



Service delivery conundrum and the use of monitoring and evaluation in the province of the Eastern Cape, South Africa



Authors:

Xolisile G. Ngumbela¹ 
Lusanda B. Juta² 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Government Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Central University of Technology, Welkom, South Africa

²Department of Public Administration and Local Government, Faculty of Humanities, North-West University, Mahikeng, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Xolisile Ngumbela,
xolisile.ngumbela@gmail.com

Dates:

Received: 06 Sept. 2024
Accepted: 23 Jan. 2025
Published: 31 July 2025

How to cite this article:

Ngumbela, X.G. & Juta, L.B., 2025, 'Service delivery conundrum and the use of monitoring and evaluation in the province of the Eastern Cape, South Africa', *Journal of Local Government Research and Innovation* 6(0), a222. <https://doi.org/10.4102/jolgr.v6i0.222>

Copyright:

© 2025. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Background: Service delivery remains a persistent challenge in many regions of South Africa, particularly the Eastern Cape province. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices, along with citizen participation, are essential components of improving local governance in the democratic era.

Aim: The primary aim of this study was to explore the pathology of the service delivery dilemma and examine the effectiveness of evaluation and assessment mechanisms within Eastern Cape municipalities. The secondary objective was to critically assess the role of citizen participation in democratic local developmental governance.

Methods: The study employed a qualitative approach, using purposive sampling to select 15 participants – 10 administrators and five councillors – from 10 different municipalities in the Eastern Cape. Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews, allowing participants full engagement in responding to the research questions.

Results: The findings revealed widespread deficiencies in M&E structures in most municipalities. In response to these challenges, the South African government introduced citizen-based M&E initiatives, culminating in the creation of the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation within the Presidency.

Conclusion: The study highlights the need for stronger M&E frameworks in local governance, as well as the importance of fostering citizen involvement in assessing the implementation of policies and programmes. The establishment of the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation reflects a significant policy shift aimed at addressing these shortcomings.

Contribution: This research contributes to the discourse on service delivery and governance by providing insights into the challenges faced by Eastern Cape municipalities. It emphasises the importance of both institutional structures and active citizen participation in improving local government performance.

Keywords: service delivery; monitoring and evaluation; ethics; South Africa; public institutions; performance; service efficiency; policies and programmes.

Introduction

This article focusses on the use of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in the local sphere of government, considered the government's delivery arm. In South Africa, the local government ensures the provision of basic services, such as water, electricity and sanitation to citizens because of its localness to communities. According to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996, local government has 'the right to administer the local government affairs of its communities on its own initiative' (Clause 151(3)). Further, the constitution obliges it to 'provide democratic and responsive government to local communities; and to ensure the delivery of services to communities in a sustainable manner' (1996: Clause 152(1)). However, it has not fully fulfilled the constitutional responsibility of a responsive governance structure. Poor implementation of policies and programmes has been noted, and evidence of this malperformance – specifically, the failure to provide expected services – can be seen in the recurring violent community service delivery protests as recorded by Ndasana, Vallabh & Mxunyelwa 2022. They further attest that these protests reflect citizens' dissatisfaction with how this sphere of government conducts its core business. Adverse audit findings about municipalities also bear witness to the lack of good governance, discipline, honesty

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection titled 'Innovating Governance: Revolutionizing Local Government through Innovative Research and Practices' under the expert guidance of guest editors Dr Tando Rulashe, Dr Kutu Ramolobe, Prof. Pandelani Harry Munzhedzi and Dr Sareesha Pillay.

and competence (Kondlo & Maserumule 2010:77). This state of affairs at the local level cannot be ignored and must be discussed. Hence, it is essential to interrogate the significance of monitoring and evaluating policy and programme implementation at the local level. This article aims to answer the question: What monitoring and assessment mechanisms can be put in place to turn the situation around and ensure effective policy and programme implementation? This study also looks at legislation applicable to local government and relevant literature to address the issue.

This article is organised as follows. Following the introductory remarks, it presents the key research questions and reviews existing literature on service delivery challenges and participation during the era of democratic developmental local government. The first part discusses monitoring and assessment measures to improve the implementation of government policies, programmes and productivity. The second part examines the frontline service delivery monitoring (FSDM) programme in this context, analysing citizen-based M&E as well as leadership dynamics. The article situates the discourse within a theoretical framework and outlines the methodological approach for conducting this research. It then discusses and analyses the outputs and findings. The last section presents the concluding remarks.

Research question

The central questions of this research are: What are the causes of service delivery challenges in the era of democratic developmental local government? Why are the municipalities facing the challenges? How impactful are these challenges on the local communities? The central research question was answered by the data collected using the research methodology outlined in this study by the researcher; this is explained in the methodology section. A short overview of relevant literature on service delivery challenges and participation during the era of democratic developmental local government is first presented in the 'Literature review' section.

Literature review

The lack of assessment in local government, according to Nonyane (2019), shows that the M&E system has not been fully implemented. Acknowledging this is the first step in comprehending the research problem. Municipalities are unable to assess the effectiveness of the current methods of M&E as a result of the lack of M&E utilisation poor service delivery is rampant in the municipalities. For example, the Buffalo City Municipality has not assessed the efficiency and efficacy of the M&E system in local government; as a result, it has been unable to comprehend why service delivery protests persist. In addition, impact evaluations have not been thoroughly studied, especially in the era of democratic developmental local government. The body of research conducted on performance M&E has found significant discrepancies between how academics see and conceptualise M&E. It is frequently poorly

understood and carried out. The assessment component of the M&E system is often not followed even though most institutions claim to have adopted it (Shapiro et al. 2024:2). Despite having M&E systems, most government institutions are unable to assess how well they deliver services. According to Kusek and Rist's (2004) analysis of measuring results, unmeasured outcomes cannot be used to assess whether an organisation is providing services effectively. A similar view is shared by Blondal (2013), who states that it is difficult to reward achievement if there is no way to distinguish between it from failure. How can one be sure they are not rewarding failure? Many organisations that track organisational performance but do not assess projects or policy initiatives have split and used the M&E concept separately. The terms for M&E are interrelated and should be used as such.

