

Effective service delivery and municipalities – synonymous?

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1. Orientation

Recently service delivery by municipalities – or the lack thereof – received much media attention. Public protest against poor service delivery and perceived corruption of officials and councillors have worsened to such an extent, that even President Thabo Mbeki took a break from his hectic international schedule to visit hot spots such as Moqhaka, comprising Kroonstad, Viljoenskroon and Steynsrus, as well as Harrismith and Hennenman. Moqhaka was one of three dysfunctional municipalities in the Free State that the provincial government put under full administration in 2004. In Harrismith even a body, the Greater Harrismith Concerned Residents Group (GHCR), was established to coordinate protest action against the municipality. Furthermore, during their 2004-annual government *imbizos* (meetings with communities), President Mbeki and the nine provincial premiers found that communities all over South Africa are concerned about the following:

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- poverty;
- unemployment;
- homelessness (in Gauteng alone, with a growing population of 7,5 million people, there is a backlog estimated at half a million houses);
- crime;

- HIV/AIDS (in 2004 there were about 93 000 AIDS deaths in Gauteng alone); and
- poor service delivery.

Residents are looking for “evidence-based” service delivery – proof that services do improve and that they get value for money, rates and taxes.

2. What can we expect from municipalities?

According to the Constitution (Act 108/1999, Section 152) the objects of local government are as follows:

A municipality must structure and manage its administration, budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community, and to promote the social and economic development of the community.

- to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities;
- to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner (these services include water and electricity, housing and refuse removal);
- to promote social and economic development;
- to promote a safe and healthy environment; and

- to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.

A municipality must furthermore structure and manage its administration, budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community, and to promote the social and economic development of the community. These objectives should be used as yardsticks to evaluate the performance of municipalities. The question is, do municipalities deliver on these objectives?

3. Applying the *Audi Alterem partem*-rule

In judging something it is just fair to apply the *audi alterem partem* rule (to hear the other side). One can easily fall in the trap to generalise and negatively judge all 284 municipalities in the same way. People in media studies will tell you that one only hears about the 5 percent negatives and the remaining good things will receive no or limited media attention. There is also of course the problem of difference in vantage point: the vantage point of residents of a municipality at the receiving end of services; and the vantage point of political representatives and public officials rendering these services. In other words, the perception of quality of services received could differ depending on whether you are at the receiving or delivery end. One should also consider the fact that there might be pockets of excellence, in other words, a municipality may generally provide poor services for example, but be excellent as far as water provisioning is concerned. So, from the viewpoint of municipalities, what are their views about their performance?

During the South African Local Government Association's (SALGA) conference held in Cape Town on 28 September 2004, with the theme: "Local government striving towards a decade of accelerated delivery", the following successes of local government were highlighted:

- Successfully merged more than 1200 municipalities into 284 local government authorities, sorting out, in the

process, the human resources, IT, rates and services billing systems and other logistical issues.

- Establishing a zero-tolerance culture and commitment to good and clean governance.
- Creating conditions for sustainable local economic development, engendering a customer service culture, inculcating a culture of appreciation and payment for services, and entrenching public consultation and communication as foundation stones for local government planning.
- Creating holistic living places for people and gaining control over the establishment of new settlements.
- Facing integrated development planning and sustainability challenges (almost all municipalities are using this mandatory instrument as a planning tool).
- Interacting with the other spheres of government in policy formulation debates and processes, in the planning and the implementation of local government development and delivery programmes, and in engendering a sense of commitment and accountability to the people.
- Ongoing successful implementation of the provisions of the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA).
- Touching base with people through *imbizos* and ward committees has become commonplace; at the last count (Oct. 2004) about 2 700 out of a possible 3 200 ward councils have so far been established.
- Developing major infrastructure and the provisioning of free basic services. Pursuant to that, 1,5 million additional houses have been built, access to clean water now stands at approximately 90% (from 60% in 1994), and sanitation provision has increased from 49% in 1994 to an estimated 65%. Electricity now reaches more than 70% against 40% in 1994. Government has pledged a sum of R14,2 billion for the three years beginning 2004 for access

to basic shelter. Currently more than 86% of municipalities are providing free basic water and more than 50% of the country's households are benefiting from this government intervention. Allocation for basic services and infrastructure investments are R5,1 billion in 2005/06 and R5,9 billion in 2006/07.

- Participating in international forums to impart information to other parts of the world and to learn from them (i.e. the development of the Pan-African municipal movement).

4. Service delivery improvement initiatives

Over and above the successes highlighted above and various service delivery initiatives as prescribed by legislation (such as integrated development planning, urban and rural development strategies, the establishment of comprehensive performance management systems and local economic development initiatives), other initiatives are also put in place to improve services. Some of these improvement initiatives are highlighted below.

- **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):** As a partner, the UNDP offers assistance in transforming local government through the improvement in service delivery, institutional capacity building and integrating the right approach to development.
- **Project Consolidate:** This project is aimed at strengthening all municipalities, whilst at the same time providing targeted and hands-on support to those municipalities who have the greatest need.
- **Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP):** This programme is the government's flagship programme for job creation, skills development and poverty reduction, at least in the immediate to short term.
- **Vuna Awards:** The Vuna Awards is an initiative of the Department of Local Government, in partnership with the Development Bank of Southern Africa, the National Productivity Institute and

the South African Local Government Association. The Vuna Awards seeks to identify good practices and to facilitate shared learning from among municipalities. It further intends to motivate municipalities to continuously seek mechanisms of improving performance.

- **South African cities support and learning network:** Since municipalities share similar challenges they can gain a lot by building relationships with each other. For example, they can exchange learning experiences, share staff and technology, undertake joint investment projects, collectively purchase things such as equipment, bulk services and advisory services and provide services to each other.
- **Local Government Leadership Academy (LOGOLA):** LOGOLA was established by DPLG to empower councillors from a knowledge and information point of view. Together with the LGWSETA and other partners, councillors are exposed to a variety of training programmes such as IDP-development processes, public-informed budgeting approaches and Ward Committees.
- **Municipal Support and Interventions Unit (MSIU):** As an immediate reaction unit and a resource for information and advice, it has brought a certain amount of reassurance for those municipalities with limited capacity in some areas.

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these structures – accelerating the quality and quantity of services. Dissatisfied residents can fortunately then replace their non-performing councillors - one can only hope that the voter turn-out will be higher than the 34,7% during the by-elections in 2004.

5. Conclusion

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The so-called “September Revolution” (referring to the violent protests in especially the Free State during September 2004) can have far-reaching consequences for the ANC since some observers believe that the protest is a

“challenge to state power ... and not a genuine protest over slack service delivery” (see *Sunday Times*, 13/2/2005). Why then, 10 years into a democratic South Africa, are communities turning to violence to make their voices heard? It could be argued that people are dissatisfied with the slow pace of change; they still live under the same poor living conditions (lack of houses, water, sanitation, etcetera) as during the pre-1994 era. While there are genuine grievances, protest should also be viewed as a political matter that is probably linked to the coming local government elections. Dissatisfied residents can then fortunately replace their non-performing councillors – one can only hope that the voter turn-out will be higher than the 34,7% during the by-elections in 2004.

One should further understand that service delivery improvement is an incremental process – a journey, not a destiny. As the President has said, “we are on track, but there are still mountains to climb”. Thus, in answering the question whether municipalities are synonymous with effective service delivery, it is probably more correct to respond with both a “yes” and a “no” – depending on whom you ask ...