



The Use of Hybrid Governance and Co-production for Effective Service Delivery: A South African Local Government Perspective

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Abstract

Hybrid governance and co-production represent the evolving paradigm in service delivery by embracing a collaborative ecosystem between the government, private entities and citizens by sharing responsibilities in service delivery design, decision-making and implementation. The South African local government have faced shortcomings regarding poor service delivery which led to the increase in service delivery protests. In South Africa, municipalities have identified various challenges over the years such as governance and backlogs as well as financial irregularities, corruption and maladministration leading to service delivery that does not reach and meet the expectations of the public. This study argues that the delivery of services in South Africa has always fallen short due to the disequilibrium between the people who are on the receiving end of services and those who create and distribute them. The objective of this study was to explore the transformative potential of hybrid governance and co-production in local government in redefining service delivery. The methodology adopted in this paper is qualitative and data was collected using secondary sources and materials. The findings of this study reveal that disparities in power, capacity constraints, low citizen engagement, digital divide and mistrust in government hinder successful hybrid governance and co-production endeavours. The study recommends that the government should strengthen stakeholder relationships and policies by bringing actors together, addressing power imbalances, bridging the digital divide and empowering citizens to co-produce knowledge for inclusive and sustainable outcomes.

Keywords: *Hybrid Governance; Service Delivery; Public Participation; Co-Production; Local Government*

1. Introduction

The concept of governance in the context of public sector reform is not new. As governments work to enhance and adapt their processes to serve the increasing population in need, it has grown in

importance and popularity. Scholars maintain that governance requires the piloting and administration of society through networks and partnerships between governments, corporations and civil society associations (Chamba and Chazireni 2023). There is an increasing interest in analysing reforms of delivery choices other than strict privatization and contracting out (Fageba and Bel 2008). In recent years various governments have been working on the best possible solutions to improve public sector service delivery through mechanisms such as Private-Public Partnerships (PPPs) (Woodhouse, Belardinelli and Bertelli 2022). For example, ten years after South Africa's democratic elections, the Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, noted that Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) benefited both the public and private sectors, with the former receiving improved, cost-effective services and the latter gaining new business opportunities (Fourie 2015). This alignment of interests was deemed to be in the best interest of the nation. Hybrid governance arises when both the public and private sectors offer high-quality services, emphasizing the importance of co-production, or the involvement of citizens in the creation, development, and delivery of services that affect their lives. Involving the public or various stakeholders in the decision-making processes in local government has been stressed for decades by scholars, politicians, and other stakeholders. The realisation of co-production which promotes the development of decision-making from the aspect of inclusivity is even more important for local governments. The plausible indication and potential benefits for this are embedded in the eradication of centralized decision-making that does not meet the needs of the public. The South African local governments have faced shortcomings regarding poor service delivery which led to the increase in service delivery protests.

In South Africa, municipalities have identified various challenges over the years such as governance and backlogs as well as financial irregularities, corruption, and maladministration (Thusi and Selepe 2023), leading to service delivery that does not reach and meet the expectations of the public. Scholars argue that this is an indication that there is a need for innovative ways to deliver services to people in a timely and efficient way. According to Bentzen, Sorenzen and Torfing (2020) after years of budget cuts, rationalization campaigns, and attempts to outsource public service production to private contractors, local governments are showing a growing interest in co-creating public value outcomes with users, citizens, civil society organizations, and other relevant actors. This co-production trend in South African local governments is rooted in both the Constitution and policy. Chigova and Hofisi (2021) note that co-production is supported by Constitutional provisions such as Section 152(1) of the 1996 Constitution, which aims to encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in local government matters. The public administration landscape presents various governance assessments that highlight the need to service citizens and increase partnerships. For example, academic reviews have been documented in Western Countries such as co-production and innovation in public services (Squio and Hoffmann 2021); co-creation of innovative public value outcomes in Scandinavia municipalities (Bentzen et al. 2020); and Collaborative Innovation in Public Administration (Pevcin, Benčina, Dečman and Vrbek 2019). South African studies have explored Hybrid governance and Co-production in local government. Biljohn and Lues (2020) compared co-production in Ghent (Belgium) and Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (MMM) (South Africa). They found that citizens in the MMM associated Social Innovation in Co-production with improved service delivery, increased citizen-government interaction, problem-solving, and collaboration between politicians, citizens, and local government administration. Chamba and Chazireni (2023) conducted a meta-analysis supporting the use of hybrid governance in State Owned Enterprises (SOEs). This approach aims to align with the country's socioeconomic framework and takes into account the positive aspects of both the insider-oriented and outsider-oriented systems. The focus is on promoting transparency and accountability, proper corporate asset management, and safeguarding the interests of investors.

