

Effective Governance as an Approach to Promote Service Delivery by Local Government in South Africa: The Case for Soul City

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This article provides an overview for effective governance as an approach to improve services at local government in South Africa. The service delivery mandate for local government is elaborated on in existing legislation which is outlined in the article. The article focuses on the foundations of effective governance and evaluates the problematic nature of service delivery in municipalities. The focal point of this article is to take the Soul City in Sol Plaatjies Municipality as a qualitative case study. The literature and findings of the case as well as other municipalities suggest that effective governance is essential for improved service delivery at local government. The research suggests that without effective governance, service delivery will not be significantly improved at local government.

Keywords: governance, service delivery, local government, service delivery protests, accountability

This article examines service delivery in the South African context and argues that without effective governance, service delivery cannot be improved in municipalities. However, effective governance alone will not end service delivery ills in municipalities; but it is argued that service delivery cannot be significantly improved without effective governance. In terms of policy implementation, governance is only as good as its weakest link, and in South Africa the weakest link is the local government sphere (municipalities), although there is great variation in the quality of local (municipal) governance. Some municipalities display relatively effective governance, while others are simply appalling (Wright, Noble, & Magasela, 2007, p. 1). Despite the achievements of the African National Congress (ANC) government in the delivery of services to the poor, especially in the fields of housing, water and sanitation, electrification, health and education, the dividends resulting from improved service delivery especially by smaller municipalities have proved disappointing in terms of reducing poverty and addressing ongoing socioeconomic problems in local government (Bhorat & Kanbur, 2006, p. 4). What various researchers agree on is the fact that, more than a decade after the end of apartheid, nearly half of South Africa's communities do not receive adequate delivery of public services (Naidoo, 2009, pp. 276-280).

In this article the focus is therefore on conceptualising governance as an approach to improve service

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delivery in municipalities in South Africa. An overview of service delivery at local government sphere (municipalities) is provided. The legislative framework is discussed as it calls upon local government to be more responsive and accountable for municipal service delivery. The principles of effective governance are identified and elaborated on within the context of this article. The article then examines the current state of service delivery in municipalities in South Africa, using Soul City as a case study. This is done using the principles of effective governance to determine whether Soul City adheres to the identified principles of governance.

Overview of Service Delivery at the Local Government Sphere

According to the South Africa Public Service Commission (2007a, pp. 1-5), as many as 29,966 government funded projects have been established which aimed at improving public service delivery in South Africa. Yet service delivery in South Africa remains problematic and has not been greatly improved, especially at local government since 1994 (South Africa Public Service Commission, 2007b, pp. 1-10).

The Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM) of the United Nations argues that a major obstacle to poor service delivery in South Africa, especially at local government is poor governance, which includes not simply corruption, but also poor performance on the part of leadership and government officials in their management of public resources as well as a lack of political will to act against underperforming officials (Luyt, 2008, p. 8). The poor management of public resources translates directly into poor implementation of public service delivery, and thus obviously undermines service delivery. The absence of adequate accountability mechanisms and a lack of transparency and access have also led to frustration with poor service delivery manifesting in more confrontational and violent ways, such as the service delivery protests which have swept through South Africa over the past few years (Naidoo, 2009, pp. 173-181).

In the overview report of the State of Local Government in South Africa, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) identified the following as causal reasons for distress in municipal governance (COGTA, 2009, p. 10):

- (1) poor ability of councillors to deal with the demands of local government;
- (2) inadequate accountability measures and support systems and resources for local democracy;
- (3) poor compliance with regulatory and legislative frameworks;
- (4) tensions between the political and administrative interface;
- (5) lack of clear distinction between the legislative and executive; and
- (6) insufficient separations of powers between municipal councils and political parties.