According to De Bruijn and Dick (2006:79), the prime responsibility of any sensible government is ensuring people's well-being. This is the principal and ultimate aim of any government. Consequently, every government must strive to promote the general welfare of its citizens. Some of the public management mechanisms are human resources, and thus there is a need for employees to be hired and assigned to different roles within the organisational framework of the particular department or municipality for services to be provided by a department or municipality. This process is complemented by function allocation, authority delegation, communication channel creation and behavioural relationships, among other things. These appointed employees are often referred to as functionaries. They are tasked with ensuring that the aims of departments or municipalities are accomplished through efficient and successful execution of duties with the ethical conduct, confidence and professionalism necessary for success on the part of the functionaries (Shafritz & Russel 2005:15). A government should also formulate policies that can be described as a proposed or adopted statement of ideals. In a sense, these policies aim to reveal the government's intentions to achieve specific goals. In arguing that, Fox, Schwella and Wissink (1991:28) say that 'policy is what governments are really doing, and government should also have policies that can be used as a roadmap for what is planned for future deliverables or intended'. Policies and initiatives are compatible, and what determines a government's failure or success is the proper execution of policies. Working public officials execute these policies and initiatives; however, they often do not meet the required standards of performance, which necessitates the deployment of measures in the form of monitoring and appraisal methods.

Monitoring and assessment measures to better implement government policies, programmes and productivity

Ijeoma, Nzewi and Sibanda (2013:320) describe monitoring as 'a clear and systematic collection of information and data during the implementation of the project or progress towards improving the quality and effectiveness of the project'. The authors, therefore, see evaluation as 'any attempt to improve

human performance'. Evaluation, according to the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA) (2011:17), is described as a branch of applied research that attempts to identify cause-and-effect relationships within a specific context. The Presidency (2011:11) defines evaluation as:

[T]he systematic collection and objective analysis of the evidence on public policies, programmes, projects, functions and organisations to assess issues such as relevance, performance (effectiveness and efficiency), value for money, impact and sustainability and recommend ways forward. (p. 11)

The Presidency (2011) further asserts that government evaluation is only occasionally used and does not sufficiently inform budgeting, policymaking or planning. As a result, municipalities are losing out on opportunities to increase the significance, efficacy, efficiency, impact and sustainability of government intervention.

Monitoring and evaluation is essential for countries to ensure good governance within government departments and agencies (Loxton 2004:1). The successful implementation of an M&E system allows the government to achieve coordinated, legitimate, credible and relevant operational excellence. Policy evaluation is a 'method of finding out about a public policy in practice, the means employed and the goals achieved' (Howlett & Ramesh 1995 cited in Parsons 1995:211). The assessments help to assess the results of policy priorities during policy formulation and other stages in the policy process (Parsons 1995:546). Rossi and Freeman (1989:170) define monitoring as the effort by assessment researchers and programme personnel to evaluate whether a policy or project and a programme is being implemented as expected and whether the system is achieving the intended objectives. Evaluation is a recurring procedure that combines practical social science analytical techniques with practical policy formulation to support the government's mission and ensure political, fiscal and other responsibilities (Parsons 1995:212).

Public organisations play an important role in society as they are more politically motivated and enforce government policy (Rainey 2009:59). The major concern in South Africa is that policy planning has not been consistent; the policies, initiatives or services do not often clearly define desired outcomes, and poor planning affects how results are calculated and assessed (The Presidency 2011:1). The country's capacity to achieve effective policy goals has been hampered by a lack of political will, ineffective leadership, management shortcomings, improper institutional design, misaligned decision rights and a lack of accountability, monitoring and appraisal culture (The Presidency 2011:3). The issue has been that 'evaluation is implemented in government sporadically and is not properly informing planning, policy-making and budgeting'. So we lose the opportunity to enhance the importance, performance, efficacy, effects and sustainability of government policies (The Presidency 2011:1). In his article, *Time to take quality*

monitoring seriously, Gavin Keeton (2012:1) states that quality monitoring was seen as an essential element in providing an 'early warning system of things going wrong allowing rapid remedial action'. The government has struggled to detect shortcomings in its service delivery systems quickly because performance analysis has not been taken seriously. Studies on the implementation of surveillance and assessment systems in a country, district or area (Armstrong et al. 2014; Engela & Ajam 2010:10) reveal that problems often occur when implementing M&E systems.

