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**An Analysis of the Developmental Local Government  
Agenda for Good Governance in South Africa**

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**Abstract**

The concept of a failed developmental local government agenda for good governance in South Africa is examined in this study. These developmental ideas include modernisation, globalisation, change, and development. The study concentrates on the forces supporting and opposing transformation. It keeps analysing different areas of developmental local government and challenges with the delivery of basic essential services by municipalities. The study explains the traits of modernisation and the issues with development theory in terms of modernisation. Additionally, the significance of globalisation and innovations, as well as their benefits and drawbacks, will be covered in the paper. Qualitative methods of data collection and data analysis are employed by the researcher. The paper will also offer suggestions and potential recommendations for change, innovation, growth, modernisation, and globalisation in the delivery of basic services in South Africa.

**Keywords:** *Failed Promise, Developmental Local Government, Government, System, Transformation, State.*

## **Introduction**

The idea of a developmental local government in South Africa aims to address specific socioeconomic problems at the local level. These socioeconomic problems are addressed through the provision of essential municipal services, like infrastructure, an inclusive local economy, and employment opportunities. These are pertinent issues that affect local communities, and municipalities must create doable strategies and priorities to keep a viable growth agenda. Participation of pertinent parties, including local communities, continues to be a key component of the overall strategy to guarantee development is people-centred (Phago, 2008; Van der Waldt, 2018). Given policy decisions and implementation, municipal policies should be, in fact, grounded and tailored to the local environment. Given this, the White Paper on Local Government of 1998 offers an imagined and fundamental description of developmental local government through maximisation of social development and economic growth, integration, and coordination, democratic development, and leadership and learning (Koma, 2012; Landsberg & Graham, 2017). In addition to recognising these traits, the White Paper further defines expectations for local government's role in promoting local economic development to encourage job creation and strengthen the local economy. Developmental local government in South Africa faces various difficulties despite its best efforts. These difficulties include hiring inexperienced political deployees, discouraging workers, political meddling, outdated institutional structures and technologies, declining funds, and the inability to adapt to changing policy imperatives (Parnell, Pieterse, Swilling & Wooldridge, 2002). Given these ongoing difficulties, many rural municipalities, which account for a sizeable portion (more than 60%) of local government in South Africa, have obviously veered away from their developmental local government objective (Ncube & Monnakgotla, 2016:90). Rural towns frequently lack the capacity to create and implement their own policies, as well as the requisite human and financial resources (Munzhedzi, 2020) due to the poor skill set that is available in the rural municipalities.

This article argues that several municipalities were revealed in the local government audit reports of 2021 by AGSA (2022) to be hopelessly broken, dysfunctional, and incapable of achieving their development goals. This article used a good governance development approach to evaluate these particular characteristics of developmental local government, particularly in municipalities that are largely rural and are faced with a lack of skills and capacity, inadequate procurement

procedures, leadership issues, poor management, and political interference (Ababio, Vyas-Doorgapersad & Mzini, 2008:6). A new paradigm shift is needed to bring in a professional local government as opposed to the current politically induced system afflicted by the socio-economic issues as described in this article. This is seen through the lens of a good governance approach. This article also covers a discussion on the issues surrounding rurality and development in areas where there aren't any effective developmental activities, as revealed by IDPs of various municipalities under study. In contexts marked by inadequate institutional capacity, municipal interests often prioritise political agendas over genuine community concerns. The local development plans must now take COVID-19 effects, climate change, the ongoing effects of food insecurity, and government regulations where conformity must be maintained into account. Therefore, it is necessary to implement digital methods that are available to both citizens and municipal officials.

## **Literature Review**

The research study's cornerstone is the literature review; each researcher must thoroughly read it in advance in order to compare and contrast topics that are relevant to the current investigation. Moreover, it helps the researchers pinpoint the area that requires investigation. This perspective holds that the theoretical framework and the literature are inextricably intertwined. To properly develop and comprehend the various interwoven components of literature, this study is thus guided by Vygotsky's social constructivism theory. According to Mitchel and Myles (2011), social constructivism holds that human behaviour and interaction affect the material reality, which is reliant on the dynamic normative and epistemic interpretation of the material world.