Assessments revealed that party political factionalism and polarisation has led to the deterioration of municipal functionality. Communities are dissatisfied with poor institutionalisation of systems, poor service delivery and poor political governance (COGTA, 2009, p. 11). Naidoo (2009, p. 163) postulated that political governance is concerned with the participation of the individual in the decision-making process that affects his or her life, livelihood and lifestyle. These relate to the issues of democracy, representation and inclusion, power sharing and the relationship between institutions of governance, such as the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, political parties and civil society organisations. Nepotism, patronage and corruption have led to a lack of citizen confidence and trust in the system, as the municipal accountability system is seen as ineffective and inaccessible to many citizens (COGTA, 2009, p. 11).

This has manifested in poor service delivery. Figure 1 below illustrates the provincial spread of community protests.

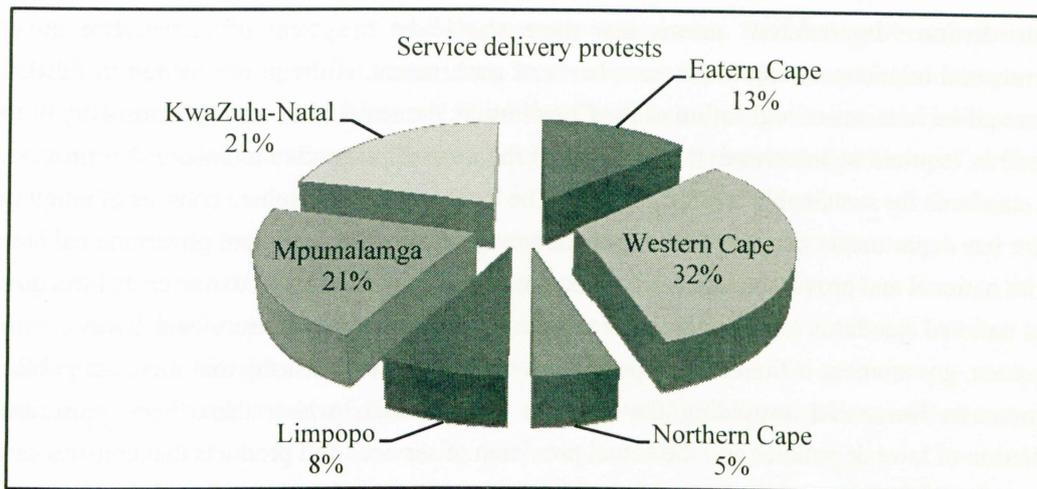


Figure 1. Service delivery protests of January-July 2009. Source: COGTA, 2009.

According to Holtzhausen (2009, p. 36), effective local government is needed to place municipalities under greater scrutiny and to encourage local government to become more socially responsible and accountable. The creation of a more accountable government includes ways to curb corruption, more effective reporting mechanisms and increased public participation in matters relating to service delivery.

Nonetheless, it is critical to examine and clarify key concepts in this article. The need for government and governance are therefore clarified.

Defining Key Concepts

The changed role of government, and the changed environment in which it has to discharge its role, have brought the term “governance” into common usage for which the word “government” is no longer sufficient. However, a common tendency is to use governance as a synonym for government. The consequence is that policy issues such as service delivery became defined implicitly as a problem of government. The notions that there might be other ways of addressing the problem of poor service delivery, or that other sectors of society might take the initiative in dealing with it, are often not considered. Thus, equating governance with government constrains the way in which the service delivery problems are conceived and places impediments around the range of strategies that seem to be available for dealing with poor service delivery. To avoid any confusion within the context of this article, it is important to clarify the difference between government and governance.

Government can be referred to as a structure, consisting of public institutions in which people work, with the aim of providing certain services and products to a society. In terms of section 40 of the Constitution of South Africa, 1996, the government of South Africa is divided into three spheres: These are the national, provincial and local spheres of government. These spheres are required to observe and follow the principles of the Constitution. The national government is responsible for policy formulation and making, developing national standards and norms, and rules and regulations. The exclusive functional areas for provincial sphere of government include ambulance services, provincial roads and provincial planning. Local government is involved in local issues such as municipal roads and the provision of local amenities to the community. The Constitution of South Africa, 1996 indicates that the three spheres are “distinctive, interdependent and interrelated”, each sphere has its area of operation.

