

## **ASSESSING SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES IN A SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITY**

<https://doi.org/10.47743/jopafl-2023-28-04>

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**Abstract:** *Over the past decade, thousands of South Africans have taken to the streets in violent protest over the fact that over 70% of the country's municipalities are unable to provide services to their residents. Only by recognising the negative effects of service delivery and proposing solutions to these problems can development in rural areas with periodic crises be sustained. The goal of this research is to identify the causes of subpar service in a KwaZulu-Natal municipality (Municipality Y) and propose solutions to the problems identified. For ethical reasons, the municipality's name has been hidden. Qualitative techniques, including in-depth interviews and purposive sampling, were used to compile the data for this analysis. The 15 interviewees were 11 local council members, and 4 traditional leaders. Lack of public participation, political intervention in administration, a breakdown in lines of communication with the local population, and the inability of top officials to see out their full terms are all factors found to have a negative impact on service delivery. The study suggests several measures to reduce corruption, including the hiring of more qualified individuals for financial positions, the implementation of ethical supply chain management policies, enhanced channels of communication and openness with local communities, and closer ties with law enforcement.*

**Keywords:** *municipal finance, protests, public participation, service delivery.*

### **Introduction**

From the beginning of democracy in 1994, local government in South Africa has undergone profound change, which was crucial to the country's overall transition from an apartheid state to a democratic social order (Kaywood, 2021). The Constitution of 1996 is the cornerstone of this democratisation process; it established a constitutional and democratic South Africa, with the Bill of Rights as its essential pillar of transition (Dube, 2020). With the introduction of new local government, communities were able to move away from the discriminatory structure of the old local government and towards a more democratic, decentralised form of local government (Tshishonga, 2019). As a means of redressing historical injustices, South Africa prioritised reforming its municipal governments (Kaywood, 2021). It was crucial for the democratic government to deracialize

local government to abolish the segregated local government (Malila, 2020). Administrative restructuring based on racial classifications necessitated a more integrated, progressive, and egalitarian form of governance (United Nations, 2016). With the start of the new municipal dispensation, South Africa has played a crucial role in the realisation of substantial economic and social progress. Over three decades after apartheid ended, millions of South Africans still lack access to even the most fundamental services (Abrams, et al., 2022). The Constitution (1996), the White Paper of Local Government (1998), the Municipal Systems Act (1998, 2003), the Municipal Structures Act (1998, 2003), and the Municipal Finance Act (2003) were all suggested to set local government on a democratic, progressive, and service-delivery track. These enabling statutes play a crucial role in integrating municipal governments into broader developmental objectives that extend beyond the provision of basic services (Ramodula and Govender, 2021). South African municipalities suffer from service delivery difficulties that impede the government's ability to carry out its mandate, despite the existence of frameworks and numerous policy interventions (Qobo, Soko, Ngwenya, 2022). South Africa's municipal governments have struggled to provide adequate services because of human resource shortages, budgetary constraints, and corruption. Unrest and property destruction have broken out at times because of subpar service. Dissatisfied citizens have led to a rise in large-scale protests against South Africa's service delivery system since 2008. Co-Operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) ranked Municipality Y in KwaZulu-Natal as one of 20 most vulnerable municipalities in South Africa. Municipalities are especially susceptible to inadequate institutional administration due to political influences that would generally be absent in the private sector.

Essential services are not available to the poor and the indigent in Municipality Y because of a lack of funding and inadequate infrastructure. Even with municipal democratic mechanisms like the ward committee system, insufficient community consultation only serves to exacerbate problems with service delivery. Consequently, it has been suggested that poor lines of communication between the municipality's internal and external stakeholders contribute to public unrest there. The purpose of this research is to examine Municipality Y's level and quality of service delivery considering the numerous socioeconomic issues it faces. This study is crucial in evaluating the role, level, and quality of services given by the municipality to the constituencies in Municipality Y, allowing the municipality to better fulfil its service delivery mandate. To better understand what influences Municipality Y's ability to provide high-quality services, this study will take a qualitative, phenomenological approach.

Essential services are not available to the poor and the indigent in Municipality Y because of a lack of funding and inadequate infrastructure. Even with municipal democratic mechanisms like the ward committee system, insufficient community consultation only serves to exacerbate problems with service delivery. Consequently, it has been suggested that poor lines of communication between the municipality's internal and external stakeholders contribute to public unrest there. The provision of services is central to the role of local government because it has the potential to address the triple difficulties of poverty, unemployment, and inequality in underprivileged neighbourhoods. The results of this study assist the municipality improve its service provision by implementing policies and procedures to boost service quality for the locals and strengthen monitoring and evaluation tools.