This article argues that the use of hybrid governance and co-production as means of effective service delivery in local government is important, *firstly* because the shift towards co-production and creation leads to resource mobilization, public innovation and democratic legitimacy (Bentzen et al. 2020); *secondly*, it provides the intent for governance structures to predict organizational and managerial

principles that involve relevant actors and align the intended results with the strategic objectives of the government or the organization, besides the needs of the citizens themselves (Lopes and Farias 2022) and *thirdly* a creative way of addressing service delivery challenges prevalent in South Africa and mobilising citizens to work with their local governments to respond to their communities' challenges (Chigova and Hofisi 2021). A significant amount of research indicates that local government and public administration are facing the need to innovate to provide high-quality services through effective governance models (Osborne, Radnor and Strokosch, 2016; Blijon 2018). Although various studies have emphasized the importance of co-production and governance, the challenges and strategies in South African local government with regard to the implementation of hybrid governance and co-production have not been comprehensively addressed in the current literature. As a result, many local governments have not yet been able to successfully implement these models and lack clarity in their public policy outlines. This study aims to address this gap by examining the implementation of hybrid governance and co-production in local government for effective service delivery. The need for effective governance models for service delivery is still a topic of ongoing discussion and protests in local government. This study seeks to contribute to the resolution of this issue by emphasising hybrid governance and co-production as effective mechanisms for service delivery innovations.

2.Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Overview: Hybrid Governance and Co-Production

The delivery of public services may face challenges due to insufficient resources at the local government level (Aripin and Rulinawaty 2022). It is therefore crucial to explore viable options to enhance service delivery in local government, including hybrid governance and co-production. Hybrid governance refers to the collective provision of key services by both state and non-state actors (Clark-Ginseberg, Blake and Patel 2022), and is a process that drives innovation and delivers co-benefits for multiple stakeholders (Toxopeus, Kotsila, Conde, Katona, van der Jagt and Polzin 2020). This approach is demand-driven and cost-effective, resulting in the realization of services such as urban infrastructure services. Citizens' participatory ways of managing these services are also included in the definition of hybrid governance (Toxopeus et al. 2020). Aripin and Rulinawaty (2022) further posit that hybrid governance is viewed as an alternative way to improve governance solutions through the structures established through cooperation and collaboration.

According to the Local Government Association (online), co-production is a crucial approach to the design and delivery of public services that creates greater democracy and empowers citizens to take control of the day-to-day decisions that affect their lives. This process involves collaboration between professionals, service users, their families, and neighbours in an equal and reciprocal relationship to enhance service delivery. Co-production has emerged as a cornerstone of public policy reform globally, with diverse articulations as a valuable means of public service reform, a response to the democratic deficit, a pathway to active citizenship and active communities, and a lever for additional resources in public service delivery (Osborne et al. 2016). However, despite its varied roles, co-production remains poorly formulated and has become one of the many "woolly words" in public policy (Osborne et al. 2016). However, in the realm of local governance, the partnership between hybrid governance and co-production has garnered significant attention to enhance service delivery, highlighting the interconnectedness of diverse actors in the governance process and the importance of active citizen involvement in the creation and delivery of public services (Bovaird 2007; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Sørensen and Torfing, 2007).

In essence, the involvement of users in planning, operating, and regulating service delivery and policymaking leads to more accountability, better performance, and responsiveness in public goods

provision. In the same vein, Kroukamp (2005) asserts that partnerships are a local governance tool to improve service delivery. Co-production serves as a crucial mechanism within hybrid governance frameworks, creating collaboration and the cooperative creation and delivery of services (Hefetz and Warner 2014). The connection of these concepts leads to the development of services that are tailored to the specific needs of communities. This results in improved efficiency through the optimization of available resources, as well as increased transparency and accountability (Alford and O'Flynn 2012; Brandsen, Steen and Verschuere, 2018). However, several challenges must be addressed, including issues related to power dynamics and resource allocation (Bovaird and Löffler 2012; Osborne 2010). Wang (2005) asserts that local governance is not always a positive experience and can be a double-edged sword. Nevertheless, with appropriate support, these approaches can empower communities, promote innovation, and pave the way for a more responsive and inclusive local governance paradigm. This ensures effective service delivery that aligns with the evolving needs and expectations of citizens (Pestoff 2014).

3. Methodology and Approach

This study paper used a qualitative approach through a review of existing literature that evaluates ongoing discussions on innovation of service delivery in the public sector, with a focus on local government in South Africa to achieve and address the objective of the study. Scholars, politicians and policymakers have been discussing the best alternatives to the challenges associated with service delivery. One solution proposed by Biljon (2018) is to provide quality and quantity services that are customized to meet the needs of citizens. To achieve this, implementing co-production and hybrid governance could assist the local government in meeting the needs of the citizens and creating governance models that stem from the proper management of scarce resources.

3. Findings and Discussions

The findings and discussions of this study are presented below.