Various political, economic, and governance ideas that aim to clarify how states might actively support development and alleviate social and economic inequality are the foundation of the idea of a developmental government. To foster long-term development, a government that actively shapes political, social, and economic results in addition to upholding law and order is referred to as developmental government. The experiences of both established and developing nations can be used to trace the development of developmental government, including notable turning points in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The growth of government across time provides important insights into its advantages and disadvantages in various settings.

### ***The Developmental State Model in East Asia***

The "developmental state" model is the most well-known instance of developmental government in the 20th century, and it had a significant impact on East Asia, especially in Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. The state's active involvement in industrial policy, economic transformation, and economic planning are characteristics of the developmental state paradigm. By encouraging industrialisation, investing in human capital, and strategically directing the market, these states placed a high priority on economic growth and development (Johnson, 1982).

For example, by implementing an aggressive industrial policy after World War II, the Japanese government significantly contributed to the nation's economic change. The Japanese government, guided by bureaucrats and economic planners, fostered a competitive, export-oriented economy by strategically investing in vital sectors such as steel, electronics, and automotive production (Amsden, 1989). Similarly, the government of South Korea, led by Park Chung-hee (1961–1979), put in place specific industrial strategies meant to diversify the economy, especially by encouraging heavy industries and growth focused on exports (Kim, 1997). By successfully promoting quick industrialisation and economic expansion, these East Asian developmental states turned their nations into significant actors in the world economy.

Political stability, efficient bureaucratic management, a significant concentration of power, and a readiness to interfere with market systems in order to support industrial development are some of the main reasons for the success of these developmental nations (Evans, 1995). According to Haggard (1990), the developmental state model's detractors contend that it can also result in inequality, diminished political freedom, and authoritarian governance. Notwithstanding these critiques, the East Asian model has shaped perspectives on developmental governance in both established and developing nations, providing a crystal-clear illustration of how the government can serve as a stimulant for economic expansion and advancement.

### ***The Role of Developmental Government in Latin America***

The emergence of import-substitution industrialisation (ISI) programmes in the middle of the 20th century gave rise to the idea of developmental government in Latin America. Countries like Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil implemented strategies to promote domestic industrialisation and lessen reliance on imports. These policies were predicated on the idea

that the state might take the lead in fostering economic growth by supporting emerging industries with subsidies, protectionist measures, and state-owned businesses (Baer, 1972).

In the post-World War II era, when many nations aimed to lessen their dependency on the US and Europe by promoting indigenous industries, the ISI approach was especially prevalent in Latin America (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). The state greatly aided this process by establishing national industries, regulating commerce, and extending credit. For instance, the government of Brazil backed important industries like steel and auto production and built extensive infrastructure projects (Evans, 1979). These policies resulted in increased public debt, inefficiencies, and inhibited innovation, even if they assisted many Latin American nations in achieving some level of industrialisation and economic progress. Many of these nations were also exposed to foreign economic shocks due to their excessive reliance on the government and protectionism (Valenzuela, 1992).

The region's debt problems and the ISI strategy's failure by the 1980s caused a move toward market-oriented reforms such as deregulation, privatisation, and trade liberalisation. Given that many Latin American nations chose neoliberal economic policies in response to their economic difficulties, this marked a departure from the developmental government paradigm (Sachs, 1989). Nonetheless, the history of state-led industrialisation and developmental governance continues to be a crucial point of reference in discussions about regional development.

### ***Developmental Government in Africa: From Colonialism to Independence***

Africa's history of developmental governance has always been significantly influenced by the colonial past and the difficulties faced by recently independent countries in the middle of the 20th century. Many African nations implemented development plans throughout the post-colonial era that prioritised government involvement in the economy. Aiming to promote industrialisation and economic self-sufficiency, several African nations established state-owned businesses, nationalised important industries, and implemented centralised economic planning in the early post-independence era (Bates, 1981). For example, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, African nations like Ghana and Tanzania experimented with socialist-inspired policies in the 1960s and 1970s. Whereas Nyerere's Ujamaa (African socialism) policy in Tanzania aimed to collectivise agriculture and encourage self-reliance,

Nkrumah's government in Ghana pursued ambitious state-led industrialisation projects, including the construction of extensive infrastructure projects (Nkrumah, 1965; Nyerere, 1968). These programmes soon faced major obstacles, such as inefficiencies, corruption, and the inability to create enough cash to support the developmental agenda, despite their initial successes in fostering national unity and infrastructure development (Bates, 1981).