## **Literature review**

Some of the difficulties local governments have can be attributed to constraints on their institutional capacity, the quality of their physical infrastructure, and the availability of their human resources (Davids, et al., 2022). Municipalities often fail to implement financial controls and incompetence is aided by the lack of skills possessed by local officials, particularly in the areas of relations and customer service, financial control, and technical incompetence in the provision of basic services such as water and sanitation, electrification, and refuse collection (Seopetsa, 2020; Masiya, Davids & Mangai, 2021;). Communities are growing increasingly disgruntled with the slow pace of service delivery, and the failure to address these difficulties has led to frequent violent protests (Mulatu, Zerihun, Mashigo, 2022). Slow service rollout, human resource challenges stemming from a lack of capacity and technical skills to deliver quality services to the people, and a lack of knowledge and awareness among communities about their rights are all factors that impede local governments' ability to provide essential services. d) The normalisation of corrupt practises and poor management has hampered the public's ability to hold those in power to account for the provision of essential services (Moji, Nhede, Masiya, 2022).

Although local government plays an important role in fostering democracy and economic growth, it faces several obstacles. Most of these problems revolve around local government's primary responsibilities, such as providing services and fostering local democracy (Mutymbizi, Mokhele, Ndinda, & Hongoro, 2020). Because of delays in translating policy frameworks into concrete programmes of action, the bulk of the poor and the unemployed lack access to services that are both long-lasting and productive (Mbanyele, 2021). Fragmented planning and implementation, insufficient skills, insufficient budgets, lack of accountability, and political intervention at the municipal level, according to Wall (2019), lead to poor or absence of services delivery and insufficient community engagement/ communication and participation (Kaunda, 2021; Malemane, & Nel-Sanders, 2021). These long-standing difficulties make it difficult for local governments to fulfil their responsibility to provide services and promote development and citizen participation in the democratic process (Selane, 2021). As a result of these ongoing issues, many people and communities have begun service delivery demonstrations. The ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and unproductivity of municipal leadership is exacerbated by the friction between politics and administration. Politicians and bureaucrats "master-servant relationship' is a major source of tension (Mbanyele, 2021). Ineffective municipal leadership is frequently attributed to a shortage of leadership skills and knowledge.

The ward committee structure has been seized for patronage purposes, and productive relationships between the public sector, the commercial sector, and civil society have all suffered because of a lack of accountability and engagement. Aging infrastructure with significant water and energy losses, poor asset management, and underinvestment in repairs and maintenance all contribute to widespread unhappiness with the quality of services provided by infrastructure (Kalonda and Govender, 2021). Inadequate skills on planning, budgeting, public financial management, including expenditure management; poor interface between financial and non-financial information; inability to significantly manage cash-flow; inadequate skills on credit and debt management, including basic financial accounting and filling or record keeping; duplication of payments in some instances and amounts not accounted for (lack of financial accountability) (COGTA, 2009-2014: 1; Powell et al., 2014; Zindi & Sibanda, 2022; Qobo & Rainer Kattel, 2022). There

are a wide variety of ways in which corrupt practises affect civilizations. A lot of individuals lost their independence, their health, or their bank accounts. Corrupt practises have a negative impact on society and the environment in four distinct ways. When it comes to politics, corruption is one of the biggest problems for rule of law and democracy. When power is abused for personal gain in a democratic society, it erodes public trust in government.

Issues such as inefficient district councillors and committees, a lack of public engagement (Rulashe, 2022), and poor rates of revenue collection are also common in local governments (Kalonda & Govender, 2021). They also have issues with having the wrong people in the wrong places, and with not having the skills they need to succeed (Authority & (LGSETA), 2019). Corruption and rent seeking among government officials and corporations are major contributing factors, as stated by (Authority & (LGSETA), 2019). This points to a systemic problem with the values and norms of good governance, which should direct individuals elected or nominated to manage local government administrations, as well as those who do business with them (Authority & (LGSETA), 2019).