3.1. Hybrid Governance and co-Production for Effective Service Delivery

The growing demand for services from local communities has created challenges for municipalities to deliver efficient services. For instance, in African cities like Johannesburg, the demand for services has risen significantly, increasing service delivery protests (Ragolane 2022). According to Sesan, Sanfo, Sikhwihilu, Dakyaga, Aziz, Yirenya-Tawiah, Badu, Derbile, Ojoyi, Ibrahim and Adamou (2021), the rising urbanization rates in Africa have led to gaps in the provision of basic services in cities across the continent due to a lack of improvements in critical infrastructure. Various service delivery systems and scales, including centralized and decentralized, public and private, exist and compete in urban spaces. However, they rarely connect in ways that meet the needs of the underprivileged.

The study conducted by Sesan et al. (2021) suggests that hybrid models of governance that promote interaction among all stakeholders, including private and public actors, in municipal and city-wide settings can improve the equitable and efficient distribution of food, water, and energy services, particularly in complex contexts. Effective service delivery and governance are essential as people at the grassroots level depend on these systems to receive the best value-for-money services. According to Bel and Fageda (2008), local governments use hybrid governance when cost considerations, financial constraints, and private interests create conflicting pressures. In Spain, hybrid governance is used as a form of partial privatization where municipal or supra-municipal governments enter into long-term contracts with private firms through joint ventures (Fageda and Bel 2008).

Hybrid organizational forms are becoming increasingly popular among local governments as they allow them to partner with private companies to take advantage of scale economies, better managerial capacities, and incentives. This results in lower transaction costs compared to contracting out to a private firm (Fageda and Bel 2008). It is important to note that political and ideological factors do not impact the decision of local governments to use mixed firms when adopting coproduction and hybrid governance (Fageda and Bel 2008). According to Aripin and Rulinawaty (2021), using hybrid governments and mixed service delivery models for public services in disadvantaged regions, especially in healthcare policymaking, has several implications. Firstly, it ensures transparent decision-making regarding the distribution of costs and benefits. Secondly, it helps maintain public trust. Lastly, it allows for the use of experts in combination with local community mutual assistance to identify the current and future environment.

Bentzen, Sørensen, and Torfing (2020) discovered that co-production is commonly used for service production and administrative problem-solving in Scandinavian municipalities. However, it can also be utilized for policy innovation, political leadership, and local democracy. This approach emphasizes inclusion in creating services for communities. From the perspective of New Public Governance, Brix, Krogstrup and Mortensen (2020) argue that co-production leads to beneficial outcomes such as increased efficiency and better citizen well-being. Involving citizens as co-evaluators is valuable as it can lead to empowerment, increased democracy, ownership, and citizen motivation to co-produce (Brix *et al.* 2020).

Khine, Mi, and Shahid (2021) conducted a Comparative Analysis of Co-Production in Public Services and found that co-production is driven by (1) stable or long-term relationships between stakeholders, (2) active users, (3) contribution/input/resources, (4) new settings, (5) new technology, (6) knowledge, and (7) flow of information at different stages of public services, including service delivery. Kinoshita, Dollery, and Yamazaki's (2020) study focused on co-production in the Japanese local government, they argued that these approaches effectively combine the strengths of local councils and community groups and can offer solutions for financial constraints and population decline. The authors found that co-production programs created a synergetic relationship between local government and community groups, which resulted in significant external benefits for residents. Firstly, the voluntary participation of local community groups made the costs associated with the co-production programs far lower than if they were provided by private or public entities alone. Secondly, the large number of local volunteers involved in the municipalities generated social capital through productive interactions among the people.

3.2. Challenges Associated with the Implementation of Hybrid Governance and Co-Production in Local Government

The local government in its effort to solve service delivery issues and reduce the accelerating service delivery protests by aggrieved citizens through the use of hybrid governance and co-production is without any challenges. While hybrid governance and co-production have been encouraged, flaws and weaknesses have also been identified. The following issues are some of the barriers that hinder the successful implementation of both hybrid governance and co-production and are discussed in no particular order of priority.

3.2.1. Resource and Capacity Constraints

Almost 60 percent of the world's population is projected to reside in the cities by the year 2030, with most of this increase expected to take place in Africa and Asia. South Africa has since not been left out in this case. The rate of urban migration to cities has severe implications for both hybrid governance and co-production including planning, policy development, infrastructure and service delivery. This has in

turn placed a strain on the capacity and resources of the government to effectively and efficiently render services. According to Khine et al (2021), state actors should possess the requisite resources and competence to engage in co-production. However, Pieterse (2022) denotes that severe deficiencies in skills, competence, and resources severely hinder almost all municipalities in secondary cities and small towns to the extent that there is minimal indication of municipalities effectively exercising their constitutional governance responsibilities. Secondly, not all citizens have the same access to co-production due to a lack of knowledge and resources (Khine et al. 2021). Moreover, barriers such as insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure and scarcity of skilled and competent personnel hinder the successful implementation of hybrid governance and co-production efforts within local government structures. In the event of this challenge, Pieterse (2022) argues that many corporations possess ample resources and have access to highly strategic planning, financial management, and governance experience, which municipalities often lack.

