi moved from the 10 year development strategy to 5 year development strategies. The 5 year development strategies that were implemented in Malawi included the Malawi Poverty

Reduction Strategy Paper (2001-2004), the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) I (2005-2010), Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (2011-2016) and the currently Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III of 2017. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III, is aimed at moving the nation of Malawi to being "a productive, competitive and resilient nation" and this is done by putting much emphasis on sustainable agriculture, water development and climate change management; energy, health and population, education and skills development; Industry and Tourism development; transport and ICT infrastructure and; while taking into account cross-cutting issues of gender, disability and the environment. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III just like previous strategies also emphasizes on the importance of an effective, efficient and accountable public service for the realization of the development results by the state (GoM, 2013).

The Malawi public service from independence was meant to be the main vehicle for delivering key services, nation building and infrastructure but also for facilitating the welfare and development of the people of the nation of Malawi. In the 1970s and the early 1980s, the public service in Malawi was one of the best performing public services, however over the years the public services performance has been deteriorating. And as such, it has not been able to supply satisfactory and worth public services to the public and has also not been able to successfully implement policies and programmes crucial for poverty reduction and for total development the nation requires. As a result, moving out of the low-income bracket for the majority of its people has been not possible hence bringing doubts of realizing the vision 2020.

Deteriorating morale, ethics and professionalism among public services is stipulated as one of the reasons that the public service has not been able to provide adequate and quality public services in Malawi. Unattractive conditions in the service, low remuneration packages, inadequate office infrastructure, and poor working environment including political interference are some of the influencing factors (GoM, 2018). This necessitated development of the code of conduct and ethics for the public service in Malawi.

4.2 Code of conduct and ethics in Malawi public service

Performing under the vision of "A highly motivated, Productive, Professional and results oriented public service," and a mission statement "to deliver quality services to the public in an efficient, effective and responsive manner in order to satisfy to national aspirations and promote the advancement of the people of Malawi," the government of Malawi launched the Malawi Code of Conduct and Ethics in 2013. The code of ethics was designed to make sure that the objectivity, transparency, impartiality, efficiency, effectiveness and integrity of the civil servants in the course of performing their duties, are observed. With the ethics in place the behaviour of the civil servants are guided and this was the intention of establishing the ethics. The code is not selective. All employees be it permanent, casual, part-time, temporary or contractual employees employed by the government irrespective grade, rank and gender are subjected to the ethics (GoM, 2013).



4.3 Guiding Principles and values

The code of ethics are guided by four principles stated below:

- a) Lawful fulfilment of the obligation with loyalty, integrity and professionalism to the Government of Malawi by the civil servants.
- b) Discharging of duties by civil servants objectively, honestly and efficiently at the same time keeping the principle of customer care for the public to still have confidence in the public service
- c) The other principle is that the civil servants shall not bring the public service into disgrace through their behaviour be it at work place or in private.
- d) Respecting the interests and the rights of the public by civil servants in the course of doing their work. (Chilipunde and Kaima, 2015)

4.4 Core Values

Apart from the principles, the civil servants shall also be required to adhere to the core values outlined in the code of conduct and ethics for the Malawi public service. Such values are;

a) Accountability

That's being accountable and responsible to the public and the government for actions and decisions

b) Honest

Acting in good faith, being truthful and open and also declaring private interests in relation to one's public duties

c) Excellence

Civil servants need to employ efficiency, effectiveness, diligence, commitment in the course of doing their work as public servants

d) Integrity

Forgetting about one's own interests and put ahead the interests and obligation of the public service and at the same time, conducting oneself in a manner that goes beyond reproach

e) Impartiality

This entails serving equally well the different political arguments and at the same time acting exclusively in accordance to the merits of a case.

f) Loyalty

This entails being trustworthy and also dedicated to the government of the day's programmes and policies irrespective of one's religious, political, social and cultural.

g) Justice

Justice entails observing the principles of natural uprightness.

h) Professionalism

Entails demonstrating high degree of capabilities, sticking to professional code of conduct and good examples as recommended in the public service.

i) Objectivity

By being objective it means being able to base your decisions and advice on severe examination of evidence.

j) Professionalism

Adhering to professional code of conduct and exhibiting high degree of competence and best practices as prescribed in a given profession in public service.

k) Selflessness

That's being noble and evading from looking for personal gains of any kind though one's official position.

l) Transparency

And finally, transparency as one of the core values is described as being as open as possible in every transactions and also being able to explain any administrative actions and decision taken if need be, (Lipunga 2015).