### **Theoretical framework**

For the purposes of this research, the efficiency-service theory and the democratic-participatory theory will serve as our theoretical frameworks. The centrality of these ideas is in their connection to the primary roles of municipalities, such as the improvement of service delivery and the advancement of local governance. The efficiency-service theory is the first important theory for analysing the roles of city councils because it claims that it is sensible for local governments to focus on service provision. According to Van der Waldt (2018), local governments are given credit for their abilities to deliver efficient services under the efficiency-service principle. The idea behind it is because local governments are often more equipped to handle particular issues than federal ones. This idea is tied to the Batho Pele principles as a framework that promotes the delivery of effective and efficient services to the public and emphasises efficiency, equality, and welfare (Pillay et al., 2015: 46-47). The democratic-participatory model is the second, and it emphasises engagement at the grass-roots level (de Sousa et al., 2022). To bring democracy and involvement in government to the people, it must first be taken down to the local level. A municipality's council is the governing body responsible for energising its constituents and addressing their concerns and hopes. In essence, municipalities might carry out their mission through fostering political will and administrative competence-based social interactions (Tshishonga, 2018). Hence, local government is in a position to construct social compact based on democratic values of accountability, openness, and public engagement (Pillay, et al., 2015).

### **Methodology**

A qualitative approach was adopted for this study. The target population for this study was the Councillors, Management, and Traditional Leaders (Amakhosi neziNduna) of Municipality Y. It included Managers both on contract and permanent positions, totalling 250 according to the following categories:

**Table 1: Target and sampled population**

Category	Target population	Sample selected
Management	13	5
Amakhosi (Traditional leaders)	88	2
Councillors	37	5
Izinduna (Traditional leaders)	112	3
Total	250	15

Source: Authors' calculations

Purposive sampling was used to engage all selected participants who had insight and knowledge of service delivery at Municipality Y. The total sample of the study was 15 participants comprised of 11 males and 4 females, with ages ranging from 20 to 60 years. Structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions to gain knowledge, experiences or expressions from the councillors, traditional leaders, and officials as participants of the study and all 15 responded. The method used to administer questionnaires was telephone, due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions that were in place. The interviews were interpreted, and the information collected was organised into different themes. Such categorisation of themes was presented by using direct quotes.

**Table 2: Gender and Occupational Categories of Respondents**

Respondent	Occupational Category	Gender
R1	Municipal Councillor	Male
R2	Municipal Councillor	Female
R3	Municipal Official	Male
R4	Traditional Leader (Inkosi)	Male
R5	Traditional Leader (Induna)	Male
R6	Municipal Official	Male
R7	Municipal Official	Female
R8	Traditional Leader (Inkosi)	Male
R9	Municipal Councillor	Male
R10	Municipal Councillor	Female
R11	Municipal Official	Female
R12	Traditional Leader (Induna)	Male
R13	Municipal Official	Male
R14	Municipal Official	Male
R15	Municipal Councillor	Female

Source: Authors' calculations

## Discussion of findings

This section is structured according to themes that have been identified by the authors from the responses to interview questions.

### *Theme 1: Poor communication*

Most participants mentioned that there is a major challenge of poor communication and miscommunication between stakeholders and the community.

(R4). *“The main challenge we have in our area is communication breakdown between the community and the municipality, in a way that even if you are trying to convene meetings in the community people don't attend meetings as they are supposed to.”*

Most leaders in the community especially traditional are concerned with the way municipal councillors, that they mislead the communities with baseless and not keeping their promises.

(R7) stated that: *“We have been getting empty promises from the politicians, day in and day out they come and say things that they don’t mean just for the sake of keeping their positions safe in the council”*

(R6) *“Our government is trying by all means to deliver services to the people, it’s just that people don’t appreciate what our government has been doing, we have free houses, we have child support grants, we have free toilets, I really don’t understand what people really want now.”*

These responses showed that one major challenge with the Municipality and the community is poor communication. Some municipal councillors fear addressing the public because such report back or consultation meetings are often contentious as the community raises objection about service delivery issues. This is when the municipality does not respond to community invitations for meetings, avoidable protests result. This mirrors what Rulashe, (2022) has reported, highlighting that communication challenges are a central issue in local governance as seen in several South African municipalities. Effective communication is a collaborative effort that requires investment into “public participation strategies, structures and processes including communication and complaint management systems” (Swartland, 2020). Ineffective communication can also be the result of inadequate skills and capacity.

*Theme 2: low term completion with Senior Municipal Managers*

The other challenge with the municipality is consistency - they do not implement what have planned because several senior management members are not finishing their term of office.

