The Perpetual Decline of the State of Local Government in South Africa

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The advent of a democratic order in South Africa in 1994, was accompanied by the first democratic local government elections in 1996. The African National Congress (ANC) brought about hope and high expectations of uninterrupted quality and sustainable service delivery to the most marginalized of society; blacks in rural areas and urban townships. To ensure a local government system that will be responsive and accountable to the people they serve, a considerable amount of effort was undertaken to put in place applicable legislation. Despite all these investments, the past 20 years saw municipalities in many parts of the country would become "black holes" or what one may call "bottomless pits" in which public funds were committed without any meaningful durable services. The aspects indicated above will be articulated to demonstrate a local government system in a perpetual state of decline and paralysis. The article draws from secondary sources, including relevant literature, to advance its argument. The articles argue that despite the strides undertaken by the democratic government, many municipalities are still in an unrelenting struggle to deliver services to communities. Almost all South African municipalities are plagued with huge service delivery backlogs. It can be recommended that there is a need to inculcate and strengthen the role of local councillors in local government matters. The article recommends professional training for councillors in policy machination, strategic planning, budgeting, and translation of plans into programs.

Keywords: democratic local government, service delivery, African National Congress

Introduction

Given that local government is the sphere of government closest to the people, it has an important social function in providing basic services to the community. Thornhill (2008, p. 492) who states that local government is the first point of contact between the public and the government institution articulates this view. South Africa, in the era of democracy, inherited a racially skewed open administration resulting in cadre-deployment. The White Paper on the local government also articulated the characteristics that will assist the municipalities to become more developmental (RSA, 1998, p. 17). According to Section 153(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 Section 153(a) of the Constitution municipalities must manage their administration, budgeting in a manner that will prioritize the basic needs of the community and the promotion of social and the economic, as well as the developmental of humankind (RSA, 1996).

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Democratic South Africa has introduced important changes at the local government level that defined speedy service delivery. Local government forms part of the public sector, which is closest to the citizens, and it is imperative that it provides essential goods and services and develops the rural communities in particular. Improving service delivery in the local government will assist in overcoming the current challenges such as lack of quality services and poverty eradication in the rural communities. For the Local government to perform its duties effectively it must do away with hiring politicians who do not have skills or excellent educational background in order to promote and enforce all the principles of corporate governance. Politicians are not performing their functions insofar as the municipality is concerned. The current performance of municipalities in South Africa is under great duress, especially with the 2016 local government elections. Some of the challenges encountered by the local government are lack of capacity pertaining to skills, dealing with processes, and self-enrichment by both politicians and officials CoGTA (2009a). One of the critical factors that result in poor performance in the South African local government, is related to inadequate or irrelevant training of managers for service delivery to the public (Kroukamp, 2008, p. 65). The aim of this article is to propose effective and efficient service delivery in the local government of democratic system of South Africa.

Background of the Study: Historical Context

The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery 1997 was introduced with the aim of transforming the overall public service institution and service delivery (Maluka, Diale, & Moeti, 2014). On the other hand, Nzimakwe and Mpehle (2012) regard the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery 1997 (Batho-Pele) as a policy framework that brings about efficiency and effectiveness in the provisioning of services. The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997, introduced eight principles, which became the compass in terms of which success or failure of public service delivery is assessed. The eight Batho-Pele principles to be compiled were aimed at promoting people first, setting the framework for the type of service quality that the citizens can expect. These principles include consultation, the development of service standards, access to information, courtesy, information, openness and transparency, redress, and value for money (RSA, 1997). Furthermore, the perpetual decline of local government in South Africa is premised on the recorded service delivery protest. The Municipal IQ recorded a precipitous increase in the number of service delivery protests in the country. The inability to provide basic services has been shown by numerous strikes and protests in which community members demonstrate their dissatisfaction and discomfort regarding the state of services provided by the municipalities.