The term “distinctive”, within the context of this article, means that each sphere has its own unique area of operation. “Interdependent” means that the three spheres are required to cooperate and acknowledge each other’s

area of jurisdiction. "Interrelated" means that there should be a system of cooperative governance and intergovernmental relations among the three spheres of government. If the provinces fail to fulfil an executive obligation required in terms of legislation or the Constitution, the national executive (consisting of the President and Cabinet) is required to intervene. It is the role of the national executive to ensure that provinces meet the minimum standards for sustainable service delivery. The local government sphere consists of municipalities. The local sphere has departments that help effect government policies. The municipal governmental actions have to comply with national and provincial legislation. The provincial sphere is required to oversee local government, to ensure that national standards are maintained or to set minimum standards for service delivery.

In essence, government is therefore responsible for making laws, ensuring that there are public institutions to implement its laws, and providing the services and products which these laws prescribe. It is this implementation of laws or policies and the actual provision of services and products that constitutes governance. "Government", within the context of this article, therefore implies the establishment of municipalities as entities of the local government sphere to ensure that services are rendered to communities to promote their general welfare and quality of life.

To understand governance, it is important to bear in mind that interest in public issues such as service delivery is not confined to government. Government is viewed less as a process and more as a public entity. While governance is concerned with public issues, the interest in such issues is not confined to the domain of government. An example is public private partnerships (PPPs) or community participation in public service delivery. It is argued that governance is the result of the interaction of a multiplicity of influencing actors. The list of actors includes civil society, which encompasses voluntary agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), the media, the military, religious organisations, business institutions, communities and individuals, all of whom share an interest and sometimes a role in addressing public issues such as service provision (Institute of Governance, 1999, p. 1). These institutions, communities and individuals actively participate in and influence public policy that affects people's lives. It is evident that the term "governance" therefore characterises various arrangements (Muthien, Khosa, & Magubane, 2000, pp. 174-175).

The concept of "governance" may therefore be applied to any form of collective action. It is about pathways to desired conditions or outcomes. Governance is thus not only about where to go, but also about how to get there, who should be involved and in what capacity.

Within the scope of this article, governance implies the actions necessary to improve the general welfare of communities at the local government sphere by means of the services delivered. This deduction further implies that priorities have been determined. For instance, the immediate priority of municipalities is to improve and redress service delivery imbalances and inequities in South Africa. However it is critical that this is done within the legal framework for developmental local government. This is therefore discussed below.

Legal Framework for Developmental Local Government

In the preamble to the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998, developmental local government is emphasised as:

... fundamental agreement in our country on a vision of democratic and developmental local government, in which municipalities fulfil their constitutional obligations to ensure sustainable, effective and efficient municipal services, promote social and economic development, encourage a safe and healthy environment by working with communities in creating environments and human settlements in which all our people can lead uplifted and dignified lives.

Haycock (2005, pp. 49-60) argued that the developmental role of local government relates to the implementation of procedures and processes that are necessary to enable municipalities to uplift their communities and to provide services. Section 152 of the Constitution states that municipalities must govern affairs by demonstrating administrative and financial capacity, and describes the objectives of local government as the capacity to:

- (1) provide democratic and accountable government for local communities;
- (2) ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner;
- (3) promote social and economic development;
- (4) promote a safe and healthy environment; and
- (5) encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.