(R2) *“The challenge of not finishing the term of heads of departments is not happening at the technical department only as the finance department also has the same problem. If the CFO is not there, the functioning of the municipality is broken somehow. This municipality functioned without a head of department at corporate services for three years. The director of corporate services resigned before his term ended in 2014, since then the post has not been filled”*

(R9) *“In strategic positions in this municipality like Engineering/ Technical services, heads of this department I have noticed that they don’t finish their terms. To me this is the main course of delaying service delivery in this area, they come and try to put things together by making sure that all what is in IDP is being implemented.”*

(R4) *“I’ve been working in this municipality since 2009, in strategic positions in this municipality like Engineering/ Technical services, heads of this department, I have noticed that they don’t finish their terms.*

Low term completion means that recruitment costs rise as positions are re-advertised, municipal programmes are disrupted and worker morale slumps. On average municipal managers and CFOs last for around 3.5 years of their 5 year appointments leading to instability (Urban-Econ, 2019). Engineering/ technical services management are essential as they oversee the construction and maintenance of infrastructure such as electricity, water supply, sewage/ effluent control, and housing. Some municipalities are hampered by senior management and chief financial officer positions being unoccupied, especially when it comes to supply chain management decisions (Zindi and Sibanda, 2022).

*Theme 3: Corruption*

Most respondents mentioned that in almost all the services of the municipality they see same service providers in serving municipality.

One respondent stated that:

*“You will find one and same companies getting jobs in this municipality regardless of whether they meet the minimum requirements or not” (R2).*

Corruption is pervasive in many municipal departments and processes in South African municipalities. Corruption is theft of taxpayers’ monies and it plagues enriches a few at the expense of the majority and leads to projects no being completed though service providers would have been paid. The findings of this study are similar to what Moji, Nhede, and Masiya (2022) reported, that municipalities lacking adequate oversight (dysfunctional purchasing and audit committee and financial controls) are prone to corruption. Municipal corruption is a major contributor to poor service delivery at all levels and the country’s citizens have lost faith in politicians and administrators, even those who are honest and professional (Mantzaris, Pillay and Jarbandhan, 2022).

*Theme 4: Interference*

Some respondents spoke about the clash of politics and administration.

(R3) *“Then you see politicians interfering in the process of service delivery on the administration side, that on its own can make officials feel like they are being pushed to satisfy the needs of some special individuals in within the Council, officials are not freely on doing their work, because politicians are interfering into administration matters.”*

(R4) *To me this is the main cause of delaying service delivery in this area, they come and try to put things together by making sure that all what is the IDP is being implemented, then you see politicians interfering in the process of service delivery on the administration side, that on its own can make officials feel like they are being pushed to satisfy the needs of some special individuals in the Council.”*

(R12) *“people are being deployed by the leading party in this municipality.....so this makes our senior managers get scared to order them about their tasks.”*

These findings echo what other scholars have reported. Municipal administrative functions are politicised, resulting in poor service delivery (Masuku and Jili, 2019). The politicisation of the public service occurs through “political interference that dictates the appointment of administrative personnel at particular government departments” (Masuku and Jili, 2019: 8) preventing municipal officials from freely doing their work. When politicians encroach and interfere in the affairs of the local government administrators most often negatively, the independence of municipal decision making is hindered. These roles of national and provincial political elites meddling in municipalities is contrary to the decentralisation of local government that is enshrined in the constitution (Chilenga-Butao, 2020).

*Theme 5: Lack of skills and incompetence in Municipal Officials*

Within the municipality it has been noticed that municipal officials are incompetent.

(R8) *“another thing I have noticed most of the officials here do not meet the minimum requirements for their position, if the Chief Financial Officer (CFO is not there the functioning of the municipality is broken somehow”.*

These findings echo Zindi and Sibanda (2022) for a metropolitan municipality in the rural Eastern Cape, that recruitment practices are improper as unsuitable candidates are appointed. The absence of a proper assessment constituent in administrative capacity-building initiatives makes measuring their level of achievement problematic, state

departments have diverse and ad hoc method to aptitude structure that aggravates the local government capacity challenge (African Development Bank, 2022).

*Theme 6: Lack of public participation*

Other respondents mentioned that public meetings are not well attended by the community. It was established that officials of the Council and Municipal Councillors do not involve community in planning of delivering services to the community.

(R7) *“I have tried many times to make a good relationship with the Mayor but my efforts never succeeded.... We must sit down when they draft the IDP.....when they present it to the community, we must be part of that, but we end up not being invited, and that makes people not to attend these meetings”.*

(R2) *“It will always be a challenge to deliver services in our communities if government takes all the powers that were normally known as for traditional leaders back in the days and give them all to the municipal councillors. We as traditional leaders, are the ones that can call people together and address them about the matters that affect the community.”*