The studies conclude that previous M&E implementation methods have not succeeded because the strategies used were not well organised or implemented, and sometimes there were vague targets and objectives of the M&E programme and what it sought to accomplish (Armstrong et al. 2014; Engela & Ajam 2010). Popular guidelines for implementing M&E programmes suggest: (1) M&E systems need to be updated and more robust research methods need to be incorporated; (2) M&E systems need to have specific goals and objectives; (3) organisations should develop structures for M&E and (4) a balance should be struck between top-down management decisions and bottom-up technical expertise to assist in the effective implementation of the M&E programme (AEMWG 2012; Armstrong 2011; Engela & Ajam 2010). Together, the South African government's approach to performance enhancement and the country's government-wide M&E system (GWMES) aims to enhance governance results and direct policy implementation to ensure that government does what matters the most (The Presidency 2009:15). The public sector needs to be active in the process and in implementing government-wide monitoring & evaluation (GWM&E) to improve service delivery and good governance initiatives, allowing for growth (Loxton 2004:1). The present study explores local government experiences in implementing GWMES. The Eastern Cape municipalities have been used as a case study. The research explores whether the GWM&E's planned objectives and priorities have been operationalised at the local government level. The study examines the implementation of the GWM&E programme at the Eastern Cape municipalities. It also investigates how the GWM&E within the municipalities has been institutionalised. In addition, it explores problems that occurred during the GWM&E's implementation.

Frontline service delivery monitoring programme

Following its inception in 2011, the FSDM programme has been tracking public service services in conjunction with the premier's offices/departments. The tracking programme is conducted through both unannounced visits and enhanced tracking meetings. The programme is aimed at catalysing changes in service delivery and emphasising the value of monitoring divisions within the sector. The initiative seeks to instil in these organisations a culture of self-tracking in order to change and enhance the quality of

service delivery. This is done with the ultimate goal of promoting preparation, transparency, accountability and tracking reporting. The FSDM system is complex in nature, and its scope is changing. The programme is a Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) flagship programme with many positive agreements with the government, the Presidential Planning Committee and the numerous portfolio committees. The system has also been active in elevating M&E in other sector divisions to strategic levels; many of which have established their own variations of the programme.

One of the programme's main areas of focus is tracking the National Youth Policy implementation. To date, according to the DPME (2020), the initiative has visited over 864 public service locations without prior notice, and it has also visited 130 sites more than once in an effort to help them improve the low-performance areas that were identified. The programme monitors the quality of service delivery by evaluating the level of compliance of public service facilities with service delivery standards. Alongside sector-specific service delivery standards, eight generic key performance areas are assessed. Such primary performance areas were explicitly chosen as metaphors for evaluating the quality of service delivery because of their importance to the Batho Pele principles, which are the standards of service used by the government to provide quality service to users of facilities. The eight service delivery standards are:

1. Location and accessibility
2. Visibility and signage
3. Opening and closing times
4. Dignified treatment
5. Cleanliness and comfort
6. Safety
7. Service availability and efficiency
8. Complaints management systems.

According to the DPME (2020), the system is currently reviewing nine sectors. Also, the sectors that have been assessed so far are:

- Transport (drivers' licence testing centres)
- Education (schools)
- Health (hospitals, clinics and community health centres)
- Home Affairs
- Local Government (municipal customer care centres)
- National Youth Development Agency
- South African Police Service (police stations)
- South African Social Security Agency (local offices)
- Justice (magistrate courts).

Although the DPME aims to maintain progress and the system is considered the best in promoting improvements in service delivery across all jurisdictions, local government reforms must be accomplished. This involves giving authorities the authority to take over reform initiatives that the local government is unable to oversee. Furthermore, the

DPME advocates for government agencies to incorporate modifications discovered through the FSDM system into their departmental service delivery improvement plans to optimise resource allocation and decision-making. Furthermore, these plans should be integrated into departmental overall improvement initiatives.

Citizen-based monitoring and evaluation

According to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Clause 152(1)(e)), 'the aim of local government is to promote community participation in local government matters'. Mle (2014) describes another citizen engagement mechanism as specified in the 2003 Handbook for Municipal Councillors (Chapter 13), which endorses a constitutional duty for councillors and discusses the role of community development workers and ward committees. Mle (2014) further avers that the ward committees are a link between the community and the municipality and are intended to answer to citizens what a municipality is doing for their actions/inactions. However, according to the Public Service Commission, this is not the case because councillors do not attend ward committee meetings. According to Mle (2014), community-based systems can be powerful monitoring and assessment mechanisms that can ensure good governance if properly used. Citizen involvement in a municipality's activities and programmes is a recipe for good governance. This point is underlined by Ijeoma et al. (2013) citing Epstein (2006) as follows:

... [H]aving people interested in performing community services is a good practice of governance that promotes group problem solving. In essence, it means a group owned or what can be called a "voice" in the process of solving their own problems.... Citizens or community leaders have a voice in reviewing and assessing the outcomes... (p. 206)

A community's participation in public affairs fosters a sense of identification and belonging among residents, which is missing because instead of an 'us' (communities) mindset, a 'them' (municipality) outlook is prevalent. In short, there is a gap between the populace and the cities. According to the Black Management Forum, Eastern Cape's Dumisani Mpafa (2013):

Countries that represent completely capable statehood and have earned the best ratings in terms of clean governance have a history of policy transparency, civic engagement and social trust, and a clear accountability system that enables people to track their municipal officials. (p. 9)

In order to facilitate efficient public oversight, it is important to implant in municipal officials and council members the idea that citizens and ratepayers are South African incorporated shareholders with the right to access local government data and proceedings. This primary democratic principle should not be taken lightly. Citizens and tax or ratepayers have the right to know what their communities are doing, how they make decisions and to have their voices heard. Public transparency is the constructive and effective dissemination of valuable public information by governments

that will encourage citizen action and help individuals and organisations create meaningful change in their communities. Nevertheless, Craythorne (2003:204) asserts that public participation must not turn into a conflict with the municipality where the authority of a municipal council is unnecessarily undermined. Craythorne further emphasises that public participation essentially means that there must be a balance between citizen participation and local government's legislative power.