4.2.2 Power Imbalances between Stakeholders

Stakeholders are usually different groups with different agendas, power and influences. Van Eeden (2013) states that stakeholders frequently possess divergent needs, yet their expertise and endorsement constitute a valuable resource for the project. Power disparities can lead to unequal opportunities for engagement such as the wealthier or more powerful parties dominating discussions, resulting in restricted representation for marginalized groups, such as minorities or economically disadvantaged populations. This undermines the inclusiveness and diversity of perspectives in local governance as provisioned by legislative requirements such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996. Van Eeden (2013) further adds by stating that people or groups with high positions and status are likely to believe that they have legitimate power and influence over minorities. For instance, a senior manager possessing genuine power may opt to refrain from exercising their authority and instead exert their influence based on their experience. An individual under the sway of a powerful figure may remain oblivious to the extent of their influence, mistakenly attributing the source of power to their charismatic qualities, for instance. Centralizing authority in specific entities or groups might hinder the emergence of innovative ideas from a variety of stakeholders in hybrid governance. The absence of a variety of viewpoints restricts the ability to come up with inventive solutions and creative approaches that are crucial for tackling intricate local problems. Brouwer, Hiemstra, van der Vugt and Walters (2013) argue that there is an increasing worry that stakeholders with less influence/power are inadequately represented. As such, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) frequently fall prey to power struggles initiated by stakeholders from both the public and commercial sectors. For example, power imbalances can affect the allocation of resources, i.e., if certain stakeholders have greater influence, there is a possibility of uneven distribution of resources, with a bias towards those who possess more power. This has the potential to result in an inequitable allocation of resources, services, or initiatives, hence worsening socio-economic inequalities within the local community. Sibanda and Leus (2021) contend that resources are a significant contributor to relationship power. Social actors and stakeholders utilize resources to either maintain or alter power dynamics within public engagement platforms and locations.

Notably, there is also a growing concern that hybrid governance and co-production as mechanisms for improved service delivery thought to help deliver sustainable and innovative development results, may not meet expectations if power dynamics are not managed fairly and effectively. Nevertheless, accomplishing this goal is challenging due to the inherent uncertainty and ambiguity associated with multi-actor collaboration. Such collaborations cannot be easily "managed" in a conventional manner, given the complex and unpredictable nature of adaptive systems (Brouwer et al. 2013).

Moreover, in the absence of a structured framework for decision-making and a lack of commonly agreed upon principles, the potential of co-production is likely to be restricted (Khine et al. 2021). The

primary factors contributing to this issue stem from divergent values held by the different parties involved, as well as the absence of a well-defined decision-making framework, leading to potential conflicts between them. In support of the above-mentioned aspects Brouwer et al. (2023) are of the view that:

“Even if the parties are willing to engage in dialogue on an equal basis, systemic differences exist in the balance of power, capacity and resources. There are uneven levels in terms of access to resources and information, as well as experience in understanding and dealing with financial issues. These systemic differences inevitably spill over and affect the process. In the case of indigenous communities faced with company power, most of them feel highly insecure about their rights and are easily waylaid by short-term cash inducements or promised benefits, such that without proper understanding they easily give up their rights” (Brouwer et al. 2013).

From this statement, it can be deduced that the local government needs to address these aspects to enable strong and effective relationships among stakeholders and ensure that power is balanced throughout the process of hybrid governance and co-production.

4.2.3 Lack of Citizen Participation

While it is envisioned that co-production would bring meaningful outcomes in service delivery initiatives, Nchanji, Ramcilovic-Suominen and Kotilainen (2021) argue that implementing participatory techniques has not been without challenges. According to Prinsloo (2013), public participation is a crucial procedure for legitimizing government actions and fulfilling the needs of society at large. Such participation ensures transparency and accountability resulting in effective governance. Bransen et al. (2018) assert that policymakers have increasingly prioritized co-production and co-creation, as there has been a surge in interest regarding citizen engagement. However, citizens have not been actively involved in the designing and delivery of the services they receive. It is for the following reasons that such active participation has been hindered. In Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development, the concept of ‘leaving no one behind’ highlights the need for inclusivity and empowering citizens in development activities. Yet, citizens often have limited opportunities to design development policy programmes (Sibanda and Leus 2021). The significance of meaningful public participation is emphasized as a crucial element in the processes of democratic transformation, local governance, and sustainable development (Sibanda and Lues 2021), and thus fundamental for both the co-production and co-creation of local government affairs. The importance of co-production as a recipe for public governance was manifested in 2011 by the OECD report, *“Together for better public service—Partnering with citizens and civil society”* (OECD 2011).