The municipality seldom includes the public and traditional leadership in decision making. Such processes strengthen democracy and assist the municipality to make suitable choices grounded on the actual needs of the community. As highlighted in Chigwata (2019), the coexistence of traditional leadership and municipal authorities is fraught with tension as their roles overlap. This leaves traditional leaders feeling ignored in the governance process as many processes that were historically the responsibility of traditional leaders are administered by municipal councillors.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Local government has great power to transform the lives of citizens who receive services provided. Considering South Africa’s history of oppression and apartheid, many people have still struggle to access basic services. This study has highlighted several issues that affect a South African municipality’s ability to provide services to its residents. However, these challenges are not unique to the municipality that was studied. This highlights the inequalities in accessing resources that hinder efforts to reduce income inequality in the country. It also offers lessons for other municipalities in order to identify areas where service delivery quality is falling short. Tensions between local governments and citizens result from several issues highlighted by the study such as corruption, poor communication, political interference and weak institutional capacity.

The recommendations resulting from this study are as follows:

*Increased efforts at inclusive approach to public participation*

The council will be able to produce more appropriate solutions based on the actual needs of the society if it partners with non-governmental organisations, civil society, traditional leaders, and private businesses to promote service delivery and growth since governments cannot shoulder all the requirements for expansion on their own. This is because traditional leaders complained about side-lined and not receiving an audience with council leadership. Traditional leadership play a crucial role in communities’ affairs in Kwa Zulu Natal, a province that has a long proud history of such leadership.

*Improvement of communication*

There is a necessity for strong communication networks amongst municipalities and public structures; to alter the association of distrust that now occurs amongst all participating agents; to enable movement of information; inspire municipality outreach



programmes for capacitation of municipalities and participants working on matters of public discussion; This is achieved through the development of a coherent municipal communication strategy that is informed by the IDP. Social media (Facebook, Twitter for example) plays an important role in reaching the public in the shortest possible time reducing the reliance on face-to-face meetings that are poorly attended. The municipality can utilise this tool as the internet penetration in South Africa is very high. Using these methods allows communities to relay their experiences (good or bad) and to instantly raise service delivery issues with the municipality for attention.

*Prevention of political interference with the administration*

It is the job of the Council Speaker to caution elected officials against interfering with administrative processes. Municipal workers are not permitted to organise into political formations at any level, including Branch, Regional, Provincial, or National and these regulations must be strictly enforced. The issue of political interference at the managerial level of council however is impossible to stop as municipal leaders are deployed to represent party interests.

*Capacitation of skills in municipal officials*

There must be a vibrant recruitment policy in place, the municipality must employ qualified candidates to their relevant aspects, it must provide the relevant training to the employees, and must avoid deployments, because deployed candidates have favours to those that are in power. The city should only hire competent people for open positions through a transparent recruitment process, provide those hired are trained and capacitated to fulfil their duties. It is advisable that the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) should have the appropriate credentials for the job and be an individual who is independent from political activities. A CFO candidate who has been sent there/ deployed by a political party will likely favour those who sent him or her there in terms of supply chain and contract processes. Transparency is essential in all aspects of supply chain management (SCM), but notably in the tender job selection, specification, evaluation committee, and adjudication committees.

*Recommendation 5: Provision of corruption measures*

Strategies for detection, prevention, investigation, and reaction must be developed and used as required. All city employees have an obligation to report any instances of corruption, fraud, or other illegal behaviour to their superiors. Corrupt practises exist in the real world, and rule- and current processes are not robust enough to combat exploitation.

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### APPENDIX: Draft Questions Schedule

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
<b>B</b> Role of Municipality Y in Service Delivery	
1 What are services offered by the municipality?	
2 Are the services being offered of quality? Please explain	
3 What is the role of the municipality in providing these services?	
4 Does the municipality have the capacity to deliver services? Please explain	
5 Who are the beneficiaries of these services?	
<b>C</b> Factors that Impact of Service delivery at Municipality Y.	
1 What factors impact on service deliver at Municipality Y?	
2 How do these factors promote service delivery?	
3 How do these factors promote service delivery?	
4 How do these factors influence the delivery of quality services at Municipality Y?	
5 Explain how effective are these factors in promoting quality service delivery?	
<b>D</b> Challenges faced by Municipality Y in in delivery quality services	
1 What challenges are faced by Municipality Y in delivery services?	
2 What are the effects of the identified challenges on service delivery?	
3 How does the institutional capacity of Municipality Y contribute towards these challenges?	
4 Explain, how e-government on service delivery has positively influenced the speed in which clients receive assistance at SASSA?	
<b>E</b> Recommendations for Improved Service Delivery at Municipality Y	
1. What can improve the delivery of services at Municipality Y?	
2 What strategies could be used to improve service delivery at Municipality Y?	



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