# The Impact of Poor Governance on Public Service Delivery: A Case Study of the South African Local Government

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## Abstract

The South African local government has seen numerous service delivery protests originating from community dissatisfaction. Lack of accountability and consequence management has had a negative impact on good governance in the local government sphere, putting the provision of basic services at risk. South African citizens have expressed their dissatisfaction by forcibly removing high-ranking public officials from their communities, claiming that they failed to keep promises made during the election campaigning phase. The financial situation of the local government has also been hampered by a lack of good governance, which has a negative impact on public service delivery. In fiscal year 2020/2021, 41 municipalities received clean audits out of 257, demonstrating the extent of the lack of consequence management and poor governance in local government. This article seeks to analyze the impact of poor governance on service delivery and propose strategies or areas for improvement to improve good governance for the prioritization of public service delivery in South Africa. This paper is timely because local governments are struggling to maintain their core function of being a vehicle for effective and efficient service delivery. Due to the higher rates of unemployment and poverty, most South African citizens rely on public services. Because poor governance leads to poor service delivery, marginalized citizens bear the brunt of the impact of poor governance in the South African government.

*Keywords: Accountability; Citizens; Governance; Public services; Protests*

## Introduction

Efficient and effective service delivery is imperative for local communities in South Africa due to high poverty and lack of job opportunities. Unfortunately, this is not the lived reality of most of the country's population. Local government is defined by shortcomings in accountability and service delivery, inadequate governance, insufficient institutional capacity, and instability. By June 2021, 23 municipalities were under management or state intervention, with the number rising to 33 by February 2022. This indicates that most of municipalities had grown so dysfunctional that the federal and/or provincial

governments had to intervene to restore governance, financial management, and service delivery (Auditor General of South Africa, 2022). Chapter 7 of the Constitution sets out a precise governance and administrative framework within which municipalities should operate. This framework is designed to help municipalities develop institutional mechanisms, structures, and systems and to allocate enough resources to provide responsive public administration to the local communities they serve within their jurisdictions. Due to this, the efficiency of each municipality is determined by the extent and breadth of its attempts to enforce Chapter 7 of its Constitution (Koma,2016). Despite precise laws and strong political policy directives, local government typically fails to achieve the full range of its essential goals. Furthermore, elected and appointed officials' perceptions of their discretionary powers under this Act are not undisputed (Madumo,2015). Municipalities in South Africa have identified several recurrent service delivery challenges over the years, including governance concerns and backlogs. In South African service delivery, financial irregularities, corruption, and maladministration are common. The primary causes of violent service delivery protests are local government inefficiency and incompetence (Masuku and Jili,2019). South Africa is a sovereign democratic state that is based on racial equality, human dignity, and a multiparty democratic system that promotes responsibility, responsiveness, and transparency. The federal, provincial, and municipal governments oversee the country. The local sphere is seen as the part of government in charge of providing amenities like water, electricity, and sanitation due to its closeness to communities. However, as seen by violent protests over service delivery throughout the nation and unfavourable audit findings, this domain struggles to carry out its constitutionally required tasks due to unethical conduct, lack of integrity, and zero good governance. The key problems facing local government that invalidate or negate ethical behavior, integrity, and good governance include self-enrichment through tendering procedures when there is tender rigging for personal profit, extortion, and nepotism, or employing friends and family. These immoral actions are widespread in the local government. The lack of penalties for poor performance in South African municipal administration perpetuates it. Ineffective leadership and lack of accountability are some of the factors that contribute to governance failure. Political trust is based on good governance, which is based on the presence of moral standards and check-and-balance systems in all spheres of human activity. According to this idea, citizens expect top-notch moral leadership at all social levels. This reality underlines the need and expectation that politicians and other public servants uphold the principles of accountability, openness, and integrity, which form the foundation of anticorruption initiatives including detection, prevention, and deterrence. According to Hlongwane (2014), good governance continues to be an unreachable ideal, and human rights remain vulnerable, as a result of the South African municipal government's inability to ensure justice, transparency, and accountability on the one hand, and citizens' role uncertainty on the other. Backlogs in housing, water and sanitation, deteriorated links with communities due to poor accountability and communication, issues with the political administrative interface, and tensions within and between parties have a detrimental influence on governance and the provision of basic services. Housing, water, sanitation, and municipal capacity are examples of needed services that are not sufficient.