According to Bovaird and Loeffler (2012), “citizens are willing to become involved in co-production activities, ‘but only if they feel they can play a worthwhile role’”. Hence, it has been proposed by Brix et al (2020) that co-production mechanisms could entail the allocation of shared duties between the system and users, the extent of citizens' impact on the collaboration, and the ownership of said collaboration. The fundamental contention is that when individuals actively engage in co-production, services become more closely attuned to their interests, needs, and expectations (Jo and Nabatchi 2018 cited in Bransen et al. 2018). According to Bovaird and Loffer (2012), the public sector lacks expertise in customizing its marketing strategies for specific target sectors. This is due to the fact South Africa encompasses a diverse array of cultures and racial groupings present within the nation of South Africa, which adversely pose a significant difficulty for the local government (Prinsloo 2013). Thus, lacking sufficient knowledge about the interests of most citizens, it will encounter difficulty in creating specific offers that are perceived as pertinent. To overcome this challenge, Breed, Jones, Pillay, and Zondi (2023:29) argue that communities should be motivated to support local governments in achieving excellence. This involves developing the required skills and capabilities, as well as unleashing their

industriousness to foster innovation and co-creation. The aim is to create a modern local government business model that combines various approaches for the 21st century.

The level of public participation integrated into the planning, design, and implementation of service delivery systems is concerning. In theory, public participation must be embedded in all municipal activities, approaches and policies. The Municipal Systems Act requires both the political and administrative leadership to ensure that communities are involved in municipal policies, planning and any decision that affects them. For example, Section 55 states that among other responsibilities, the municipal manager is responsible for facilitating participation by the local community in the affairs of the municipality (SALGA 2013). However, in practice, there is limited evidence to support this (Chua 1997). Ragolane and Malatji (2021) found that when community members were surveyed about public participation, they reported that it is primarily carried out for "compliance purposes" and that it often takes a "narrower approach" in local government. While it is true that moving to a co-production model of service delivery may not, in and of itself, guarantee significant improvements in service delivery, it is clear that there is a need to shift the focus to service producers who have greater contact with consumers, clear lines of authority, and formal mechanisms for public consultation. Flattening hierarchical structures and integrating staff across departments can also be beneficial (Chua 1997).

4.2.4 Lack of Trust in Government by the Society

In South Africa, the lack of faith in government institutions by society, which is rooted in past grievances and current problems such as corruption, weakens the motivation of citizens to actively participate in co-production endeavours. In the same vein Thusi, Matyana and Jili (2023) expressed that the South African government is marked by political power struggles, the appointment of party loyalists to positions of authority, a biased application of law, and inadequate provision of services. All these issues negatively impact the citizens of the country. Consequently, this results in the loss of trust in government by the people. An indicative decline in the levels of trust in government is often expressed in the form of protests (Taylor, Draai and Jakoet-Salie 2020) and by not actively participating in government elections (Thusi et al. 2023). Taylor et al. (2023) argue that communities characterized by low levels of trust are more likely to oppose municipal governance and endorse rent and service protests. Moreover, individuals who do not actively participate in municipal activities are more likely to hold a pessimistic view of government and its institutions (DPME 2021). According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2017), the South African government is the least trusted among its citizens on a global scale, with only 15% of the population expressing confidence in the administration.

Brix et al. (2020) trust is another significant aspect of co-production, even though it can be established in different contexts in different ways. The local context of co-production has a significant impact on how an intervention strategy for building trust should be designed. This is because trust can be the driving force behind several intervention techniques, each with different goals, depending on the specific situation. However, establishing trust and credibility between citizens and government entities becomes crucial yet difficult in this context. Squio and Hoffman (2021) argue that in general communities are uninterested and often lack the commitment to local problems and are not motivated to provide solutions. Trust is coined as the foundation of continual communication and problem solving and ultimately co-production through the involvement of citizens in the delivery of public services is believed to foster trust. However, it becomes problematic when there is a lack of trust in communication channels and public engagement tactics, which hinders the co-production of services and further hampers efforts to build trust (Taylor et al. 2020). To remedy this, individuals and state agents need to recognize that working together may be mutually beneficial. This can be achieved by establishing ongoing communication channels and fostering a proactive and collaborative approach, which can lead to the development of new knowledge and skills (Squio and Hoffman 2021). Moreover, municipalities through

communication channels can thus be aware and better understand what communities need and which services are deemed fundamental by them (Taylor et al. 2020).