4.5 Work Ethics

In the enactment of their official responsibilities, the civil servants are obliged to act in accordance with the ethics outlined below:-

- a) Need to be dedicated, committed, devoted to civil service and its core values and at the same time has to be someone who would want to see good outcome.
- b) Should attend to public in a very proficient way and this should be in line with the standards set by the public service.
- c) Public officers shall performs their duties in a manner that portrays competence, ingenuity and at the same time with love for work.
- d) Civil servants are required to set vivid standards of performance which the public can anticipate.
- e) Civil servants in accordance with the guidelines shall always observe the official working days and if need be, they will make themselves for official duties.
- f) Strict regard for working hours which should also be committed just to official duties is a must. The civil servant shall be punctual for official functions and office meetings.
- g) Shall portray a positive, good and right image of the government at the same time making sure that the public is efficiently, fairly, and effectively served.
- h) A civil servant having authority at a workplace, shall be required to exercise such powers with due trust and diligence and he/she shall demonstrate a high standard of duty performance.
- i) Love, sympathy, courtesy, respect and fairness must be rendered for all the people of the Malawi nation with special treatment given to elderly, persons with disabilities, the expectant mothers and the sick.
- j) Requests made by the clients should be responded to with rapidity and at the same time with precision.
- k) Shall have due respect for the duties, relevant interests and rights of the public in Malawi.
- l) Public servants shall always encourage a culture of negotiation at the same time observing honesty and forthrightness, (GoM, 2013).

4.6 Personal Behaviour

Civil servants have also a duty to treat the public and their colleagues with politeness and as such;

- a) The public servants shall not effect humiliation to fellow workmates or the public by dressing, behaviour or speech.
- b) Getting drunk or taking intoxicating drinks while duty is not prohibited;
- c) Likewise, public servants shall not be engaged in gambling at the place of work;
- d) Smoking should only be done in places where it is likely to inconvenience other people or workmates.



- e) No public servant should cause misery to his/her co-workers
- f) No discrimination against any human being on grounds of marital status, gender, ethnic group, nationality, age, HIV and AIDS status, religious beliefs, disability and political affiliation, should be taking tolerated.
- g) Need to have total respect for the protection of the workmates and public.
- h) No absenteeism without prior and proper permission.
- i) There shall be no bullying, intimidation, and harassment of the public or workmates, (GoM 2013).

4.7 Effectiveness of Work and Human Ethics in Malawi

Looking at delivery of quality services to the public for the development of the people of Malawi. One may ask if what the public service is doing today and will take Malawians to their desired future. But are the public really getting the required services? If not, what could be the problem?

Although the public sector is doing everything it can to deliver quality services to the public, the services still remain undesirable to a lot of citizens in Malawi. For example a lot of people are going to private hospitals simply because in most cases they don't get medicine in public hospitals. Parents and guardians prefer to send children to private schools just because in public schools the quality of education is low. Partly non adherence to ethics amongst the public servants has been reported to contribute to this. There are a lot of misconducts that are taking place in the public service which have had negative consequences on the proper use of government resources, a lot of cases of public servants attending to personal business have been reported during office hours. Below are some of the misconducts by civil servants that were reported in media;

a. Looting of government/ public money popularly known as "Cashgate" in 2013/14

The incidence happened in Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi where headquarters for all government ministries are based. In almost all ministries there grew a malpractice of paying suppliers a lot of money for services that were never rendered or supplied. In September 2013 a government clerk was found with \$300,000 in the trunk of his car which he could not explain its source. A week later a treasury official was short outside his home because they did not shared the money they looted and the one who was given less wanted to kill the treasury official. These incidences revealed the whole "cashgate scandal", which was a system of looting public funds.

b. Stealing of drugs and other medical suppliers in some public health facilities

There have been a lot of reports about drug and medical suppliers in public hospitals in Malawi a situation that lead to unavailability of drugs in such hospitals. Another case was reported on Malawi24.com by Archangel Nzangaya in December 2019, where some health workers were faulted for fueling drug theft. It reads, "Health workers in Chitipa district have been blamed for being in the forefront in stealing drugs and other medical suppliers in some of the public facilities". This is not only taking place in Chitipa district, in several other district the story is the same.

c. "Sexually transmitted grades scandal"

Lynoke Mughogho on October 24, 2019 reported on malawi24.com about the issue of university professors who give marks to female students in return for grades at college of medicine. This was followed by a press release that the college made condemning the act. Part of the press release read, "we do not condone any form of harassment including sexual abuse whether among students or among staff, or staff against students, or students against staff. It is morally, ethically and academically wrong and abhorrent and no human being deserves to go through this".

d. Teachers doing business during working hours

One of the Malawi24 reporter on November 18, 2019 wrote this story on malawi24.com, in which the Teachers Union of Malawi was warning teachers against conducting business during normal teaching hours saying the practice is against principles of the teaching professional.

This is not only happening in public schools but also in other public services. Apart from this there are cases where other civil servants report to work whilst drunk and also there is a lot absenteeism.

e. Corruption in public services

GAN Integrity in 2016 produced a report on corruption in public services in Malawi. The report indicated that for someone to get a service from a public service for example to get water connection of electricity connection, one has to give gifts to the officials.