### *Methodology*

This article relies heavily on secondary data as a method of acquiring useful and important information to achieve its objectives and address the issue statement at the center of the topic. The research examined the corpus of literature to achieve its objectives. The extensive literature was used as a secondary source to analyze the effects of bad governance on the provision of public services and to propose methods for the government to improve good governance for the prioritization of public service delivery. All of these issues were investigated using the qualitative research method. This report comes at a good moment because the local administration is having trouble providing citizens with effective services. This is demonstrated by the numerous rallies against poor service delivery that occur every month across the nation.

*Literature Review of the literature*

**Importance of Good Governance on Public Service Delivery**

Accountability and transparency are two crucial components of good governance, as effective governance is founded on openness and broad stakeholder participation. Good governance is the process of making decisions and implementing or not implementing those decisions. It is the use of authority to manage a nation's financial and social resources for growth (Chaterera,2016). The goal of good governance is to encourage improved service delivery and accountability in the public sector by establishing a standard of good governance. In the public sector, good governance encourages better decision making, more effective resource management, and more accountability (Ali,2017). Human rights cannot be separated from good governance, especially at the local government level. Indeed, human rights provide the performance standards by which government officials can be held responsible. This suggests that in the absence of human rights charters, government officials at all levels of government may find it easier to disregard the rule of law, policies, and misappropriate public resources to harm individuals' fundamental rights (Hlongwane,2015). A well-functioning and well-governed society that seeks to maximize its developmental potential and the welfare of its residents requires an efficient public service. Local governance might and should play an especially significant role in this area, trying to expand services and eliminate inequities, as well as proving to residents that their community can organize itself efficiently and successfully (Kroukamp and Cloete, 2018). The concepts of democratic governance enable people to regard themselves not just as sovereign citizens with a rich and extended Bill of Rights but also as free citizens crafting their own destiny. Citizens' engagement in governance has increased their awareness and comprehension of government programs and processes. This has resulted in people who can offer constructive and informed criticisms of government initiatives, which has improved service delivery (Kimutai and Aluvi, 2018).

**Lack of Good Governance in South Africa Local Government Causes**

**Lack of skills in the local government sphere**

According to Masuku and Jili (2019), municipalities with a lack of abilities in the political and administrative components have a detrimental influence on governance and service delivery. Ineffective management and political infighting were discovered to be major contributors to local government protests (Hough, 2008). According to Naidoo's (2010) study findings, municipal service failures may be mostly linked to a lack of effective leadership and human resource issues. A high rate of irregular or inappropriate appointments, along with low ability, inadequate skill development programs, and bad institutional management. Only 7% of municipalities engaged consultants to fill vacancies in 2020-21, while 62% hired consultants to bring skills that the finance unit lacked. The remaining 31% used consultants due to a lack of skills and a vacancy gap. Because these municipalities cannot understand legitimate financial reporting, they employ consultants year after year without guaranteeing that the skills are transmitted to the municipal staff; thus, what was intended to be a short-term remedy becomes indefinite. Overall, 79% of municipalities rehired consultants from the previous year (South African Auditor General,2022). Municipal officials lack the abilities and skills required to report in accordance with regulations, which has an impact on financial governance (Ijeoma and Nzewi, 2016). In local government, a lack of capacity or talents affects how local governments are managed and, as a consequence, their ability to carry out their mission. The compilation of credible financial statements and performance reports was impeded by important positions and key personnel who lacked the essential competencies and capabilities. The failure to manage and maintain infrastructure has led to deterioration and a rise in service delivery protests. Corruption, cadre deployment, skill shortages, and poor administration have all been cited as reasons for poor local government performance (Ndevu and Mulller,2017).