Similarly, the economic crises and the influence of global financial organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s compelled several African nations to renounce state-led developmental programmes. According to Mkandawire and Soludo (1999), these organisations promoted structural adjustment plans that gave market liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation precedence over government involvement. However, the concept of progressive government continues to heavily influence discussions on African governance and development, especially in relation to fostering inclusive growth and reducing poverty.

### ***The Post-Colonial Developmental State in the Middle East***

Following colonisation, developmental governments were put in place in the Middle East with an emphasis on economic modernisation and nation-building. The government of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1954–1970) in Egypt, for instance, implemented a state-driven model of growth that prioritised industrialisation, land reforms, and the nationalisation of important industries, including manufacturing and agriculture (Springborg, 1993). A period of state-led industrialisation and growth, marked by large-scale projects like the Aswan High Dam and substantial infrastructure investments, was brought about by Nasser's policies. Similar to this, oil-rich Gulf States like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates have modernised their economies and constructed top-notch infrastructure through state-led developmental programmes, largely funded by oil export earnings (Hertog, 2010). In order to achieve rapid modernisation, these nations undertook massive state projects in the areas of social welfare, infrastructure, health, and education. However, because these economies are still reliant on oil earnings, the long-term viability of these strategies has been questioned (Fasano & Iqbal, 2003).

### ***Contemporary Global Influence and the Shift Toward Good Governance***

In the current global context, the idea of "good governance," which prioritises accountability, openness, and citizen participation, has come to be associated more and more with developmental government. According to the World Bank and other international organisations, governments must be both effective in their interventionist duties and sensitive to the demands of their citizens in order for development to be sustainable (World Bank, 1992). The global trend toward democratisation, decentralisation, and the advancement of human rights is reflected in this change in emphasis from state-led development to good governance, particularly in the wake of the fall of numerous authoritarian governments in the late 20th century.

Finally, it can be said that the history of developmental government shows that market forces and government intervention in the advancement of development have a complicated connection. From East Asia's developmental state model to Africa's and Latin America's socialist experiments, the state has played a pivotal role in determining economic policies and results. However, in many areas market-oriented reforms have become more popular due to the drawbacks of state-led development, such as inefficiencies, corruption, and the requirement for democratic accountability. Developmental government is now strongly associated with good governance ideals, which aim to strike a balance between citizen engagement, accountability, transparency, and governmental intervention.

The goal of a democratic, inclusive, and progressive state is the foundation of South Africa's developmental local government programme, which was implemented following the end of apartheid. According to the philosophy underlying developmental local government, community involvement, decentralisation, and service delivery are essential to achieving social and economic change at the local level. Although this agenda's main objectives—such as ensuring good government, fostering equitable development, and eliminating poverty—are lofty, there have been many obstacles to their actual implementation. Both the agenda's achievements and shortcomings are reflected in the literature on developmental local government in South Africa, especially with regard to governance, service delivery, citizen participation, and the larger institutional framework.