4.2.5. The Effect of Digital Divide on Hybrid Governance and Co-Production

With the advancement in the digital age, technology is now transcending at an exponential pace, forcing the global economy and government to re-think and transform their way of governance. The local government as the custodian for basic service delivery, is obligated to ensure that no one is left behind in this digital transformation. The UN E-Government Survey (2022) posits that every person, irrespective of their age, race, gender, legal status, ethnicity, location of residence, or socioeconomic level, has the right to acquire and receive fundamental rights and services, which include e-government services. Nevertheless, the shift towards digital services must be thoroughly evaluated (Grossi and Argento 2022). The digital divide reflects and exacerbates longstanding structural inequalities, so while vulnerable populations may stand to benefit most from digital and learning technologies, they are also the most likely to be digitally excluded (UN E-Government Survey 2022). This is due to the lack of access to resources, digital connectivity, poor or no technological infrastructure and the lack of skills and knowledge to use the new technology. Consequently, the disparities between individuals who have access to digital technology and those who do not are increasingly widening, limiting access to public services and economic opportunities. Faldi, Rantazo and Moretto (2022) argue that the feasibility of co-production technology is contingent upon various contextual factors, including the nature of the community and its available resources, the layout of the metropolitan area, the density of dwellings, and the proximity to centralized systems for networked services such as water and electricity. UN E-Government Survey (2022) asserts that in the current hybrid digital society, individuals living in poverty or vulnerable circumstances may intentionally or unintentionally lack access to digital services. This lack of access can be attributed to exclusionary policies and laws, as well as societal power dynamics or one-size-fits-all policies. Furthermore, the insufficient coverage of institutions in the digital realm for hybrid governance and co-production can be linked to the absence of possibilities for interaction and consultative processes for vulnerable populations, as well as a lack of understanding among governments about the specific requirements of these groups. Even though digital inequality aspects are concerning, citizens are becoming more discerning and increasingly seeking sustainable digital transformation of government services (Friday, Garner, Pillay and Bertrand 2021). Therefore, governments can also guarantee that citizens are not just consulted but also enabled to actively influence the decisions that impact them (Friday et al. 2021). This can be achieved through emerging digital e-participation tools, such as social media, mobile apps, and online digital platforms as well as developing infrastructure, especially in remote areas for access opportunities. This will in turn enable governments to gather extensive feedback from communities and such feedback serves to enhance policy creation and decision-making processes by giving valuable insights in hybrid governance and co-production.

3.3. Mitigation Strategies Associated with the Implementation of Hybrid Governance and Co-Production in Local Government

The implementation of hybrid governance and co-production has presented various challenges for local governments. However, findings suggest that these strategies can enhance service delivery by engaging stakeholders and promoting collaboration.

3.3.1. Partnerships and Involving Stakeholders in the Decision-Making Process

Stakeholders have varying interests in the provision of public services, and therefore they support municipalities in responding to the basic needs of communities by engaging them in decision-making and offering development support (Zwane & Matsiliza 2022). In all government activities, involving

stakeholders and promoting public participation is an essential process to ensure that people's needs are met.

Partnerships are a local governance tool that aims to improve service delivery, and they aim to produce practices that enhance the quality of life of citizens in public service delivery at all levels of government (Kroukamp 2005). The challenges of governance in contemporary public administration and management have brought up questions on how citizens can be served better in local government, how the production of public services should be organized, and how service delivery systems should be managed and conducted. Kroukamp (2005) asserts that the government must be prepared and ready to partner with the private sector, NGOs, and citizens to achieve these goals. Engaging stakeholders, particularly citizens, in local government has become an increasing challenge. Zwane and Matsiliza (2022) found that the eDumbe Municipality has overlooked stakeholder involvement in service delivery, highlighting the importance of participatory democracy and cooperative government principles to address this issue. They argue that the lack of stakeholder participation is caused by various factors, including non-compliance, political interference, and improper fund management (Zwane and Matsiliza 2022). The authors further propose that training and awareness programs should adopt a participatory empowerment approach to equip residents with various techniques and strategies for engaging stakeholders.

Taute (2021) highlights the importance of collaborative partnerships in improving service delivery in South African local government. According to his findings, this approach is crucial in addressing the failures of government and optimizing the creation of social value as collaborative partnerships help private organizations understand how municipalities function, identify gaps, and improve services rendered. Regular partnerships create stronger relationships between the public and private sectors, leading to a trusting environment where municipalities willingly give some power to the service providers. This results in benefits and value beyond what is mandated. However, Taute (2021) found that collaborative governance has not fully filtered through public institutions, and the resources and knowledge about collaboration are not focused enough for it to be as successful as it could be.

Wangari's (2018) study on stakeholder involvement and the provision of affordable housing by the National Housing Corporation in Kenya revealed that the organization experienced a greater level of success in achieving its goals due to its adoption of superior practices regarding stakeholder involvement. This led to increased outputs, better collaboration and synchronization with the external environment, and ultimately resulted in successful service delivery implementation and goal achievement for the organization. Public participation is crucial for identifying methods that can effectively involve the community in the policymaking and implementation process (Masango 2001).