Theoretical Framework

Stewardship Theory

This paper underscored that effective and efficient service delivery in the Democratic local government is a process of a particular theoretical context that requires finding expression in articulating the process. The main theoretical support for this paper is derived from stewardship theory. Stewardship theory describes the roles and accountability parameters of local government leadership (managers) and their governance functions especially how they employ their principal's assets more effectively. Stewardship is viewed as an "obligation to provide services in an effective and efficient manner that meet the needs of the citizens [clients] of the South African public service institutions without exception" (Nzimakwe & Mpehle, 2012, p. 280).
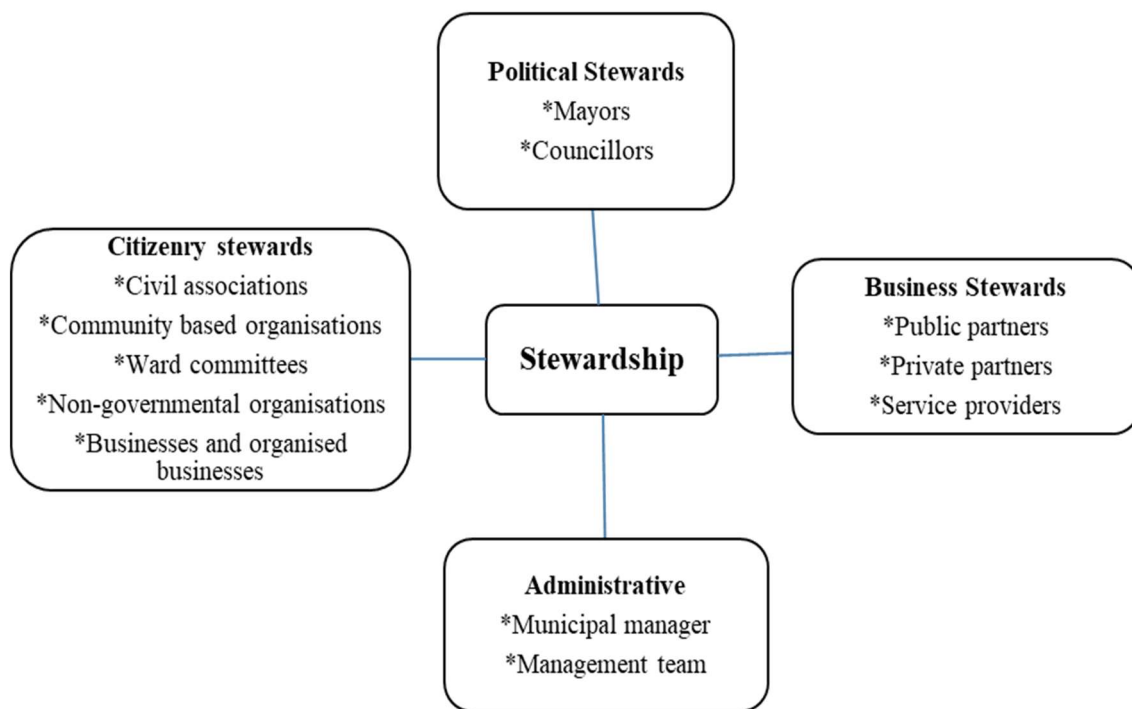
Figure 1. Stewardship relationships in local government (Source: Researcher's own illustration).

As illustrated from the above figure, it should be apparent that the concept of stewardship is the equivalent of accountability. An ideal embodied in stewardship is that elected councillors, citizens, administrative officials, and public-private partnerships hold each other accountable for the effective and efficient running of the local government implementation.

Stewardship theory is based on the assumption that managers when left to do their jobs will act in the best interest of their principals making effective use of assets under management. Stewardship theory is all about being in control of something that has been entrusted to one's care but does not belong to the entrusted person (Waters, 2013, pp. 316-407). Hence, politicians and government administrators are alike entrusted with the care of the nation's resources placed under their control during their tenure of office. Thus, the entrusted responsibilities can be removed by the communities if the stewards are not accountable and responsible for their actions. For example, most municipalities are reported to have been faced with corruption because of greedy stewards who have forgotten their roles (Corruption Watch, 2013, pp. 13-37).

It is unfortunate that the removal of such stewards has been left, increasingly, to the undiscriminating and violent actions of the previously ignored (local resident) principals. Thus, good stewardship is best demonstrated through responsibility in the management of public resources. According to Corruption Watch (2013, pp. 13-37), there have been too many reports of maladministration, mismanagement of public funds, and abuse of resources by the stewards at the local government level. Corruption Watch 2013 statistics show that 22% of the reports received from the public implicate municipalities, traffic police, education institutions, housing subsidies and allocations, and the South African Police Services in poor service delivery and bribery. Corruption can creep into the running of municipalities and threaten the delivery of services if the stewards fail to protect the principals' assets and neglect their responsibilities to use the assets wisely while under their care.