Leadership dynamics

Mle (2014) emphasises that political leadership and expediency are essential to ensuring the successful implementation of government policies and programmes at all levels. The Auditor General (2010/11) cited a lack of political leadership as one of the reasons for a weak local government. Public leaders must take control of government policies and initiatives and play an active role in overseeing their execution. A state needs leadership, effective policies, professional administrators and staff, clear control lines, adequate processes and consistent and reasonable implementation of laws. However, municipalities are characterised by political turmoil, in-fighting and jostling for power and offices.

Taking advantage of these circumstances, administrators neglect their responsibilities as policymakers and programme implementers. This research firmly believes that local government politicians and leaders need to bridge the gap between the existing reality and the sustainability we all wish to see in our communities, keeping in mind the spirit of the White Paper on Local Government (1998). They may do this by promoting economic expansion, sustainable development and spatial change through sound governance, robust institutions and financially stable municipalities, universally accessible, high-quality services and infrastructure. The kind of leadership that we all hope to see in our lifetimes is one that is devoted to enhancing the standard of living and possibilities available to all people because this will enable them to pay for the services that are provided to them.

Theoretical considerations

The theoretical framework serves as the structure and support for the study justification, the description of the issue, intention, meaning and research questions. The theoretical framework provides a grounding basis for the literature review, methods and analysis (Grant & Osanloo 2014:12). In the case of this research, public engagement, good governance and reform theories were deemed adequate to build on the analysis. The three hypotheses feed into the theory of human needs that offer a straightforward theoretical interpretation of how to conceptualise and contextualise human needs. Both these theories of public engagement provide frameworks for understanding how stakeholders and citizens might influence public policies and choices. They can assist public administration in creating and carrying out programmes and policies that take into account the preferences, values and

requirements of marginalised and vulnerable communities. The use of these three hypotheses further allowed the researcher to predict possible events and possibilities.

Study area

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current M&E system used by the municipalities in the Eastern Cape province and to provide two thinking tools or mind maps – the theory of change tool and the logical framework – that help describe how outcomes can be achieved. In order to assess the efficacy of the existing systems, this was essential for putting the impact evaluation system into practice. The notion of M&E will be introduced in this article. After that, it will discuss the function of M&E in local government. The application of M&E in the South African context and the international context will also be presented in this article.

The Eastern Cape province is one of South Africa's nine provinces. It is also classified as the poorest in the country. Without strict adherence to M&E, the Eastern Cape province cannot prosper (Mle 2014). Further, if M&E results are not properly implemented from time to time, government interventions will not be sufficient. Poverty, deprivation and joblessness in the province are products of a separate growth strategy adopted in the past. Historically, the Eastern Cape functioned on the fringes of the national economy. The province served largely as a reserve for and reproduction of cheap labour. The economic development of the Eastern Cape is concentrated in two regional metro stations, Port Elizabeth and East London. Despite economic growth, there are still high rates of unemployment and poverty, particularly in rural areas where two-thirds of the population reside.

Research methods and design

This article uses a qualitative approach in order to provide an in-depth examination of the problems at stake in this research. Qualitative analysis is an attempt to understand a person's beliefs and perceptions regarding a specific circumstance or context. In addition, the qualitative researcher strived to become more than just an observer in the natural setting being studied. They frequently intentionally tried to put themselves in the shoes of those they observed, observing and appreciating from their own perspective the behaviours, attitudes, deeds and habits of the participants from a scientific standpoint (Babbie & Mouton 2005:271; Leedy & Ormrod 2001:153).

Data analysis

This research provided qualitative data collection in the form of messages, concepts, phrases, written terms and direct quotes originating from the participants. The video files from the focus group and the unstructured adult interviews were transcribed word for word. Therefore, the researcher followed a technique of qualitative content analysis. The study of the content is a systematic method of analysing the content of clear ideas and ways of looking at them. Actually,

it is more than just a formal method; it is a direct observation technique (Neuman 2003:438). The results of this analysis and the researcher's review are presented. Responses from the participants are quoted verbatim and fittingly analysed.

Sample of the study

The sample of this analysis consisted of 15 administrators working in separate divisions and five councillors serving in the 20 sampled municipalities that spread across the province. The researcher explicitly employed a purposeful sampling technique. Purpose sampling is used when a qualitative researcher wants to classify different types of cases to be investigated in detail (Neuman 2003:213). This implies that the researchers used their own personal judgment to recruit the participants. The researchers included both men and women who were working in the municipalities as managers.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee (UREC) (reference no.: REC-270710-028-RA Level 01). Participation in the research was voluntary. To maintain confidentiality, information from questionnaires, the focus group and unstructured elite interviews were treated secretly. Before embarking on the study, the researchers explained orally that participation in the research was voluntary. In addition, they clarified that the study would not harm the participants (Mouton 2013:240). Finally, because the analysis was for academic purposes, the researchers pointed out to the participants that they would not receive remuneration for participating in the study.

Discussion and analysis

By tracking projects, policies and programmes as well as the effects on services provided, M&E should support municipalities in facilitating and promoting the effectiveness and efficiency of their services (Motingoe 2012). A municipality must establish a performance management system in accordance with the *Municipal Systems Act 32* (RSA 2000: Section 11 (13)) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The system is put in place in order to monitor and assess the effectiveness of any services provided or policies and programmes and determine the jurisdictional authority of the municipality. An evaluation of a municipality's human resources (HR) and their effect on its projects and programmes should be a part of the M&E system in this process. Monitoring and evaluation plays a crucial role in enabling municipalities to identify early warning signs and assess the effectiveness of their systems (Naidoo 2011). Unfortunately, there are no municipal evaluation systems in the M&E systems of most municipalities.