## **Research Methodology**

This work used a qualitative research approach that applied the interpretive paradigm. According to Myers (2012), qualitative research aims to achieve a deeper understanding of individuals within their specific social and cultural contexts. As a result, the researcher is regarded as the main tool for gathering and analysing data. The study used two executive managers and a municipal manager from each municipality, and Councillors, municipal workers, and ratepayers were asked for information using the purposive and sample procedures. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and observational instruments. This work, which focused on municipalities based in nine provinces of South Africa, likewise employed a case study research design. According to Schofield (2020), sampling is a technique that considers everybody who is accessible and willing to participate in the study if they meet the necessary requirements. This study adhered to the guidelines of qualitative research since it aimed to ascertain how officials' work supporting the administrative performance of municipalities may enhance services and foster good governance and competency. In this context, a sample of two executive managers and a municipal manager from each municipality were chosen for this study. In-depth interviews and observation were the main methods used to gather data on the participants' experiences. Johnson and Christensen (2012) stress that in-depth details regarding a participant's ideas, opinions, knowledge, logic, motives, and emotions regarding a subject can be gleaned through qualitative interviews. According to Saez, semi-structured interviews involve a conversational and improvisational process throughout, with key points and responses being recorded on a form intended to assess and categorise responses. This allows the interviewee to provide a wealth of useful information while presenting the interview as more of a casual discussion than a question-and-answer session.

On the other hand, the researchers conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. This suggests that semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to choose the format, subject matter, and order of the questions they would ask participants as well as the questioning strategy. To obtain precise and comprehensive information, the researchers created semi-structured interview questions for senior managers and municipal managers to use during the interviews. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of a participant's opinions, perspectives, or narratives regarding a specific subject, researchers also employed semi-structured interviews. Concurrently, tape recordings of

the interviews were created, notes were taken as a backup, and data transcription was done to guarantee accuracy. According to this perspective, the interviews gave the participants the opportunity to share significant or meaningful information about the topic being discussed with them in their own terms, without being constrained by defined categories. During the interview process, participants sought clarity on claims or queries, an interaction that highlights a key advantage over using only a questionnaire. tool. Maree argues that interviews make intuitive sense to lay audiences and have high credibility and face validity. Semi-structured interviews were employed in this investigation. According to Johnson and Christensen (2012), they also allow individuals to project their own definitions of the world. They allow participants to bring up and explore topics that might not have been covered in structured questions, and they provide flexibility rather than rigidity in the order of talks Denzin and Lincoln (2011). A series of related questions were posed by the researchers to informants during semi-structured interviews. In support of this, Mertens (2014) states that semi-structured interviews follow an interview guide, which is a list of required questions and subjects. The interviewer uses a range of strategies to investigate and determine when the discussion on a topic has met the study objectives. In this sense, the interviewer covers each topic by asking one or more questions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In South Africa, the concept of developmental local government has become a key component of the post-apartheid political system. By tackling poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment locally, it seeks to incorporate local government into the larger national agenda for democratic governance. The achievements and failures of this agenda can be examined from a number of theoretical angles, such as participatory governance theory, good governance theory, and developmental state theory.

The study is anchored in three theories: developmental state theory, good governance theory, and other

### ***1. Developmental State Theory***

Developmental state theory highlights the state's proactive, interventionist role in directing economic development. The goal of South Africa's post-apartheid developmental local government agenda is

to enable local governments to act as catalysts for social and economic change, especially in underserved communities (Parnell & Pieterse, 2017). In order to ensure that local governments function as development engines rather than as administrative entities, the state is entrusted with creating policies that promote regional economic growth and improve service delivery. The issue here is the discrepancy between the capacity of local government and the state's developmental goals, which results in inefficiencies and annoyance among the populace (Cloete & De Coning, 2021).

## ***2. Good Governance Theory***

In public management, good governance philosophy emphasises responsiveness, accountability, transparency, and engagement. These tenets are essential to the developmental local government agenda, which mandates that local governments provide efficient and equitable public services and answer to the people (Fick, 2018). It is unclear whether the promise of good governance has been fulfilled, though, as corruption, poor management, and inefficient service delivery have plagued South African local governments despite the emphasis on good governance (Shokane, 2017). There are still many obstacles to overcome in order to strengthen governance frameworks and guarantee that municipalities adhere to responsiveness and transparency criteria (Mchunu, 2021).

## ***3. Participatory Governance Theory***

To make sure that policies represent the needs and goals of communities, local governments should include residents in decision-making processes, according to the participatory governance theory. The developmental local government paradigm, which seeks to increase public participation in local governance, depends heavily on this notion. Even though public involvement frameworks exist, real engagement is frequently low, particularly in historically underprivileged groups (Fick, 2018). The absence of efficient involvement procedures and the significant gulf between citizens and local government representatives hamper the efficacy of developmental local government, frequently leading to citizen alienation and disillusionment (Mathebula, 2019).