Stewardship theory has a long history and in the 19th century. Stewardship theory was extensively used in the context of running the affairs of the churches, as the government (Wilson, 2010, pp. 1-8) did not fund them. Modern stewardship theory has its roots in governance (Pastoriza & Ariño, 2008, p. 377). A great deal of this study examined the topics of leadership, financial management, and governance, requiring that the effect of stewardship theory on these activities also be considered as part of this aspect of this paper. In order to understand the thinking behind the seemingly radical concept of accountability, it is important to appreciate that the role of stewards in every public institution is to deliver the service envisaged by their principals. Stewardship is a useful concept in management philosophies (Karns, 2011, p. 88), and is applicable to a wide range of fields (Waters, 2013). The term stewardship means that a person is effectively entrusted with the responsibility of owning others' resources (Pastoriza & Ariño, 2008, p. 407). Within the context of this paper, the philosophy of stewardship requires that those entrusted with governance responsibility and functions strive to be effective in the public service institutions. From the local government perspective, the stewardship concept is invoked to remind all municipal officials about service delivery responsibility that is due to their principals, and the public at large. As articulated by Ngwakwe (2012, p. 3220), it is affirmed that being a good steward to the community means that there must be a "Culture of mutual accountability among the government, public officials, service provider, and the citizen". Khalo (2013, p. 186) articulated that financial accountability is becoming increasingly important in public service institutions, and one means of affecting accountability is through auditing.

Planning Fragmentations in the Realm of Local Government

In 1994, the first Democratic Government established new departments in an effort to correct past imbalances, which were racially based in terms of access to public services. After winning the elections, the ANC government had to re-compensate the municipal and political office bearers with higher positions to run the office. Twala (2012) echoed that in most cases qualified officials are often overlooked when promotions and general appointments occur. Irregular appointments may lead to commotion, ambiguity, and low morale amongst employees in the public service. South Africa in the era of democracy inherited racially skewed Africans compromised the majority of public servants in lower positions, with a few middle and senior-level open hirelings in homelands government (Franks, 2014), shift from an apartheid-era public service to a vote based administration way, at all levels (Mathekga, 2015). Post 1994 government faced various challenges in the three administrative levels, namely national provincial, and local (Maserumule, 2016). This study promotes the view that cadre -deployment in local government in South Africa contributes to a state of disorder or government chaos. It is anecdotal that planning in the 1930s at the local level was done on a racially segregated basis and within top-down apartheid superstructures. Ordinarily, planning was more concerned with the perceived needs of the privileged group of people in society (Mojapelo, 2007). Given the pervasive nature of planning, it gave very scant attention to issues of environmental sustainability, economic viability, poverty alleviation, and social health and welfare and focused on control of sect orally-structured infrastructure delivery programmes by the public sector (DPLG, 2000b).

Cadre-Deployment and the Deteriorating State of Local Government in South Africa

Municipal managers in the Democratic South are faced with challenges to run their offices effectively and efficiently which include underperformance, corruption, and cultural entitlement amongst others. Local governments in South Africa are in a state of disarray or account of the practice of cadre-deployment as observed in a report released by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA, 2009a). This report reveals challenges that affect the governance and management of local government.

Several municipalities across South Africa are unable to plan their work effectively, manage their projects skilfully, and plan their budgets wisely and the lack of qualified experts in technical fields inhibits their capabilities. There are challenges such as lack of transparency, accountability, financial mismanagement, fraud, and generally poor performance as indicated by service delivery backlogs in the provision of water, housing, and sanitation. This situation of limited skills available to render basic goods and services prompts service delivery protests against poor governance and related conflicts (COGTA, 2009a). There are structural challenges including financial mismanagement, lack of strategic planning, poor human resource strategies, and ineffective labour regulations amongst others which result from the practice of cadre-deployment having a negative influence on service delivery. Hoffman (2006) posits that the establishment process is basically driven by the completion of salary packages which is reinforced by the character of enrolled officials. Yende (2017) articulates that through cadre-deployment, officials have been placed in positions for which they were unqualified. The practice of cadre-deployment had been continuing despite state promises by the President of South Africa. Several government reviews and reports in South Africa indicate that the relationship between politicians and administrators has been tumultuous. The capacity of councillors has been under the spotlight for quite a while. Many times, councillors are only leaders in name but not in terms of skills and competency. Moreover, inexperienced and incapable mayors are often appointed to lead municipalities (Coetzee, 2010, p. 56). The latter often leads to a leadership conundrum at the local level. Full time office bearers in municipalities include the mayor, the speaker, and members of the Mayoral Committee in bigger municipalities. The issue of division of responsibilities and powers amongst political office bearers in a municipality has proved to be a persistent source of tension. The last cause of leadership incoherence can be attributed to inter-factors, which spill over government structures.