### Corruption rampant in the local government sphere

The preponderance of protests is due to issues with service delivery and administration, nepotism, fraud, and corruption, as well as the incapacity of councillors and administrators to listen to people. Municipal governance in South Africa is plagued by corruption and inefficiency. Corruption is a fundamental danger to democracy and the rule of law because it represents a lack of ethical leadership and a collapse of institutions meant to enforce good governance practices. (Skenjana et al.,2019). South African municipalities must make aggressive efforts or measures to combat corruption in all its forms. If such measures are implemented successfully, municipalities will be able to save enough money from theft to use to provide quality services to their people. Again, corruption is the absolute opposite of good governance in that government organizations that experience significant levels of corruption would struggle to achieve the ideal of good governance. Incidents of fraud and corruption in all government domains are indicators of governance flaws (Hlongwane, 2015). There have been consistently allegations of corruption in all three branches of the South African government. There are methods for preventing corruption, stopping power misuse, and guaranteeing accountability, but they are rarely used. Although significant progress has been achieved in many areas, the issue of corruption continues to be at the forefront of growth and requires further work to be done to raise the standard of living for people. A legislative basis for procurement in South African municipalities and municipal organizations is provided by the Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003 (Act 56 of 2003). Especially during the procurement process, local government is often manipulated. Service delivery issues, subpar audit findings, and financial management issues, including corruption, are common in South African municipal administration. The possibility of corruption is increased by the procurement process in the local government. Local governments in South Africa often have poor audit results and problems with financial management, such as corruption. Corruption occurs when buyers and sellers collude to break the law to benefit themselves, which leads to bribery. Bribery and fraud are often used. Bribery typically includes some amount of fraud since it must be concealed with falsehoods and dishonesty. Unscrupulous procurement techniques, as opposed to bribery, often result in increased financial waste. In public procurement, both small- and large-scale corruption is prevalent. Petty corruption is most common in contracts for products and services, as well as small local government initiatives (Xolani et al.,2022).

### Cadre deployment approach: awarding political party loyalists with strategic positions without necessary skills and expertise

Political deployment has encouraged corruption through fraud, tenderpreneurs, nepotism (for instance, R3.274 billion contracts were awarded to family members in 2012/2013), cronyism, favouritism, money laundering, and pricing collusion. Corrupt practices in local government include misuse of mayoral funds, unauthorized transfers of municipal funds to third parties, favouritism in procurement procedures, payment of bribes to secure services, misuse of travel allowances, fictitious tenders, non-payment of municipal services by council members, use of municipal facilities for party-political or individual purposes, hiring of people as general workers without posting open positions, and other irregularities. The cadre deployment model has harmed governance and service delivery. This is attributable to the ANC's cadre deployment program, which has filled critical posts in local governments with inexperienced political office bearers preoccupied with personal interests rather than public service performance (Mlambo et al.,2022). According to a 2009 assessment by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, due to the established practice of cadre deployment, local government parastatals in South Africa are in disarray. This investigation exposed many difficult issues that affect local government governance and governance. Numerous communities in the county often struggle with effective task organization, project management, and budget planning, and their ability is limited by the lack of skilled professionals in the technical sectors. In light of cadre deployment, both district and local municipalities struggle with the problem of employing unskilled workers, district municipalities lack project management employees, and the propensity to hire people with political

connections detracts from the knowledge needed in municipalities. Without personnel with this knowledge, organizations and municipalities would struggle to plan, organize, coordinate, and manage budgeting procedures and reporting, which will prevent them from completing their jobs and fulfilling their mandates (Magagula et al.,2022). Cadre-deployment negatively affects service delivery since people in key positions are only politically influential rather than qualified for their posts. In South Africa, corruption has increased as a result of the use of cadres. Political prisoners are not chosen based on their qualifications, backgrounds, or intellectual achievements. They are only used to maintain the ANC's political allies' monopoly on power and patronage (Xolani et al.,2022).