However, studies have shown that certain methods such as public hearings may not have much impact on municipal plans and policies (Mdlalose 2016). To address this, municipalities need to adopt suitable processes that can make a difference in people's lives. For instance, poor communication between municipalities and citizens has been identified as a key reason for service delivery protests. Therefore, methods such as radio, television, citizen representation in policymaking, and questionnaire surveys can have a positive impact. The Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality public participation policy (2014) supports the idea that communities must be engaged in processes that are familiar to them. The policy suggests various methods such as door-to-door visits, vehicle loud-hailing, notices, broadcasting, publishing, and any other means to communicate important information to the public and involve them in the decision-making process. Collaboration factors for effective service delivery should be encouraged in the South African Public sector. In essence, local government must attempt to overcome the challenges that have circumvented their performance (Agba, Akwara and Idu 2013)

3.3.2. Publicising Local Government Affairs

Public participation is essential for effective service delivery and to ensure co-production and hybrid governance, particularly in the form of information sharing. Successful public participation requires both the public and the government to initiate the process. This means that to ensure effective public participation, both the public and the government must make it a norm to engage. Midgley et al. (1986), as cited in Masango (2001), argued that there must be growing social and political awareness among the people to cultivate a culture of public participation. However, to cultivate such a culture, the public must first understand the concept of public participation, which requires educational therapy. This will help the community to identify and solve their problems more efficiently. According to IDASA (2010), cultivating a culture of public participation is important because it will improve the inclusiveness of public participation and incorporate public inputs into municipal governance issues.

3.3.3. Cooperation, Co-Option and Co-Creation

According to Warner (2011), when there are only a limited number of competitive private suppliers available for services, cooperation may be a preferable alternative to privatization. Not only does cooperation aid in achieving economies of scale and regional service integration, but it is also particularly advantageous for services that require careful contract management, community involvement, and control. As municipalities strive to modernize their service delivery to keep pace with the demands of a more competitive economic system, they are turning to cooperation as a means of enabling governments to collaborate in a more efficient and effective service delivery model. This approach unlocks new possibilities for economies of scale and efficiency gains. In terms of co-option, Burke (1968), as cited in Mdlalose (2016) asserts that services can be governed and managed by the municipality, citizens and other interested stakeholders. In his view, it is the responsibility of local governments to provide essential services to their communities. To effectively achieve this, municipalities require the assistance of their respective communities in delivering and upkeeping necessary services. In the same vein, Biljon and Lues (2020) that meaningful co-production and participation start with the responsibility of every citizen to protect, preserve and collectively use goods and services provided by the government. By involving the community in these efforts, they develop a sense of ownership and accountability for the services being provided by the municipality.

According to Meričková, Nemeč and Svidroňová (2015), co-created innovations are mostly initiated by non-governmental actors, and local governments tend to have neutral or negative attitudes towards such innovations. Dollery, Kortt and Drew (2016) suggest that shared service arrangements, where groups of voluntarily participating councils collaborate, offer a more effective means of securing the advantages of scale and scope in local government without the significant costs associated with compulsory council consolidation. However, the success of shared services has been limited in small regional, rural, and remote local authorities due to the costs of establishing and maintaining shared service entities, which can offset any savings from shared services. They propose that the common service model, which allows voluntarily participating local authorities to reap the benefits of scale and scope in local services where economies of scale apply, can secure gains in administrative, managerial, and technical skills not otherwise available to regional, rural, and remote local authorities. Unlike compulsory amalgamation, these advantages do not come at the cost of community divisiveness, dismantled small councils, and attenuated local democracy.

In the South African context, Ragolane (2022) and Madumo (2014) have argued that cooperation between stakeholders is crucial for the achievement of municipal effectiveness in service delivery provision, based on the Social Contract Theory. Furthermore, Ragolane (2022) found that the cooperation between stakeholders in the City of Johannesburg has been hindered by various challenges, such as lack of balance and checks, lack of trust, and intra-governmental relationships leading to service delivery

protests. Similarly, Mangai, Pillay, Masiya and Lubinga (2023) found that, while the police have made efforts to co-produce for crime prevention through practices and programs such as police forums and youth desks, these practices are not popular among citizens due to a lack of trust in the police. This contradiction in perception highlights the need for a more effective approach to co-producing crime prevention with citizens. Moreover, this is needed in all service provision activities to solve the issues which communities face and to address the challenges at the grassroots level.

3.3.4. Smart Governance and Citizen Co-Production in a Hybrid Governance

According to Webster and Leleux (2018) mutual trust, shared understanding, and new opportunities for co-production emerge in an environment mediated by new technology. Citizens have become increasingly attuned to using Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in their everyday lives, for communicating with each other and service providers, to undertake transactions, request services, or provide feedback on services, often instantaneously, and public services are not immune to these transformational changes in society (Webster and Leleux 2018). However, research indicates that citizen participation during the co-production of services is influenced by divergent circumstances, the needs of citizens, infrastructure, and the availability of resources (Biljon and Lues 2020).