Linking to the first bullet point, Tengeni (2005, pp. 161-162) asserted that accountability in governance stems from legal, political, administrative and financial responsibility and should include all of these elements. It is applicable from the highest to the lowest member in the municipal hierarchy. A number of legal prescripts contained in the Municipal Finance Management Act, 1999 (Act 1 of 1999), Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 2000 (Act 3 of 2000), Promotion of Protected Disclosure Act, 2000 (Act 26 of 2000) and the Promotion to Access to Information Act, 2000 (Act 2 of 2000) have the combined effect of advancing accountability and thereby preserving effective governance. The endorsement of zero-tolerance for corruption and an increased focus on ethical behaviour in municipalities are supported as fundamental components of effective governance. Measures adopted to promote public sector accountability include the establishment of institutions and mechanisms to exercise oversight of government. Independent bodies such as the Auditor-General's office, Public Accounts Committees, Ombudsmen, Human Rights Commissions, Public Service Commission and Information Commissioners enhance good governance through their oversight functions. Audit Committees can also serve as an oversight committee regarding the finances of the municipalities. Audit committees are an integral part of the process of transparency, accountability and improved financial management. This is the reason why audit committees have become a legislative requirement for local government in terms of the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003 (Act 56 of 2003) (National Treasury, 2004, p. 96).

The main purpose of the Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003 (Act 56 of 2003) (MFMA) is to regulate municipal financial matters in terms of providing for securing sound and sustainable management of the financial affairs of municipalities and other institutions in the local sphere of government. Section 34 of the Act indicates that national and provincial governments must by agreement assist municipalities in building their financial capacities by providing support. In terms of the Municipal Property Rates Act of 2000, municipalities can enhance their own revenue through the collection and setting of property rates. The MFMA states that efficient and effective systems and service delivery are a shared responsibility between the spheres of government.

The South African Constitution (1996) stated that municipalities make decisions and have legislative powers over local issues. The local sphere is often referred to as grass-roots government, because of its direct association with communities at a local level. Matters often dealt with by local government include refuse removal, electricity, water and sanitation. Municipalities' capacity to act expeditiously will depend on the structures created to ensure that such delivery takes place. There is a need, therefore, to ensure that all government structures are geared towards achieving the efficient and effective rendering of public services. Thus, the municipalities have the responsibility to meet the needs of society.

The various basic values and principles that are grounded within a democracy are (Constitution 1996):

- (1) representation;
- (2) professional ethics;
- (3) efficiency and effectiveness;
- (4) accountability;
- (5) impartiality;
- (6) development orientation;
- (7) representativeness and participation;
- (8) fairness.

An open and transparent system presupposes that the information required to hold officials accountable and to enforce the individual's fundamental rights should be readily accessible. It is therefore possible to establish a direct link between transparent and accountable public administration and access to information. Section 195(11)(g) provides that transparency must be maintained by the provision of accurate, accessible and timely information to the public on, for example, aspects relating to service delivery. Every person has the right to information held by government and any other information held by a person and needed for exercising or protecting this right. This prescription led to the promulgation of the Promotion of Access to Information Act 2000 (Act 2 of 2000) (Holtzhausen, 2007, p. 62).

Democracies strive towards the creation of conditions that will benefit the greatest number of citizens and provide the greatest good. To meet democratic objectives, public institutions should be organised in a way that promotes transparency and participation.

The Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998) provided the basis for the establishment of metropolitan, district and local municipalities. The two-tier system in non-metropolitan areas was implemented to help deliver services to areas where local municipalities lacked the capacity to deliver these services (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2007, p. 34).

A municipality must develop a culture of municipal governance that complements formal representative government with a system of participatory governance, and must for this purpose encourage and create an enabling environment for community participation in the affairs of the municipality. This can be done by allowing for input in the preparation, implementation and review of the integrated development plan as well as of the performance management system. The community should also contribute to the preparation of the budget and the strategic decisions relating to the provision of municipal services. The municipality must further build the capacity of the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality and also build the capacity of councillors and staff to foster community participation (Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, Act 32 of 2000).

The need for a more accountable, participatory and inclusive approach to governing in local areas with a prominent focus on effective and efficient service delivery is stressed. It further highlights the importance of the participation of the community in the system of local governance. The Act states the importance of an appropriately skilled workforce that will be able to deliver services and manage the growth of the municipality (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2007, p. 35).

The Local Government: Municipal Systems Amendment Act, 2003 (Act 44 of 2003) amended the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 and specifically provided that documents must be made public and should be displayed at the municipality's head and satellite offices and libraries, on the municipality's official website (if it has a website) and also that the community should be informed about where detailed information

regarding the documents can be obtained. Communities must also be invited to respond to these documents.