### Unstable Collations ("Marriage of inconvenience") in the local government Sphere

There is a strong belief that party politics and the resulting coalition governance at the local level limit the electorate's voice while also harming service delivery in municipalities due to unstable governance. Given recent national trends and developments, coalition governance has resulted in unstable municipalities and compromised service delivery (Beukes & De Visser, 2021). The local government elections in South Africa in 2011, 2016 and 2021 have made clear that coalitions are a permanent fixture. This system of government must be accepted by political parties, citizens, and lawmakers as an ongoing aspect of South African politics. The international experience has shown that parties with different ideologies can cooperate. However, the preparation and attitude of the participants are everything. The future of coalitions will be distressing unless South Africa's parties and leaders take accountability and support alliances that promote stable and constructive governance (Nzimakwe, 2022).Local governments in South Africa have extensive constitutional autonomy and financial independence, which means they are well-positioned to assert themselves against national and provincial administrations, particularly in cases of political discordance between various levels of government (Pieterse, 2019). This constitutional autonomy and financial independence seem to be not beneficial in some local governments in South Africa, due to marriages of inconvenience that are dysfunctional. Habane and Malinzi (2019) concur that coalitions necessitate sacrifices, such as changing from a party's core doctrine to meet coalition demands. In addition, disagreements arise because of the party representation system, and the notion of stable municipalities becomes a dream. In South Africa, this paradigm jeopardizes quality and long-term service delivery, strong leadership, and effective governance due to party politics that take precedence over the voters' mandate to those elected. The obstacles and opportunities presented by the coalition parties that comprise municipal governance can result in sustainable or collapsed service delivery. Masipa multipartyism is projected to become widespread in post-apartheid South Africa's political system. Although multiparty governance is frequently praised for contributing to effective democracy, power sharing, and consolidation of many policies to bring the country ahead, it can offer significant obstacles to the overall governance of the country (Masipa, 2017). According to Sekatle and Sebola (2020), no approach is optimal to sustain coalitions because numerous concerns must be reviewed. Another consideration for political leaders is that countries differ. As a result, the coalition model cannot simply be implemented because political leaders wish to keep power, as is typically the case in African countries. Even though this paradigm is claimed to offer unity to profoundly divided nations, several complexities could lead to political instability. To have a beneficial impact on municipal government and service delivery in South Africa, the concept of coalition governance must be deconstructed.

### Solutions to Poor Governance in Local Government

### Talent Management in South African Local Government

The South African public sector has significant obstacles when it comes to providing services effectively. This failure to provide a satisfactory level of service is directly attributable to human management strategies that neglect to preserve crucial public sector expertise. Public sector leaders

should prioritize talent management, as qualified individuals are in high demand in government. The current state of local government in South Africa reflects the reality of subpar service delivery, high levels of corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of qualified personnel. Municipalities must be more proactive in finding, employing, developing, and retaining talented people if they want to overcome the problems they face. Every public sector organization depends on the successful commitment and dedication of its human resources or capital to continue operating. The loss of talent and expertise in effective talent management techniques is required in the South African public sector because of staff resignations and their effects on service delivery. The creation of jobs is essential within the South African public service to motivate personnel to produce high quality services, and talent management is the key to engendering these behaviors among public employees, according to Ncemane et al.,2021. In order to reduce poverty, inequality, and unemployment, South Africa's public sector talent management should be seen from the standpoint of a growing nation that demands responsibility and accomplishments. The South African government is looking for people who are adaptable, competent, technically proficient, and creative. The South African public sector must be professionalized, and public servant skills must be raised if the country is to become a capable and thriving state. By implementing a set of deliberate policies and practices to continuously provide qualified and competent individuals to meet the demands of the public sector, talent management supports public service professionalism.

**Professionalisation of Local Government Sphere**

According to Kroukamp and Cloete (2018), corruption cases, ineffective service delivery, local government office holders, and ineptitude generally prevent the South African local government from currently exhibiting the required professionalism. Local government's development function may be supplemented by professionalization and staff development in municipal administration, which would solve the issue of insufficient and sometimes non-existent service delivery. This is especially crucial because municipal services directly and immediately affect the quality of life of residents in their communities. Local government is the part of government that directly serves communities and people. Individuals' fundamental needs are also addressed at this level of government. Water, sanitation, garbage collection, and electricity all have an immediate influence on people's quality of life. Before the profession of local public administration can contribute significantly to the provision of high-quality services, both in quantity and quality, several conditions must be met. According to According to Scheepers (2004), in order for local public administration management to be recognized as a profession, it will be necessary to: attract qualified graduates from tertiary institutions; continuously develop practitioners in the occupation; establish minimum performance standards and requisite competencies; create standards of ethical conduct that are acceptable to the community at large and the profession as a whole; and increase the body of knowledge pertaining to the field. During a five-year period, municipalities spent more than R971 million on financial reporting consultants. Despite municipalities employing officials who should have handled some of the responsibilities, this included R245 million in 2020-21. These funds may have been used to assist personnel in critical roles in acquiring the necessary skills, to strengthen the control environment, or to solve service delivery difficulties (Auditor General of South Africa,2022).