In 2006, former president for the Republic of Malawi was drugged to court being accused of theft of millions of dollars from donors. Many hailed his arrest as a bold move towards fighting graft in a country that's been held back by corruption. He diverted some funds that were meant for different development projects into his own account. The case has not yet been concluded and the delay have been widely criticized and some see a political hand in stalling the process (Africanews.com).

In another case, the United States banned Presidential Advisor on Parliamentary Affairs Uladi Mussa from entering the USA because of corruption. According to Information Specialist at the United States Embassy Marcus N. Muhariwa, the US noted that Uladi Mussa was indeed involved in and benefited from corruption practices. Mussa who is currently answering charges, was involved in fraudulently issuing of citizenship and passports to people from Burundi, Rwanda among other foreign nations when he was the Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security.

4.8 Possible reasons as to why Ethics are not being adhered to

As it has been highlighted, the public service in Malawi has been unable to deliver adequate public services and of good quality. The public service in Malawi has also been unable to effectively implement policies and programmes crucial for reduction of poverty but also overall country's development. Consequently, majority of the people of Malawi are still living under poverty line. The country is unlikely going to realise vision 2020. A number of factors have contributed to the deteriorating performance of the public service over time one of which is deteriorating morale, ethics and



professionalism among public servants. But what has led to the deterioration of the morale and ethics among public services?

a) Lack of knowledge about the work code of ethics

While the work ethics is aimed at guiding the government officers to ensure that they conform to a core set of standards in their everyday behaviour, little has been done to ensure its accessibility, availability and its subsequent implementation in the public service. Since its introduction 1st June 2013, not many public servants have been aware that there exists a code of conduct and ethics in the Malawi Public Service. This is also coupled by the spirit of not liking to read such documents by most civil servants unfortunately.

b) Low remuneration packages

In Malawi, civil servants get relatively low salaries unlike those in parastatals, private sector and in Non- Governmental Organizations. When this is coupled by financial pressure and of course selfish desire, the result is corruption and stealing of public resources. Low remuneration is also the reason why most civil servants tend to do personal business during working hours and why there is a lot of absenteeism.

c) Weaker structures to enforce the ethics

In the civil service, the role of ensuring that ethics are followed is rested upon the human resources department. In most departments of the civil service, human resources department is staffed with low grade staff like clerk officers grade M. They tend to have difficulties to approach senior officers when they are the ones on the wrong side of the ethic.

d) Lack of resources

As one way of making sure that ethics are followed, there is a need for conducting supervisory visits, conducting staff performance appraisals, conducting trainings/refresher trainings on ethics, but due to inadequate resources in the civil service system, such important activities do not take place. Performance appraisals are important since they give proper staff performance feedback that can help improve the employee's future performance. Knowing that at some point in time the staff's performance will be assessed can make the staff work extra hard so much and this will in turn improve service delivery in the public service. Conducting trainings helps in informing and reminding the civil servants what they are supposed to do and in the absence of this, everybody does things the way he/she sees them hence it brings chaos.

e) Shortage of staff

Another problem that the public service in Malawi is facing is shortage of staff. In some cases due to low remuneration packages and poor working conditions, people opt to work in private sectors, in parastatals, in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) leaving the government with less workers. Mzungu (2016) observed the high nurse-patient in Malawi. Due to high poverty in Malawi, a lot of people go for public services and with the case of less workers, more pressure is exerted on few working staff as a result of such huge workloads, they tend not to follow the work ethics in performing their duties.

f) No channels for reporting unethical acts that will make people report such acts

In most of the public service offices there are no mechanisms for receiving complaints from the general people. This results into perpetuation of occurrences of unethical things as perpetrators are often not corrected.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Adherence to work ethics by the civil servants has proven to be a serious problem in public service system in Malawi. This has resulted into violation of the rights of the general public, their dignity and respect. A lot of causes have been isolated to causing poor adherence to work ethics by the public servants such as; lack of knowledge about the work code of conduct and ethics, low remuneration package, weak structures to guide civil servants' adherence to the ethics, inadequate financial resources, shortage of staff in public service and no proper channels in most of the public services for reporting unethical conducts.

These causes can be addressed in a way by, like for example shortage of staff, putting in mechanism that will make staff stay for example by introducing workers contracts and sending staff for further education. Periodical and routine staff performance appraisal and supervision by managers would also help reduce unethical practice by civil servants as this will make them to be in their best behaviour always in anticipation of performance appraisal and supervision. In recruitment, selection of high quality people to add to the public service team that have a good reputation of work ethics in previous employment is very important. Strong ethical behaviour has to be maintained at higher ethical level to ensure employees maintain strong respect and good work ethics. Controls measures have to be in place such as progress audits to assess employees work efficiency and behaviour if complaints arise. Finally, there has to be a mechanism for the general public to be reporting unethical practices by civil servants. If properly used, interventions can help reduce cases of unethical practices by civil servants in the country hence helping the government delivering quality services to the general public

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