The appraisal of individual performance is given more attention (Buthelezi 2016). This results from the following: a lack of professional expertise on the part of municipal officials, political interference with HR services and procurement procedures, a lack of accountability and

responsibility on their part, operational changes brought about by periodic elections, a lack of funding for evaluations, a lack of appropriate teams to conduct evaluations to determine the impact of implemented projects and a lack of political support for the M&E process. Because of municipalities' inability to assess the effectiveness of the current system, protests over the delivery of public services occur. Most research on M&E in local government, however, has been descriptive in character and has not addressed the effects of evaluations on projects, programmes and policies. Remarkably, research participants stated that effect evaluation has not been adequately examined, especially in most towns. As a result, little is known about the efficacy or efficiency of M&E, and it is not clear what leads to subpar service delivery.

Ramaphosa (2019) claims that since 1994, the South African government has made tremendous progress in creating a single local government system from the fragmented, undemocratic and racially divisive apartheid system. Also, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) (2019), in support of Ramaphosa, argues that for South Africa to be successful, the government needs to work together in directing resources to rebuild administrations. During apartheid South Africa, these administrations were under-resourced, performed poorly and offered no real value to people. Be that as it may, SALGA has completely failed to witness the devastating legacy of Bantustan misrule and the impact of apartheid spatial planning. It has also failed to see municipalities with poor financial management, destabilised by factionalism and a scramble for power and control of resources. In addition, SALGA has dismally failed to realise and see councillors who are detached from their constituencies, neglect their duties and waste public resources. These are the same councillors who tarnish the image of local government, hence recurring service delivery protests in many parts of the country.

The audit reports for local government for the period 2018–2019 were issued by the South African AG Kimi Makwetu (2020). He named this report 'Not much to go around but not the right hands at the till' to represent the state of local government financial management. The AG further painted an alarming picture of billions of rands distributed to municipalities being 'handled in ways that are contradictory to the established and recognised disciplines of accounting standards'. He strongly warned that these lapses in administration and governance make for very poor transparency and consequent vulnerability to public purse corruption. He further explained that the provision of utilities and the supply of goods to customers by municipalities is done with the hope that they would pay for services rendered though it is not always done. Yet, there has been a trend of citizens showing an unwillingness to pay for such services or totally failing to pay for them. Individuals and households also feel the same pressure and are not paying for the goods and services they consume. To highlight the magnitude and omnipresence of this around the world, almost 60% of the revenue seen in the books will never find its way into the municipality's bank accounts on average.

As demonstrated by the debt period, most municipal programmes have generally been unsuccessful in turning debt into cash for a number of years. This does not, however, mean that the relentless efforts to recover these funds will end. Meanwhile, those who provide services on behalf of the municipality or provide administrative and other functions tend to earn their salaries, primarily and almost exclusively, in some cases, from the revenue from the national purse. This field of municipal finances is compounded by the fact that not all those who are part of the payroll have been put together with the intention to provide the services that are part of the plans of the municipality directly. This leaves the municipality with nothing else to do than to try external assistance – including in places where they already have warm bodies at work. That comes at a substantial cost to the municipalities because consultants must be employed. The most common consequence of this is that those who provide goods and services are promised payments in the future and therefore must wait for funds for future spending to be allocated before they can be paid for past deliverables. The ultimate outcome of this is an irreversible downward spiral to a financial cul-de-sac that has already occurred in many of the local municipalities and districts around the world, with a few exceptions. This, in essence, was part of the findings of the audit of local government financial statements across the country.

Makwetu (2020) notes that it should be appreciated that a large number of exceptions are concentrated in the Western Cape (although there are dotted areas of concern in this province's Central Karoo and Garden Route Districts). When evaluating the different audit conclusions in this study, it is important to always bear in mind the above context. It is no longer about an accelerated push to reach a particular audit conclusion, but how the municipality invests in qualitative and preventive measures to avert this systemic decline in financial fortunes within an environment where all matters are considered. Makwetu (2020) suggests, then, that the goal of this research should not be a perceptive, intelligent analysis of ideas where the inclination is to rationalise the problem as though it were to lessen the impact or shift attention from the important issues. Rather, it should be about 'how to take decisive action to restore the reputation of these institutions and place them in a position to control their finances in order to meet the needs of people' (Makwetu 2020). Makwetu has persistently called on those responsible for administration and supervision to look at basic structures and controls as a basis for proper accountability to the people of the country. This should be done in order to ensure that taxpayers' money is spent in a controlled manner as laid down in municipal governance legislation and that people may derive the expected benefits from this expenditure. The AG (Makwetu 2020) also presents a disconcerting picture of most municipalities, citing their excessive reliance on grants and assistance from the federal government, their inaccurate and poor revenue collection, their unapproved, irregular, pointless and wasteful spending and their crippling debt that prevents them from paying for electricity and water. Makwetu (2020), on the other hand, acknowledges the small number of municipalities that appear to have made a significant effort to guarantee that they not only obtained or maintained clean audits but also provide a

good account of their operations. A municipality's financial statements tell the story of how well a municipality is managed (Makwetu 2020:8). As with a few municipalities, it can be a positive story of:

[P]rudent spending that generates value for money; diligent billing and payment practices; properties that are preserved and safeguarded; careful contributions and savings for emergencies and future projects; and honest obligations to creditors and the community. (p. 8)

Thirteen of these municipalities are in the Western Cape, including the district municipalities of Cape Winelands and West Coast, Bergriver, Cape Agulhas, Cederberg, Drakenstein, Hessequa, Langeberg, Overstrand, Prince Albert, Saldanha Bay, Theewaterskloof and Witzenberg. Other municipalities that perform well consistently are the municipalities of Senqu (Eastern Cape), Midvaal (Gauteng), Okhahlamba (KwaZulu-Natal), Capricorn (Limpopo), Gert Sibande and Nkangala (Mpumalanga) and John Taolo Gaetsewe (Northern Cape). In these municipalities, best practices include stable leadership that is committed to a strong control environment and effective governance. Continuous monitoring of audit action plans to deal with any audit results in a timely manner and a constructive approach to managing emerging threats were both standard features in these municipalities. Apparently and conclusively, the Local Government Audit Report 2018–2019 seems to tell a good story of how the efforts of the few diligent municipalities have been overshadowed by the overall regression in audit results.

Eastern Cape province

The 2018–2019 AG audit report on local government finances continues to paint a picture of a systemic lack of project oversight and financial controls, a persistent atmosphere of lack of transparency and a tolerance for transgressions that have led to a further decline in the province's audit results. Little has changed over the previous 3 years, and the overall trend has remained negative. Eight municipalities were found to be unable to adequately substantiate the information provided in their financial accounts and to have disclaimed opinions as a consequence of the thorough investigation conducted on the Eastern Cape province (Makwetu 2020). Makwetu (2020) argues that instead of managing the limited resources available responsibly and diligently, there appear to be dysfunctional control environments, an extensive disorder in accounting records, prolonged vacancies in key positions and instability in councils, poor procurement processes, no consequences for poor performance and transgression and unreliable reporting on municipal finances and programmes. The report showed the abnormal R2.5 billion expenditure incurred during the years under review. For audits completed after the cut-off date for this report, a further R4.2 billion was flagged. The Eastern Cape province was found to have invested a total of R118 million into financial management services (Makwetu 2020). In addition, an amount of R2 million, according to the study, was expended by municipalities whose audits had not been completed by the report's cut-off date.

As deduced from the AG Report, South Africa is faced with some difficult moments ahead and has a long road to travel in order to bring both financial and delivery of services stability on the local government front. The main argument here is guided by the nature of our historical democracy, which was constrained by global pressures and local weaknesses; therefore, our economy is not growing at the rate required to decisively tackle unemployment and poverty. Although the ethos of this article is local government, it must be noted that South Africa's problems are at all levels of government – public finances are under strain, limiting the scope for further social spending and increased infrastructure investment. Not underscoring the recent events of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the government has raised concern in many quarters about the direction of the country and the stability of its institutions. Again, according to Ramaphosa (2016), when allocating public funds, elected officials and local government representatives must work together to realise the goal of a fair, democratic and equitable society while having a clear conscience. Ramaphosa also emphasised that council members, as chosen representatives of the people of South Africa, regardless of their position or length of service, had an ongoing obligation to address the issues confronting local government. It is abundantly clear from this that even Ramaphosa, in his dual roles as president of the African National Congress (ANC) ruling party and of the nation, is aware that local government is falling short of serving the interests of the people, particularly the impoverished, the vulnerable and the marginalised. For this reason, he called on his allies who have been elected to local government council positions to unite in their resolve to uphold the interests of the people. For Ramaphosa, local government must urgently seek a united purpose and action as nation-states that are authentic, enduring and that advance the interests of the people of this country. He further argued that as a country, we do have the means, ability and commitment to build a united nation founded on the principles of honesty, integrity and justice for all.

According to the AG report findings, there are underlying problems that have an impact on the service delivery efficacy and efficiency in the various Eastern Cape municipalities (Makwetu 2020). The report further brought up fundamental failures by municipalities to adhere to the M&E system. If the findings of the AG Report are anything to go by, it clearly shows that there are not enough qualified people working in the M&E sector in the South African municipalities. The municipalities do not analyse regulations and individual KPIs are not in line with organisational KPIs. It shows that a significant 43% of survey respondents concurred that they meet the requirements for the job they were hired to do.

Surprisingly, however, it was revealed by some managers that the majority of the staff employed in these units have educational backgrounds unrelated to their jobs. Another intriguing conclusion was that respondents to the questionnaire overwhelmingly concurred that the municipalities do not plan and execute impact evaluation for better future

results and long-term planning. The management's contradictory responses – that there was no impact evaluation system in Eastern Cape municipalities – were intriguing to observe. Managers reacted by saying that assessments of policies and programmes were ineffective because they were typically conducted during the assessment period, which presented a positive but unreliable picture of operations.

Strategies to strengthen the implementation of monitoring and evaluation

The Republic of South Africa's Constitution assigns local government the duty of providing equitable and fair public services because it is the branch of government closest to the people (Koma 2010). Because it is a legal requirement in South Africa for the chief executive officer of a public entity or the accounting officer of a department or municipality to set up an M&E system for the organisation, local government should strengthen the implementation of M&E by flagging poor-performing municipalities. As is well known, this constitutional mandate's main goal is to undo the underdevelopment brought forth by the apartheid government. Accordingly, the national government envisions local governments that can collaborate with local residents to address issues and offer long-term, cooperative solutions. But many municipalities nationwide are finding it difficult to fulfil this mandate, according to Davids (2011), particularly in light of the shift from an inward-looking approach – one that prioritises internal municipal processes – to an outward-looking approach, or one that focusses primarily on citizens. Unfortunately, the majority of people continue to live in extreme, long-term poverty, while inequality and unemployment are rising quickly. Local government is responsible for addressing these issues.