To sum up, the theoretical frameworks of participatory governance, good governance, and developmental state theory offer a thorough lens through which to examine the advantages and disadvantages of South Africa's developmental local government programme. Building capacity,

guaranteeing public involvement, and fighting corruption must receive more emphasis due to the practical implementation issues, even though the goal of a more inclusive, accountable, and developing local government is still relevant. These frameworks emphasise the necessity of a more integrated approach to governance, in which individuals, local government, and the state cooperate to accomplish developmental objectives.

### **The Promise and Evolution of Developmental Local Government**

Following South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, the idea of developmental local government was born as part of the post-apartheid administration's attempts to rectify the inequalities brought about by apartheid. The idea of a developmental local government was essential to the idea of a "developmental state," according to Parnell and Pieterse (2017), in which local governments would play a major role in boosting social services, encouraging economic growth, and advancing democratic governance at the local level. According to the Department of Provincial and Local Government's 1998 White Paper on Local Government, local governments should be able to provide housing, water, and sanitation, as well as jobs and economic opportunities for historically underserved communities.

The democratic ideals of decentralisation and the understanding that local governments might better respond to community needs served as the foundation for this vision. In addition to providing services, local governments were supposed to be in the forefront of development by promoting job creation, local economic growth, and poverty alleviation (Siddle & Koelble, 2018). However, a number of problems, such as political meddling, capacity shortages, corruption, and a lack of real citizen participation, have undermined the achievement of this ambitious programme, making its execution much more difficult and inconsistent.

### **The Governance Challenges in Developmental Local Government**

The governance issues that have prevented South Africa's developmental local government from being implemented successfully have been highlighted in a significant amount of research. According to Cloete and De Coning (2021), the fragmentation of governance is one of the main challenges to establishing the developmental state at the local level. With the national and provincial governments having a big say in local matters, South Africa's complicated structure of intergovernmental interactions

can occasionally cause misunderstandings and hold up decision-making. Coordination between municipalities and higher governmental levels is frequently difficult, which results in inefficiencies and fragmented service delivery (Cloete & De Coning, 2021).

The efficiency of local government has also been severely weakened by political meddling and corruption. According to Shokane (2017), corruption and political favouritism have been widespread at the local level, with municipal officials frequently misusing or mismanaging public funds for their own benefit. Residents' quality of life has been directly impacted by the theft of money intended for service delivery, especially in underserved communities. Furthermore, the limited capacity of local governments, particularly regarding financial management and human resources, has made it challenging for municipalities to execute their developmental mandates (Mchunu, 2021). The lack of technical expertise received by local government representatives in fields like finance, project management, and urban planning exacerbates this.

### **Service Delivery and Developmental Local Government**

Improving the delivery of public services, especially in the areas of housing, electricity, water, and sanitation, was one of the main goals of developing local government. Nonetheless, a number of studies have revealed the inadequacies in the provision of these fundamental services. According to Crankshaw (2020), many municipalities still struggle to deliver reliable and high-quality services, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, even after significant infrastructure investment after 1994. Housing, sanitation, and electrical backlogs are still present, despite some towns' progress in modernising informal settlements and delivering essential services (Mathebula, 2019).

Water and sanitation services, in particular, remain critical areas of concern. According to Mathebula (2019), while some municipalities have achieved near-universal access to basic water supply, many others face challenges related to infrastructure maintenance, water quality, and equitable distribution. Inadequate investment in the maintenance of existing infrastructure has resulted in the deterioration of service delivery in some areas, particularly in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces (Ferguson & Vermaak, 2020). Similarly, the provision of housing shows disparity; some local governments have achieved significant progress in reducing the housing backlog, but others have failed to meet targets due to inefficiencies and resource mismanagement (Crankshaw, 2020).

Furthermore, local governments are under a lot of pressure to build infrastructure and offer sufficient services as a result of South Africa's population becoming more urbanized. Siddle and Koelble (2018) contend that the issues of informal settlements, poor infrastructure, and inadequate sanitation have been made worse by the rapid urbanization and the inability of local government to control growth. Municipalities' low financial resources exacerbate these problems, making it challenging to address the difficulties in providing services.