These prescriptions are in line with the Promotion to Access of Information Act, 2000 (Act 2 of 2000) that gives the right of access to information referred to in section 32 of the South African Constitution. The Act generally aims at promoting transparency and accountability of all private and public bodies. In this regard, the Act aims at empowering and educating everyone to understand their rights in terms of the Act and to exercise those rights in relation to public and private bodies. The public therefore has a right to know how municipalities apply the power and resources entrusted to them.

The preamble to the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act, 2005 (Act 13 of 2005) calls for cooperation, and the integration of actions in government depends on a stable and effective system of governance for regulating the conduct of relations and the settlement of disputes between the national, provincial and local spheres of government. The Act provides a framework to facilitate coordination in the implementation of policy and legislation, including the effective provision of services. The Act refers directly to local government planning and capacity and acknowledges that the realm of local government includes a shared responsibility among various stakeholders in and across government (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2007, p. 35).

The Fundamentals of Effective Governance

Governance is the totality of how people manage the way they co-exist with one another in a mutually beneficial way. It is about institutionalising appropriate combinations of the culture, structures and modes of behaviour that society needs for effective co-existence. According to the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM) (2000, p. 12), good governance has eight major features. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. These features overlap with the principles as contained in chapter ten of the Constitution 1996. It ensures that corruption is minimised, the views of communities are taken into account and the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. According to the United Nations, it is also responsive to the present and future needs of society. Governance means the constitutional, legal and administrative arrangements by which local government exercises power, as well as the related mechanisms for public accountability, rule of law, transparency and citizen participation. Organisational local governance concerns the rules and administrative processes by which local authorities are controlled and directed (Holtzhausen, 2009, p. 69).

It is indicated that effective local government focuses on effective leadership, openness and transparency, responsiveness and accountability (Mule, 2001, pp. 71-75). The core characteristics for the implementation of effective local governance include both transparency and accountability (Van Niekerk, Van der Waldt, & Jonker, 2002, p. 65). Effective local governance also typically includes leadership, transparency and accountability, public participation, impartiality in service delivery, efficient and effective use of state resources, sound human resource management, performance management and customer oriented service delivery. For the purpose of this article, accountability, transparency and access to information and leadership will be focused on.

Accountability

Accountability is the right to obtain justifications and explanations from public officials or private service providers responsible for the use of public resources. This places an obligation on officials to account for the use of public resources. Accountability is understood as the obligation to render an account for a responsibility that has been conferred (Van Niekerk et al., 2002, p. 3). Accountability means that those individuals and municipalities

charged with the performance of particular actions or activities are held responsible. It also places an obligation on oversight bodies to demand adequate explanations and justifications from local government officials and, where these are not provided or are unsatisfactory, to instigate corrective action, using the full extent of their constitutional/legislative powers. Oversight bodies are perfectly placed, because of their constitutional authority, to demand accountability. Accountability also requires that oversight leads to adequate corrective action when necessary, and this requires political will to take action against corrupt and/or underperforming politicians and government officials (Naidoo, 2009). The essence of accountability is therefore answerability.

Two types of accountability questions can be asked (Botes, Brynard, Fourie, & Roux, 1992, p. 252). The first type asks simply to be informed; this can include financial information and/or a narrative description of activities or outputs and outcomes. This type of question characterises basic monitoring and implies a one-way transmission of information from the “accountable” person to the overseeing person. The informing aspect of answerability relates to transparency. The second type of question moves beyond the reporting of facts and figures, and asks for explanations and justifications (reasons), that is, it inquires not just about what was done, but why it was done. Justification goes beyond dialogue, between the accountable and the overseeing actors. This dialogue can take place in a range of venues, from internal to a particular agency (e.g., staff members answering to their hierarchical superiors) to more public arenas (e.g., hearings where municipal managers answer to legislators, or city hall meetings where local government officials answer to city residents—these are known as *izimbizo* in SA). The aspect of answerability, and its expression through public dialogue and debate, contribute to local government responsiveness and to the exercise of voice by citizens.

