

Local government at the heart of POOR SERVICE DELIVERY

By Edward Thabani Mdlongwa

South Africa enters a new dawn and post-Mandela era after 20 years of democracy and citizens are eagerly anticipating a better life going forward.

The national elections were held recently with the African National Congress (ANC) retaining power and President Jacob Zuma returning as President of the country for a final five-year term. Despite the ANC returning to power, service delivery remains one of the biggest challenges that the government faces. In the 20 years of democracy one has seen some strides made in certain key sectors of the economy like education and health, however, at a local government level the quality and efficient delivery of basic services to people like water, sanitation, housing and electricity remains a huge challenge. In recent years one has witnessed an escalation in the number of violent service delivery protests across the country with people frustrated at the slow pace of delivery and also at corrupt practices that have become endemic in some municipalities. It is important to look at some of the challenges within local government in order to understand how they hamper service delivery.

Key challenges hampering service delivery

Some of the key challenges within local government that are hampering service delivery include the following:

- Human resource challenges with regards to skills and capacity in municipalities. Many municipalities across South Africa just do not have the people with the requisite technical skills and in cases where they do there is sometimes a shortage of skilled personnel who can assist the municipality in rendering quality services to the people.
- Corruption and maladministration. In many municipalities corruption and maladministration has become endemic and the lack of accountability or transparency in rendering services to the people is a cause for concern.
- Financial challenges. Across South Africa a number of local municipalities are either bankrupt, or on the brink of bankruptcy which affects their ability to provide quality service delivery to the people.
- Lack of awareness and lack of knowledge by communities with regards to their rights. This hampers service delivery as communities do not know how or who to approach when they face challenges regarding service delivery in their communities. This allows some municipal officials to act with impunity knowing that the community will not challenge this as they are not aware of their rights or the channels to follow when these rights have been abused.
- Slow rollout of services. When local municipalities do get their act together and render services to the people often this is a slow and tedious process which hampers the quality and efficiency of service delivery.

One can see that they are quite a number of challenges within local government that hamper service delivery. In order for South Africa to truly forge forward in this post-Mandela era it is of paramount importance that the government pays particular attention to the quality and efficient delivery of basic services. Some of the key ways to address these challenges are discussed below.

Ways to address Service Delivery Challenges in Local Government

- Increased awareness and education programmes to be carried out by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in communities to educate them on their rights, how to participate in municipal affairs and to make them understand key aspects of legislation like the Municipal System Act of 2000 and the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) of 2003 and how it impacts on them.
- Corrupt officials must be investigated and dismissed timeously if found guilty of committing criminal offence in order to ensure the integrity of municipality and for the community to have confidence in the municipality that corrupt officials will be dealt with under law and corruption will not be tolerated.
- Municipalities must make clear efforts through improved modes of communication to encourage public participation in key municipal processes like the public consultations for the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). The use of various modes of communication like posters, memos and community radio stations which are more accessible to ordinary community members must be used to communicate rather than websites or newspapers which may not be accessible to ordinary members of the community.
- Municipalities must learn to adhere to the laws of the Country starting with the South African Constitution which provides for the basic rights of all people and the key legislative laws which govern and regulate municipal workers and issues like the MFMA and the MSA. By municipalities adhering to the laws of the country this will ensure better service delivery.

South Africa is now in what one could describe as a watershed time in its democracy and as the nation goes forward it is imperative that government is able to provide quality and efficient service delivery to all the citizens. In 2016 the local government elections take place and coupled with the national elections that have taken place citizens would have made their voice known by exercising their right to vote and are looking for a better life after 20 years of democracy. It is now time that these elected officials deliver on this mandate as South Africa forges ahead in ensuring a better life for all.

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