### **Citizen Participation and the Role of Community Engagement**

Another essential component of developmental local government is citizen involvement, which aims to guarantee that communities actively participate in decision-making and that local government responds to their demands. However, the literature shows that although there are many procedures and rules for public involvement in local governance, including ward committees, public hearings, and community-based planning, citizen engagement has frequently been insufficient or shallow (Fick, 2018). Participatory structures are frequently underutilised or underfunded, and many communities feel cut out from the decision-making processes (Fick, 2018).

The lack of confidence between citizens and local government representatives is one major issue. In many places, residents believe their issues are not being handled, which causes them to become apathetic or frustrated (Siddle and Koelble, 2018). In such instances, officials or political leaders have already taken choices, and the consultation process is viewed as a formality. This makes it more difficult for local government to be a real force for engagement and development (Mathebula, 2019).

Furthermore, how much residents can influence decision-making depends in large part on the political environment in which local governments function. According to Siddle and Koelble (2018), ward council members are occasionally held to higher standards by their party structures than by the communities they represent, and political parties frequently control local government systems. Because of this top-down political system, citizen participation has been less successful, and local governments frequently fall short of giving people the capacity to actively direct their own development.

## **The Future of Developmental Local Government in South Africa**

Notwithstanding the difficulties, there is a growing understanding that South Africa's developing local government must change to accommodate communities' shifting requirements. According to Parnell and Pieterse (2017), municipalities should adopt new governance models to encourage diversity and efficient service delivery. This includes adopting more adaptable, context-specific approaches to service delivery and urban planning, as well as using technology to enhance communication between the public and local government.

Furthermore, Mchunu (2021) stresses the significance of increasing local government capacity in order to guarantee that municipalities are better able to handle their obligations. This involves developing systems that help communities better manage their infrastructure and budgets as well as funding the education and training of local officials. In addition, overcoming the difficulties towns have and guaranteeing the effective use of resources would require increased intergovernmental cooperation between the federal, provincial, and local governments (Cloete & De Coning, 2021).

The outcomes of South Africa's developing local government programme have been uneventful. Significant obstacles still exist in the areas of service delivery, citizen involvement, governance, and corruption, despite the fact that it has helped democratise and decentralise governance. The literature emphasises that significant changes in governance structures, improved service delivery capabilities, and a greater dedication to citizen participation are necessary for the developmental local government agenda to be successful. Local government will continue to play a critical role in meeting community needs and making sure that the developmental state's promises are fulfilled as South Africa struggles with inequality and underdevelopment.

## **Findings and Discussions**

The goal of South Africa's progressive local government agenda, which was implemented in 1994 as part of the nation's democratic transition, was to establish a more responsive, equitable, and inclusive governing structure that could support social and economic advancement locally. But as the research and real-world experiences indicate, putting this agenda into action has not been without its difficulties, with varying degrees of success. This section will analyse the implications for South Africa's local government system and summarise the main conclusions

from the data that is derived from the primary respondents interviewed by the researcher.

### ***Governance and Institutional Capacity Challenges***

The persistent governance issues at the local level are among the most recurring conclusions in the literature on South Africa's developmental local government. According to Cloete and De Coning (2021), the division of governance structures among the national, provincial, and local levels of government has resulted in inefficiencies, misunderstandings, and occasionally conflicting priorities, all of which have made it more difficult to carry out developmental policies locally. Difficulty coordinating operations with higher governmental levels is common for many towns, often resulting in inadequate or delayed responses to local requirements.

Additionally, a major obstacle still exists in the institutional ability of municipal governments. According to Mchunu (2021), many municipalities struggle with a shortage of human resources, competence, and skills, which limits their capacity to manage resources and carry out policies. Many local governments lack qualified personnel with technical competence in areas like infrastructure development, financial administration, and urban planning, especially in rural and peri-urban areas. Many local municipalities are consequently unable to promptly and effectively handle fundamental service delivery requirements, such as water and sanitation.