Performance Measurement as a Mechanism for Effective Service Delivery

As articulated by Ndevu and Muller (2017), performance measurement is essential to the delivery of improved services. Performance expectation management ensures that objectives are accomplished. Performance measurement in the South African government has been largely regarded as a process of refining the deliveries of public goods. It is very important to develop a performance management system that is well aligned with a human resource management system. The performance management system should be able to address issues at an appropriate level of government to ensure that effective performance system such as pre-design considerations and performance standards are met (Mokoele, Masenya, & Makalela, 2018).

As articulated by Swanepoel (2008, p. 379), an effective performance management system should be able to empower line management to implement the strategies and objectives of a particular organization successfully. The organizational performance management system is an advantage to a municipality as it identifies major systematic blockages and guides for future planning and developmental objectives. It ensures accountability for residents, municipal areas, political and administrative components of the local government. Performance management serves numerous critical functions in the public sector. Some of these include the assurance of efficiency and adaptation of proficiency. Performance measurement ensures that objectives are accomplished. Public officials must be accountable to their citizens on issues pertaining to service delivery.

It is necessary to concentrate on the utilization of good performance management tools to ensure its effectiveness through the use of theories of self-survey frameworks and performance maintenance benchmarks. Ndevu and Muller (2017) contend that performance measurement is essential to deliver improved services. This is particularly true for local government as reflected in the State of Local Government report that covered every

municipality in the country (Department of Corporative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2009b). According to the report, the relationship between politicians and senior managers in municipalities is among the root causes of poor performance by municipalities often resulting in high staff turnover as managers get to be fired without regard for procedures. The legislation further specifies the roles of office bearers like the mayor, the speaker, and the accounting officer who is answerable to a council collective. A council of a municipality is responsible for the following:

- determination of the vision of a municipal in consultation with the community for a prescribed period.
- approval of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), Local Economic Development (LED), strategy and sector development.
- approval of the budget and related policy.
- recruitment and appointment of municipal staff particularly at senior management.
- development and approval of delegation and performance management system.
- holding municipal staff individually and collectively accountable for municipal performance.
- reporting back to the community and intergovernmental forums on the performance of the municipality.

The Effects of Accountability and Transparency on Local Government

Whenever corruption thrives, accountability and transparency disappear. This circumstance appears to be a common occurrence in South African local government. The Public Service Commission (PSC) Report of 2010 testified that corruption in South African local government manifests itself in the form of bribery, mismanagement of public funds fraud and procurement irregularities (720), and appointment irregularities (627). According to the Public Service Commission (PSC) Report Provincial Health Department 76, disciplinary cases involving fraudulent activity resulted in 17 dismissals, 13 resignations, and 14 written warnings. The above statistics clearly illustrate that corruption has become an accepted operation in government, forsaking the Batho Pele principles for good governance. Public officials still cross the line of ethics which results in failure of transparency, honesty, integrity, and accountability. Bureaucratic corruption in local government is also caused by the municipality in failure to develop their officials in the form of workshops and training. The weaknesses in the control mechanism in local municipalities have opened the gates to corruption since there is no authoritative person or mechanism to hold officials accountable or penalize them for their actions (Pillay, 2016).

Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and Service Delivery in South African Municipalities

The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 regulates integrated development planning. Chapter 5 of the Municipal Systems Act of 2000, consists of different parts that complement the implementation and adoption of the IDP. Chapter 5 further details the general matters pertaining to IDPs, the content of IDPs, the process for planning, drafting, adopting, and reviewing the IDPs, and the miscellaneous features of the IDP. It requires the municipality to be developmental in its planning and it also seeks to achieve the objectives set out in sections 152 and 153 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Section 25(1) requires the municipal council, within the prescribed period after the start of its elected term, to adopt a single, inclusive, and strategic plan for the development of the municipality. Most local municipalities in South Africa are confronted with various challenges pertaining to the effective implementation of the IDP (Madzhivandila & Asha, 2012). Asha (2014b) argues that the poor implementation of the IDP is largely attributed to the lack of meaningful participation of the public in the decision-making processes. The study further indicated that the form of

participation that municipalities are using is not authentic enough in relation to the effective implementation of municipal IDPs. Valeta and Walton (2008) in Buffalo City municipality revealed that the implementation of the IDP is inadequate in the municipality because of poor planning and budgeting of the municipality which lead to poor implementation of the IDP. Fourie and Opperman (2007) share the same sentiments, that the budget is the most important mechanism in effect to the implementation of municipal IDPs.

Therefore, for effective implementation of the IDPs, the budget needs to be integrated with the planning processes below.