In any case, implementing smart governance and citizen co-production in a hybrid governance model for effective service delivery in local government involves leveraging social innovation, smart city governance, and co-creation to enable meaningful citizen participation. Webster and Leleux (2018) assert that smart cities have empowered citizens by giving them a greater voice in the design and delivery of public services and policies. Allan et al. (2020) discovered that e-participation - the practice of providing service feedback - has a positive correlation with the clearance rate of urban service requests in subdistrict service units, even after controlling for various factors. Interestingly, their research showed that the impact of e-participation on service performance varies depending on the type of city service. For instance, e-participation has a greater relative influence on complex problems that involve multiple agencies, as opposed to simple routine services (Allan et al. 2020).

According to López-de-Ipiña et al. (2022), using co-creation methodologies and digital tools can help drive both bottom-up and top-down innovation initiatives to promote public services. Webster and Leleux (2018) agree, noting that new ICTs and citizen-state informational relations allow for co-design, co-creation, and co-production to enhance public services. However, the extent of citizen empowerment resulting from these changes remains uncertain and depends on factors such as citizen engagement and institutional norms. The authors highlight the importance of incentivizing citizens and ensuring transparency in power distribution to address scepticism among disengaged citizens. This requires a shift from a government-centric approach to a citizen-centric one, with benefits or rewards for both citizens and municipalities (Webster and Leleux 2018).

In the technologically mediated municipal reciprocity process, municipal inputs are designed to encourage citizen engagement while citizen inputs require trust in the municipality and a willingness to participate in the governance process. These inputs are interrelated and not independent variables, and their interaction can result in more meaningful and sustainable benefits for local communities. This marks a significant departure from traditional governance practices (Webster and Leleux 2018). The introduction of processes such as e-consultation, e-public participation, and e-collaboration then take the stand to provide a more efficient way of providing services through an engaged system using ICTs.

4. Recommendations

In South Africa, local government performance reports, policy documents and academic literature have continuously supported the idea of improving intergovernmental relations and forming strong partnerships between municipalities and non-state entities. The successful implementation of hybrid governance and co-production in local government, especially for service delivery, requires involving all stakeholders in the decision-making process. In the past, local government has often overlooked the participation of citizens, NGOs, and other organizations in the planning, execution, and implementation of service delivery systems and policies, resulting in imbalanced relationships. Participatory democracy is crucial to meeting the needs of citizens and improving public administration. To achieve this, co-production and hybrid governance are comprehensive frameworks that enable stakeholder relationships in local government. Therefore, local government must be willing to partner with stakeholders to ensure that service delivery meets the standards mandated by the Constitution of 1996. This can be accomplished by enhancing the sharing of information and knowledge among individuals or groups involved, in order to facilitate active and involved participation of all stakeholders.

Literature suggests that public service managers need not only the tools and techniques to encourage collaboration between the multiplicity of stakeholders involved in co-production but also the skills and capacity for managing the governance of co-production (Paskaleva, Cooper and Concilo 2018). Local government municipalities must increase social innovation to build better outcomes in the collaboration between stakeholders. Local government must further empower stakeholders and provide an enabling environment for both hybrid governance and co-production initiatives. The government must also address power imbalances between stakeholders. To rectify power disparities in hybrid governance, deliberate measures must be taken to promote inclusiveness, fair participation, and openness. Efforts such as enhancing the skills and capabilities of underrepresented groups, providing opportunities for meaningful participation, and implementing transparent decision-making processes can help reduce these disparities. Moreover, it is recommended that trust and increasing capabilities of stakeholders are important to creating a transparent and citizen-centric in which both the government and citizens benefit. The local government has been slow to adopt innovative models for service delivery. To address this, co-design, co-creation, and co-option must be emphasized to involve all stakeholders in local authorities. This approach can provide several benefits, such as economies of scale and scope in local services, gains in administrative, managerial, and technical skills, and improved services for regional, rural, and remote areas. This approach does not lead to community divisiveness, dismantled small councils, and weakened local democracy.

Conclusion

It is imperative that a governance model be implemented to address the challenges faced by citizens at the grassroots level in order to improve service delivery in local governments. The functioning of local governments in the current political landscape has yet to have a positive impact on service delivery. Effective political management is crucial for enhanced municipal service delivery and good local governance. While public participation has been overlooked in local government, it is essential for providing quality and effective services to citizens. Involving stakeholders and creating partnerships is not only a necessary process to adhere to policy frameworks but also a means for governments to take on responsibility for the creation of public services. In the South African local government, there is still much work to be done to streamline service delivery using alternative methods, such as e-government and cooperation between service providers and citizens. As the disequilibrium in local government municipalities continues to grow, it is essential to consider innovative approaches to ensure successful public administration.

Future Research

This study maintains that further investigation is necessary to fully grasp the essence of co-production and hybrid governance in South African local government. It is imperative to conduct scholarly research that captures the perspectives of stakeholders in the implementation of these models. This is of critical importance as the issues of inadequate governance models in local government have engendered discourse in economic, political and social theory with the aim of identifying the most effective methods for managing limited resources and delivering quality services.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to this paper, as well as the published research results, including the financial aspects of conducting the research, obtaining and using its results, as well as any nonfinancial personal relationships.

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