This article strongly supports the government because it envisions an efficient and successful public service that:

- Enables cooperative governance to provide efficient and long-term service delivery
- Enables intergovernmental planning
- Efficiently oversees the execution of government actions
- Continuously and accurately assesses these interventions to produce insights that guide decision-making, policy development and future interventions
- Monitors municipalities on their implementation and interventions and makes recommendations on corrective measures in order to produce expected service delivery outcomes.

Conclusion

It is essential to monitor and evaluate local government to ensure it is responsive to the requirements of its constituents. There is, of course, no one-size-fits-all strategy for addressing the issues that local government faces. Municipalities' political and administrative leadership must collaborate to provide services to the public in a sustainable manner if they hope to foster the sector's growth and long-term success. They must also have the necessary technical abilities and

skills to carry out their duties in monitoring and evaluating the municipalities with tact and discretion.

To achieve high-quality service delivery, municipal political leadership should plan appropriately and be aware of the expenditures involved in establishing and maintaining a results-oriented Municipal Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (MWMES). Attracting and keeping skilled and experienced M&E staff members who help the municipality with high-quality reporting regarding interventions to improve decision-making processes is one of the crucial expenses to take into account. The municipal political leadership will be better equipped to design and assist M&E units in their work if they are aware of the up-front costs and related advantages of a results-based M&E system.

If the South African local government is to be taken seriously and become responsive to its citizens, it needs a 90-degree turnaround – a shift from skills deficiency and mismanagement to a tradition of local governance that guarantees transparency and is free of facilitated abuse of power and corruption. There is a need for local government that inspires its citizens' passion for grassroots participatory democracy whose solid foundations were first laid in 1994 and establishing an inclusive system of governance that is more responsive to citizens' development aspirations. By doing that, our local municipalities will be municipalities that are skilled at mobilising a broad section of society behind their people-centred vision. They will become capable and developmental because they will be investing in the organisational and technical capacity of their administrations to effectively implement pro-poor policies. This will leave long-lasting legacies instead of cheap promises by working consistently to improve the quality of life of citizens through delivering sustainable quality services.

In conclusion, considerable cooperation between several role players is necessary to run an effective and sustainable MWMES and guarantee that the desired outcomes are achieved. Nonetheless, it also necessitates a high degree of backing from municipal political and administrative leadership, who ought to cooperate to guarantee that they assist towns in providing high-quality public services.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the three spheres of government work more closely to ensure an integrated effective and efficient service delivery. Monitoring and evaluation play a crucial role in connecting these spheres through a coordinated linking of critical activities such as information flow interdepartmentally to ensure accurate reporting of government programmes. This means intergovernmental relations among these governance spheres must be strong to ensure mutual accountability.

Related to the previous point, strong municipal political leadership encouraging the use of M&E data is required to guarantee the sustainability of MWMES. The ability of this leadership to foster and fortify interdepartmental trust is

necessary for facilitating the sharing of data among various divisions and improving interdepartmental collaboration (Govender & Reddy 2014). Effective data management systems make this collaboration crucial for the creation of strategic policies in municipalities. By reducing information duplication, a coordinated data management system reduces errors in decision-making. Every stage of the data management process – data sourcing, data collection, data collation, data analysis, data reporting and data use – must have high-quality data, and this is crucial for a municipality's M&E unit. Data must be precise, dependable, thorough, timely and of high integrity, free from prejudice or manipulation.

Further, a robust performance culture that includes efficient incentives and disciplinary measures must be established (Engela & Ajam 2010). In order to guarantee that predetermined objectives and deliverables are fulfilled, it is critical that incentives are connected to performance. In essence, there are two primary sets of criteria used to determine rewards: the accomplishment of predetermined goals and the level of performance at which the goals have been reached (Bussin 2017). This suggests that a municipal employee's incentive is determined by how well they achieve the established standards of quality. Similarly, each municipality ought to have a well-defined policy outlining the penalties for non-performance.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to extend their appreciation and profound gratitude to all those who directly or indirectly participated in, and contributed to, this study.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

X.G.N. contributed towards the writing of the original draft, project administration, the review writing and L.B.J. contributed towards the review writing and editing, funding proof reading and supervision of the article.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, X.G.N., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research.