According to Seekings (2007), accountability in South Africa is especially important in municipalities, since it is at these levels that the major part of the national budget is directed aimed at improving service delivery through the provision of housing, health and education services. Taylor (2003) stated that local government should be responsible and accountable for the overall operation of municipalities.

Within the context of this article, accountability includes the development of policies and plans and monitoring and measuring institutional performance, for example, measuring service delivery outcomes within municipalities’ policies and plans. Muthien et al. (2000, p. 69) affirmed that accountability also defines key reporting relationships and the chain of command within the local government structure. Whichever structure a municipality chooses to adopt, its overall effectiveness is at all times contingent on its ability to instil measures of accountability. The promotion of service delivery by municipalities can, in part, be tested against the strength of its accountability.

Naidoo (2009, p. 52) was of the opinion that the current concern with accountability by municipalities indicates that communities are dissatisfied with the local government sphere. In municipalities, discontent has focused upon lack of basic services, abuses of power and mismanagement. There is therefore a definite need to ensure that accountability structures are created which are in line with legislative policy imperatives for local government. Improved accountability and financial controls would improve service delivery. At the political level, accountability requires making administrative leaders accountable to political leadership, typically through the contestability of political power. At a municipal level, accountability should take several forms. The traditional form is hierarchical, based on administrative leadership reporting to the political level.

Transparency and Access to Information

Transparency and access to information refer specifically to community involvement and consultation as to

the manner in which the people will be governed (Van Niekerk et al., 2000, p. 65). Transparency assumes the free flow of information. The transparent disclosure of public spending and service delivery outcomes is a powerful overall control mechanism in the new system of budgeting proposed by government, particularly in ensuring the transparency and accountability of the operational aspects of the budget at local government. While reforms in the budget process in municipalities have resulted in a more transparent and “bottom-up” approach, opportunities for popular consultation and participation still remain quite limited (Gildenhuis & Knipe, 2000, p. 112).

Kroukamp (2005, p. 77) stated that as a basic principle of governance, transparent decision-making is intended to make the local government sphere more accountable, that is, managerial or performance accountability in respect of finances, accountability to end users, and political accountability to community interest groups. Accountability relations are connected to the creation of trust between the different stakeholders.

Leadership

Local government not only needs sound management, but also requires effective leadership at all levels of the service delivery chain. The head of a government organisation must, through education and training of its employees, develop its human resource capacity to a level that enables it to perform its functions in an efficient, collaborative and accountable way. The Draft Public Administration Management Bill (2008, p. 8) requires managerial, professional and strategic leadership across all government institutions, including local government. A very clear lesson is that the transactional competencies of management, while crucial for such complex organisations, are simply not sufficient on their own.

There is therefore a critical need to build leadership, to produce critical thinkers at local government. There is relative agreement among Directors-General that senior managers ought to have a number of qualities, such as interpersonal, communication, creative cooperation, financial and human resource skills (Naidoo, 2009). Cloete, Wissink and De Coning (2006, p. 210) argued that the ability to analyse policy has also been identified as a critical skill for senior management in local government. Sensitivity to the political environment is another important quality. Leaders should engage others as partners in developing and achieving the shared vision and enabling them to lead. It is also about creating an empowering environment for creative thinking and for challenging assumptions about how public services should be delivered. It is also about much greater sensitivity to the needs of a range of internal and external stakeholders, inside and outside municipalities.