Furthermore, the ability of local governments to carry out their mandates has been weakened by political meddling and corruption in municipal governance. According to Shokane (2017), political patronage networks frequently have an impact on resource distribution, which has resulted in the misappropriation of public monies. These governance shortcomings have made it more difficult for towns to foster development and offer essential services like electricity, clean water, and housing to their residents.

### ***Ineffective Service Delivery and Infrastructure Development***

One of the most obvious flaws in South Africa's developmental local government programme is its failure to sufficiently address service delivery. Basic services still have a large backlog, especially in historically underserved communities, despite notable advancements in some areas. Although the South African government has made significant

investments in infrastructure development, Crankshaw (2020) points out that many communities continue to face poor service delivery, particularly in the areas of housing, sanitation, and water.

The incapacity of local governments to maintain and improve infrastructure is one of the fundamental problems. Although many communities have made progress in delivering basic water and sanitation services, Mathebula (2019) notes that maintaining the current infrastructure is still a significant concern. The poorest neighbourhoods are disproportionately affected by the growing backlogs in service delivery that municipalities face as a result of infrastructure deterioration and inadequate investment in repairs. Furthermore, Ferguson and Vermaak (2020) contend that the disparity in service delivery between urban and rural areas is growing since urban governments frequently receive more funding and resources than their rural counterparts, which further solidifies inequalities in service accessibility.

Housing presents an equally complex challenge. Although there has been progress in the construction of homes for the impoverished by the federal government, local governments frequently lack the administrative competence necessary to successfully plan and carry out housing projects. In many housing complexes, inadequate planning results in overcrowded informal settlements and restricts access to essential services, claims Crankshaw (2020). This is made worse by local governments' low funding, which frequently prevents them from being able to invest in significant infrastructure improvements.

### ***Citizen Participation and Empowerment***

Public participation by citizens is another essential element of the developing local government agenda. Local governments are specifically urged under the policy to involve communities in decision-making and make sure that service delivery satisfies the requirements of the populace. In practice, meaningful citizen participation is still scarce, according to the literature. Even though there exist procedures for public input, like ward committees and public hearings, Fick (2018) contends that they are frequently useless or underutilised.

The lack of confidence between residents and representatives of the local government is one of the main problems mentioned in the literature. Communities in South Africa frequently feel cut off from the political process because they do not observe noticeable changes in their day-to-day lives, claim Siddle and Koelble (2018). The idea that local officials and politicians are more answerable to political parties or private

interests than to the community they represent exacerbates this mistrust. Because elites make decisions without actually consulting the impacted groups, public involvement procedures are frequently viewed as symbolic rather than substantial (Mathebula, 2019).

Furthermore, true community involvement may be hindered by local political party supremacy. Ward council members frequently serve as go-betweens for communities and political parties rather than as advocates for the interests of their residents, as Siddle and Koelble (2018) point out. This political dynamic weakens the foundations of participatory democracy at the local level by limiting the ability of regular citizens to actively engage in government processes.

### ***Corruption and Mismanagement at the Local Level***

The objective for developmental local government has found major challenges in the form of corruption and poor management. Various studies report that political meddling and ineffective management lead to the misappropriation or waste of funds intended for development and service delivery. According to Shokane (2017), institutional supervision is often inadequate, and there is a lack of political will to address corruption, which has become a widespread issue in South African municipalities.

The diversion of resources meant for service delivery has a direct influence on the quality of life in impoverished and vulnerable groups, where the effects of corruption are most noticeable. In some localities, the absence of accountability has resulted in subpar infrastructure projects, inflated tenders, and improper use of public funds. Citizens are disillusioned as a result of these problems, believing that the local government has not lived up to its promises. According to Mchunu (2021), reducing corruption and guaranteeing the efficient use of public funds require the implementation of more robust oversight and auditing systems as well as other accountability measures.

### ***The Future of Developmental Local Government: Opportunities and Challenges***

Opportunities exist to revive the developmental local government agenda despite these obstacles; one significant chance lies in the growing use of technology in municipal governance. Ferguson and Vermaak (2020) assert that digital platforms can facilitate more transparent and effective service delivery by enhancing contact between citizens and local governments.