It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

References

- Ajam, T., 2014, 'Intergovernmental fiscal relations in South Africa', in H. Bhorat, A. Hirsch, R. Kanbur & M. Ncube (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Economics of South Africa*, pp. 127–133, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Armstrong, G., Adam, S., Denize, S. & Kotler, P., 2014, *Principles of marketing*, Pearson, Melbourne.
- Armstrong, L., Bailey, J., Julier, G. & Kimbell, L., 2014, *Social design futures: HEI research and the AHRC*.
- Armstrong, M., 2011, *Armstrong's handbook of strategic human resource management*, Kogan Page Publishers, London.
- Babbie, E. & Mouton, J., 2005, *The practice of social research*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town.
- Blondal, N., 2013, *Monitoring and evaluation: A management tool*, SAHO, Guangzhou.
- Bussin, M., 2017, *Performance management reboot*, KR Publishing, Randburg.
- Buthelezi, N., 2016, *The effectiveness of implementing performance management system within the skills development Unit of eThekweni Municipality*, In-house Publication, Durban.
- Craythorne, D.L., 2003, *Municipal administration: The handbook*, 5th edn., Juta and CO, Lansdowne.
- Davids, G.J., 2011, 'Local government capacity challenges in post-apartheid South Africa: Lessons learnt', *African Journal of Business Management* 5(7), 3570–3576.
- De Bruin, H. & Dick, W., 2006, 'Strategies for safe guarding public values in liberalized utility sectors', *Public Administration* 84(3), 717–735. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2006.00609.x>
- Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), 2020, *Annual performance plan 2020/21*, Government Printers, Pretoria.
- Engela, R. & Ajam, T., 2010, *Implementing a government-wide monitoring and evaluation system in South Africa*, pp. 11, 14, 18, ECD Working Paper Series, No. 21, The World Bank, Washington, DC.
- Fox, W., Schwella, E. & Wissink, H., 1991, *Public management*, Juta & Company Ltd, Kenwyn.
- Govender, I.G. & Reddy, P.S., 2014, 'Monitoring and evaluation in municipalities', *Administratio Publica* 22(4), 160–177.
- Grant, C. & Osanloo, A., 2014, 'Understanding, selecting, and integrating a theoretical framework in dissertation research: Creating the blueprint for your "house"', *Administrative Issues Journal* 4(2), 4.
- Ijeoma, E., Nzewi, O. & Sibanda, M., 2013, *South Africa's public administration for community service, Independent Service Delivery Monitoring Networks (ISDMN) South Africa*, Verity Publishers, Pretoria.
- Keeton, G., 2012, 'Time to take performance monitoring seriously', *Business Day*, 26 November, p. 13.
- Kondlo, K. & Maserumule, M.H., 2010, *The Zuma administration critical challenges*, HSRC Press, Cape Town.
- Kusek, J.Z. & Rist, R.C., 2004, *A handbook for development practitioners. Ten steps to a result-based monitoring and evaluation system*, The World Bank, Washington, DC.
- Leedy, D. & Ormrod, J.E., 2001, *Practical research: Planning and design*, 7th edn., Merrill Prentice Hall, Columbus, OH.
- Loxton, L., 2004, 'Monitoring, evaluation are missing links in Africa's development', *The Star*, 01 December, p. 9.
- Makwetu, K., 2020, *Not much to go around but not the right hands at the till*, Auditor General Offices, Pretoria.
- Mle, T.R., 2014, 'Potential benefits of monitoring and evaluation as a tool in the South African local government spheres', *Africa's Public Service Delivery & Performance Review* 2(1), 43. <https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdprv2i1.43>
- Motingoe, R.S., 2012, *Monitoring and evaluation system utilisation for municipal support. Public management and governance*, North-West University, Potchefstroom.
- Mouton, J., 2013, *How to succeed in your master's and doctoral studies*, van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria.
- Mpafa, D., 2013, 'New BEE codes may lead to fraud', *Daily Dispatch*, 23 July, p. 13.
- Naidoo, I.A., 2011, 'The role of monitoring and evaluation in promoting good governance in South Africa: A case study of the Department of social development', unpublished master's thesis, University of Witwatersrand.
- Ndasana, M., Vallabh, D. & Mxunyelwa, S., 2022, 'Understanding the service delivery protests in South Africa: A case study of Duncan Village', *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review* 10(1), 644.
- Neuman, W.L., 2003, *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*, Pearson Education Inc., New York, NY.
- Nonyane, P.C., 2019, 'Exploring the implementation of the monitoring and evaluation system in Local Government: A case study of eThekweni municipality', unpublished master's thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Office of the Auditor General, 2010/2011, *Auditor General's Report 2010/2011*, Government Printers, Pretoria.
- Office of the Auditor General, 2018/2019, *Auditor General's Report 2018/2019*, Government Printers, Pretoria.
- Parsons, W., 1995, *Public policy: An introduction to the theory and practice of policy analysis*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.
- Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy, 2011, *Basic M&E course manual*, Government Printers, Pretoria.
- Public Service Commission, 2010, *Public service commission report*, Government Printers, Pretoria.
- Rainey, H., 2009, *Understanding and managing public organizations*, 4th edn., Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Ramaphosa, C.M., 2019, *SALGA is answering citizens' calls*, Voice of Local Government, 20, Observatory: Times Media Publishing Group, Park Town, Johannesburg.
- Republic of South Africa, 1996, *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, Constitutional Assembly, Cape Town.
- Republic of South Africa, 2000, *Local Government Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000*, Government Printers, Pretoria.
- Rossi, P. & Freeman, H., 1989, *Evaluation: A systemic-approach*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- SALGA, 2019, *SALGA National Executive Committee meeting outcomes statement*, Sandton, Johannesburg.
- Shafiriz, J.M. & Russel, E.W., 2005, *Introduction to public administration*, 4th edn., Pearson, New York, NY.
- Shapiro, V.B., Kim, B.K.E., Robitaille, J.L., Mahoney, J.L., Lee, J. & LeBuffe, P.A., 2024, 'Monitoring the growth of social and emotional competence to guide practice decisions', *Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy* 3, 100032.
- South African Local Government Association, 2019, *Voice of local government*, 20, Times Observatory: Media Publishing Group, Park Town, Johannesburg.
- The Presidency, 2009, *Improving government performance: Our approach*, Government Printer, Pretoria.
- The Presidency, 2011, *National evaluation policy framework*, Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, Government Printer, Pretoria.