**Combating corruption in the local government domain**

In developing countries like South Africa, where funds are few and must be utilized as efficiently as possible, corruption is particularly harmful due to a lack of trust in the government. This viewpoint allows one to claim that improving service delivery is the primary goal of the public sector's battle against corruption. This could be accomplished by gradually reducing corruption and improving government. The government would save a significant sum of money earmarked for the provision of public services by successfully and efficiently eliminating corruption. The South African government loses a significant sum of tax money each year. Law enforcement continues to be a crucial part of any anticorruption plan. South Africa requires a more comprehensive approach to combating corruption. Existing and prior tactics do not

appear to be effective in combating significant and high-level corruption (Budhram and Geldenhuys,2018). According to the conclusions of Pillay (2016)'s study, South Africa exhibited a wide range of corruption. Corruption is due to systemic and organizational flaws. These issues can only be resolved by holistically addressing corruption and addressing the political/administrative conundrum through collaborative leadership and strong political will. Internal control measures and good financial management activities must be supplemented by a fraud and corruption detection and response plan. Imposing penalties on officials who violate the law assists communities in recovering losses incurred by those officials and deters other officials from violating the law. Municipalities can demonstrate their commitment to responsible financial management practices in this way. However, 60% of the towns did not follow the law on punishments. Noncompliance was material in 54% of municipalities (South African Auditor General,2022).

**Formalisation of Coalition Agreements in the Local Government Sphere**

A coalition government is created when two or more political parties engage in a formal agreement to work together to attain an electoral majority and, as a result, form a government. Coalitions work because the parties who agree to govern in a coalition have comparable ideologies and policies; otherwise, coalitions would fail (Nzimakwe,2022). Consociation can be ensured during coalition government in South Africa if parties sign into formalised and binding coalition agreements that encourage openness and responsibility to voters. Formalized and legally enforceable coalition agreements should be presented with electorates who voted for parties so that they are informed of the contents of the agreements and may judge whether political parties keep their campaign promises. The coalition's content might include economic, core service delivery concerns such as water reticulation, road and housing building, power, civil rights issues, and deadlock-breaking procedures in the case of disagreements and conflicts among partners (Klüver & Spoon, 2016). Formalised, binding, and open coalition agreements can help promote transparency, which is currently lacking because parties create coalition governments behind closed doors to disguise the nature and contents of such agreements by not releasing them to voters. Formalized and legally enforceable coalition agreements can also be used to assess the sincerity and integrity of parties that have joined forces, as well as to penalise parties who do not adhere to coalition agreement provisions in future elections. Formalised and binding coalition agreements also become key legal binding documents utilised by the South African legal system to compel a party that violates these conditions to respect them to maintain the coalition government's stability (Makole et al.,2022). According to Mutereko (2022), the foundation of any successful coalition governance is a written coalition agreement that is influenced by mutual understanding. Unfortunately, these agreements are uncommon or only exist as non-binding informal collaboration arrangements. One of the biggest causes of coalition governments failing might be the absence of agreements. An essential point to note is that later coalition agreements might be damaging to the council's activities in the absence of written agreements. Furthermore, the lack of openness regarding the coalition government's agenda adds to the uncertainty (Khambule,2022). It is regarded superfluous and unreasonable to propose a new legislation to handle coalition politics to resolve such a situation in which coalition administrations produce inefficient service delivery. What may be agreed upon, however, is that components of South Africa's governance structures must be reformed to ensure more effective service delivery through multiparty leadership (Makgale, 2020). South Africa, like other African countries, faces major problems due to poor governance, corruption, lack of accountability, and maladministration. Coalition governance is intended to be a solution to improving governance principles. A coalition agreement's major responsibilities are to unite leaders from various parties, increase communication among them, and contain or facilitate settlements of interparty dispute. Following the end of discussions between parties, a coalition agreement should be raised to the status of a guiding text for coalitions that all members engaged should value (Nzimakwe,2022).

## Concluding Remarks

Poor service delivery, corruption, lack of consequence management, lack of skills, and lack of accountability characterize the South African local government. These obstacles impede the efficient delivery of services. The Auditor General of South Africa issues audit reports on municipalities' bad conditions, but the financial position and service provision worsen rather than improve. The government must promote accountability and openness, which would promote good governance and improve the state of the public sector. Because public service delivery is essential in South Africa, many residents rely on the government to provide services. This increases the importance of the government prioritizing public service delivery. The constitution guarantees South Africans access to public services. Political will and self-less public servants are what could save the South African public sector. The coalition government formation major focus must be to promote accountability and good governance; however, this is not the case in South Africa, many coalition governments have failed since South African politicians are more concerned about staying in power, rather than service delivery. There is a need for responsive and accountable governance in all spheres of government in South Africa if the needs of the marginalized are to be met.

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