Additionally, e-government tools can help local governments cut corruption, expedite procurement procedures, and better manage resources.

Furthermore, Mchunu (2021) contends that for towns to fulfil their developmental goals, it is imperative that local government capacity be increased. This includes funding the education and training of municipal employees, enhancing financial administration, and bolstering local governments' ability to organise and carry out development initiatives. In order to overcome local governments' resource constraints, intergovernmental cooperation is also essential. A more coordinated strategy between the federal, provincial, and municipal governments may help guarantee that resources are distributed efficiently and that local governments are better prepared to handle development issues, according to Cloete and De Coning (2021).

In summary, research on South Africa's developmental local government agenda has shown both the model's potential and its drawbacks. Although decentralisation, service delivery, and public participation have made significant strides, the efficacy of local government is still being threatened by issues with governance, corruption, poor infrastructure, and political meddling. Comprehensive changes that increase accountability, build institutional capacity, and encourage greater public participation in local governance are all necessary to address these problems. The ability to construct more responsive, transparent, and inclusive governing systems that can meet the intricate requirements of local communities is crucial for the future of developmental local government in South Africa, notwithstanding these obstacles.

## **Conclusion**

The probable consequences of the post-COVID-19 situation must be considered in a pertinent manner for developmental local government with a programme that is sound for the local economic sustainable development agenda. The developmental local government model provides a framework for sustaining municipal development agendas. To advance and enhance services, innovative initiatives are needed in rural towns struggling with significant development backlogs. Repurposing municipalities to serve their inhabitants in accordance with their constitutional purpose is necessary to address the ongoing issues caused by underperforming municipal institutions. In essence, the municipal system might be made more professional to meet the political issue at

hand, particularly in the post-COVID-19 period when it is predicted that digitisation will take centre stage in most municipal tasks, including those in remote communities. The post-COVID-19 period's consideration, as seen through the lens of the developmental local government approach, maintains that a developmental agenda is necessary and that municipal processes need to be overhauled. It also recommends that a merit-based system be taken into consideration and that political interference be reduced. Additionally, in order to support rural communities, relationships with reputable higher education institutions are crucial. New kinds of digital engagement also need to be considered. A pertinent local government development goal would be realised in that way.

## **Recommendations**

South Africa's post-apartheid goal of advancing democracy, enhancing service delivery, and empowering local communities included the introduction of the idea of developmental local government in the 1990s. The development of local government is widely viewed as a failure, as the promise of excellent local governance has been undermined by several significant obstacles.

The following suggestions aim to tackle these issues, accompanied by references to offer background information:

### **1. Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms**

It is imperative that local governments implement accountable and transparent governing procedures. Stronger financial management, improved oversight, and the development of reliable mechanisms for public involvement in decision-making are all part of this.

### **2. Enhance Capacity Building**

More thorough capacity-building initiatives for local government representatives are required. To guarantee efficient service delivery, proper training is crucial, particularly in the areas of financial management, procurement, and human resources.

### **3. Improve Public Service Delivery**

The quality of essential services, including housing, power, water, and sanitation, should be improved by local governments, with an emphasis on distributing them fairly to underserved areas.

### **4. Promote Citizen Participation**

The public must actively participate in the processes of monitoring and decision-making. More forums for public participation must be established by local governments, particularly in underserved areas.

### **5. Strengthening Intergovernmental Relations**

To maintain coherence and prevent fragmentation in service delivery and development projects, there has to be more cooperation between the three levels of government.

### **6. Address Corruption and Malfeasance**

It is crucial to address corruption at the local government level. The misuse of resources can be reduced by bolstering anti-corruption organisations, upholding legal frameworks, and encouraging moral leadership.

### **7. Increase Investment in Infrastructure**

To promote economic growth while improving the standard of living, local governments must give infrastructure development and maintain top priority, particularly in underprivileged areas.

It is becoming clear then that to achieve the developmental local government agenda and fulfil the promise of good governance for all its residents, South Africa's local governments can act by tackling these crucial issues.

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