It is argued by Miller (2005, p. 24) that it is necessary to empower, challenge and motivate managers at all levels to be visionaries, initiators, effective communicators and decision-makers, capable of responding proactively to the challenges of the change process, rather than acting as administrators of fixed rules and procedures in government. Naidoo (2009) stated that the leader, the followers, the situation, values, ethics, cultural factors and the task are also all important factors in effective leadership. Leadership at local government sphere should be able to effectively serve multiple, complex and mutually exclusive goals. The leadership should cater for sensitivities of culture, gender, religion, ethnic origin, socioeconomic and political differences. These divergent perspectives, approaches and sensitivities should be incorporated and developed in such a way that the full potential of local government may be realised optimally. Leadership should aim, therefore, to utilise the divergent perspectives within local government in order to reach the highest possible levels of performance to improve and help optimise public service delivery at local government in South Africa.

In light of the above, it can be reiterated that the essence of local governance in municipalities includes having effective accountability, transparency and access to information and leadership within municipalities.

Service Delivery—The Case of Soul City

Each province is facing specific challenges regarding service delivery strengths and weaknesses. Due to severe drought conditions in 2009, water service delivery (including water and sanitation connections) could not be provided in parts of the Eastern Cape. In the Free State there are municipalities that rely on boreholes and underground water. During certain months in the year these underground water areas run dry: In Hertzogville, for example, communities can only collect water for two hours a day. In Boshoff water is supplied to communities by army trucks. In Mpumalanga insufficient funds are contributing to infrastructure backlogs. The booming mining industry is leading to more and larger informal settlements and the municipalities cannot deliver services to all. Land is also not available for township developments (COGTA, 2009, p. 40).

People started moving into the area called Soul City during 1999. Originally there were 25 shacks and sanitation, communal standpipes and formal roads were unavailable. People were later moved in 2000 to allow for the development of basic infrastructure services such as sanitation and electricity. In April 2009 there were 866 households in the Soul City area (Department of Social Development, 2009, pp. 4-8).

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) requested that a situation analysis be done in a newly developed area in the Sol Plaatjie Municipality in the Frances Baard District called Soul City. Sol Plaatjie Municipality is one of the best performing municipalities nationally and has a Class 4 classification (COGTA 2009, pp. 84-85). The Soul City Situation Analysis was then commissioned by the member of executive council (MEC) for Social Development in the Northern Cape, Alvin Botes, to determine and better understand the daily challenges faced by the Soul City community in the Northern Cape. The final report provides an overview of the level of services already provided to the Soul City community and also identifies weaknesses and challenges that need to be addressed, including service delivery challenges. Face-to-face interviews (structured and unstructured) were conducted with a sample (58) of household heads during April 2009.

Seventy-six percent of the households interviewed were unemployed and most of the respondents received income from the Child Support Grant (35%), followed by a monthly salary (21%) and the Old Age Grant (11%). Those households without any form of income survived through support from family and friends, food parcels, handouts and “piece jobs” (Department of Social Development, 2009, p. 33). An analysis of the service delivery needs found that 57% of the interviewed households had access to electricity and 97% had access to running water, while 3% had running water in the house (see Figure 2).

From Figure 2, it is clear that respondents needed municipal services the most (29%). These services include a community hall, electricity provision to those households without electricity, garbage containers, recreation facilities, naming of streets, tarred roads and a drainage system for rainwater. It should be noted that 96.6% of the interviewed households have adequate access to basic water services. Most of the respondents made use of hospital and clinic services. A major concern was the quality of the dwelling units in which the households live. The majority of the respondents felt that the bricks that were used to build the houses were of a poor quality, roofs and door frames were loose, windows and doors were broken, there were cracks in the walls and when it rains the water seeps through the walls (Department of Social Development, 2009, p. 33). It seems as if quality control was not done properly and future developments will require a stricter process in determining the quality of materials.

Of those interviewed, 36% was aware of new developments in Soul City. These developments include the installation of electricity, paving, tree planting, the provision of water, cleaning of public areas and the renovation of some of the houses. It should also be noted that the majority of the respondents reported that they do not

receive information on services available and it is imperative that information regarding service delivery be communicated properly and in a timely fashion. Those who reported that they did receive information stated that it was communicated through the radio, television and public meetings. Leaders in the municipality need to take cognisance of the service delivery challenges and need to be more open and accessible as well as responsive to the needs of the community. Communities need to become more involved in local governance and it is the responsibility of the municipality to facilitate and create mechanisms for involvement (D. van der Merwe, personal communication, December 3, 2009).

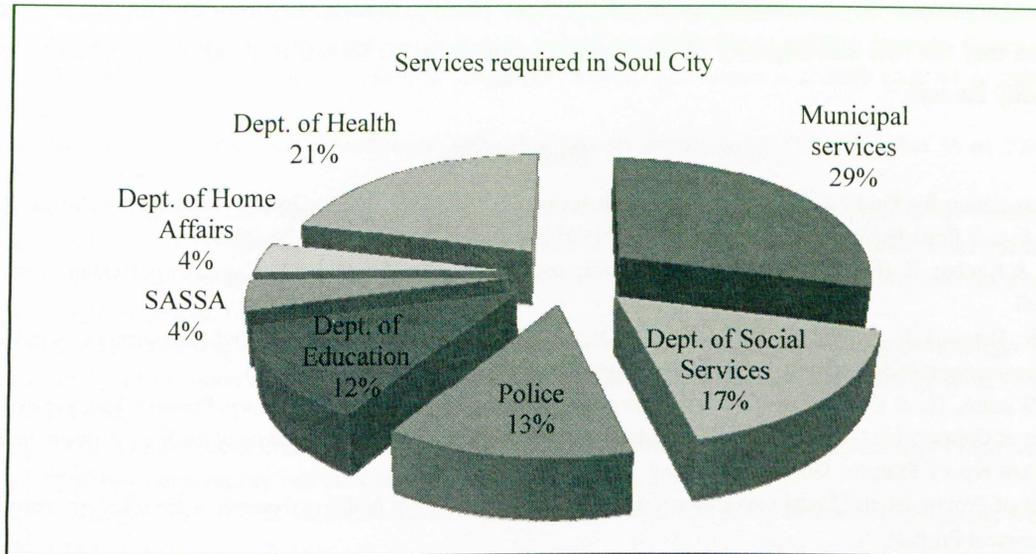


Figure 2. Services required in Soul City. Source: Directorate: Population Development, 2009, p. 23.

In terms of the focus of this article on the fundamentals of effective governance, it is clear that the MEC for Social Development adhered to the request from SCOPA to account on the situation in Soul City. Service delivery outcomes were measured and accounted for. In terms of transparency and access to information, a 36% response rate leaves much to be desired. The Sol Plaatjie Municipality should put in more effort to communicate with the community. It is suggested that the website be utilised more effectively. Well-informed citizens who participate in the affairs of the municipality could lead to a state of governance where the municipality will also be held accountable by the community for service delivery.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, effective governance as an approach to improve service delivery in municipalities in South Africa is proposed. Service delivery progress and the lack thereof at local government are considered. The legislative framework which calls upon local government to be more responsive and accountable for municipal service delivery is discussed. The principles of effective governance are identified and elaborated on. The article analyses the current state of service delivery in municipalities in South Africa using Soul City as a case study. This is done using the principles of effective governance to determine whether Soul City prescribes to the identified principles of governance.

Based on the findings of this study, the article therefore strongly argues that effective governance is an essential approach for the rapid improvement and the redress of service delivery imbalances and inequities at local government. Although there are a number of principles to promote effective governance, this article predominantly

focused on accountability, transparency and access to information and leadership as crucial elements for the improvement of service delivery. Accountability, transparency and access to information and leadership are central to effective governance and the alleviation of service delivery backlogs at local government level.

Firstly, accountability should be entrenched as a basic tenet of good governance and civil society should be progressively capacitated and empowered to hold municipalities accountable for their implementation of service delivery policies. Secondly, transparent decision-making is necessary to make the local government more accountable, that is, managerial or performance accountability in respect of finances, accountability to end users, and political accountability to community interest groups. Thirdly, in order to promote effective service delivery, it is argued that the role and capacity of municipalities ought to be rooted in its ability to attract, develop and retain quality leaders.

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