Budgeting and planning. Some scholars argue that the effectiveness of the municipality to successfully plan and implement IDPs is largely dependent on the ability of the municipality to allocate budget to a variety of development projects and programmes within the IDP (Valeta & Walton, 2008). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa establishes local government as the sphere of government that structures and manages its budget processes to give priority to the basic needs of communities. Therefore, in inculcating budget together with municipal planning, it is then that municipalities need to use the Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP), as it contributes meritoriously towards giving effect to the implementation of the IDP (Valeta & Walton, 2008). The SDBIP is an annually adopted document that contains projections of the revenue to be collected by the municipality and operational and capital expenditure to be incurred by the municipality. Some scholars demonstrated that the effectiveness of the municipality in successfully planning and implementing the IDP to deliver on their mandates is largely dependent on the ability to plan and allocate public resources in a developmental and sustainable manner (Phago, 2009). Fourie and Opperman (2007) stated that the budget is the most salient mechanism that gives effect to the municipality's service strategies.

Integration and coordination. IDP as a strategic document must be linked with other government programmes for effective implementation within municipalities (RSA, 2000). The IDP is implemented by local government, with other spheres of government. However, to some extent it faces the challenges of showing a clear linkage with other government programmes (Lakshmanan, 2011). Such challenges are attributed to many factors, inter alia a lack of guidelines to assist municipalities in integrating various sector plans and programmes in their IDPs (DPLG, 2000a). Correspondingly, it led to the notion that local government cannot fulfil its mandate without a concrete partnership with the provincial and national governments. Tsatsire, Taylor, and Raga (2010) argue that establishing and maintaining sound intergovernmental relations becomes vital in ensuring the success of local government implementation of the IDPs. It is anecdotally evident that at the core of IDP implementation, municipalities must first position themselves to achieve full integration and coordination of sector-specific plans in the IDPs (Beyers, 2015). However, Mojapelo (2007) demonstrated that, in most instances, sector plans are normally developed as standalone plans and independent from one another, which results in fragmented programmes and projects that are not entirely contributing to the vision of the municipality. Some scholars, such as Asha (2014a), explicitly lamented that poor implementation of the IDP is pragmatically shown by a swift and rapid increase in service delivery protests and matches. The violent service delivery protests are a clear and concrete indication of the failure of local governments to achieve their developmental mandates (Koma, 2010; Asha, 2014a; Mashamaite, 2014). Phago (2009) conducted a study and found that it is still conspicuous that local government continues to face conundrums in terms of producing credible IDPs. Manthata (2004) also found that municipalities face the challenge of translating IDPs to programmes to provide service to the people. This is attributed to the issues of capacity for implementation at the grassroots level.

Mechanisms to Curb Cadre Deployment in the Local Government

Lessons that can be drawn from the experience of the Auditor General (AG) with regard to successful public institutions, are that all successes are based on a leadership tone, showing a willingness to accept accountability and decisively addressing weaknesses within a separate time frame and continuing with performance monitoring (Nzewi & Musokeri, 2014, p. 44).

According to the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) (2007) a variety of initiatives were launched which include the following:

- Government Monitoring and Evaluation system.
- Single Public Service.
- Public Service Amendment Bill.
- African Peer Review Mechanism of Programme of Action.
- Provincial Growth.
- Development Strategies and
- Integrated Development Plan.

The above programmes were designed to improve the performance of public officials to enhance effective and efficient service delivery to the public they serve. Therefore, if the problems within the local government are to be fixed, they must also be fixed at the provincial and national level.

Roles and Functions of Leadership in a Municipality

Political leadership is regarded as a developmental structure with the developmental role of bringing change. Leadership is the most basic of developmental structure that will create a good environmental performance. Councillors are specifically responsible for "Governance and Leadership roles" to promote service delivery (Gqamane & Taylor, 2013, p. 831). Leadership in a municipal context refers to a body of council, consisting of councillors elected directly at the ward level. As determined by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) Section 151(2) of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 74) vests the executive and legislative authority in a council of a municipality. The Constitution further mandated a municipality to structure and manage its administration budgeting and planning process in such a way that it will ensure responsiveness and accountability to the developmental objectives set by the local government. The Legislation further specifies the roles of office bearers like the mayor, the speaker, and the accounting officer who is answerable to the council collective.

Service Delivery Challenges in the South African Local Municipalities

Service delivery remains an enormous challenge facing municipalities (Dikotla, Mahlatji, & Makgahlela, 2014). Local government's failure and inability to provide basic services has been shown by numerous strikes and protests in which community members demonstrate their dissatisfaction and discomfort regarding the state of services provided by the municipalities (Asha, 2014a; Mashamaite, 2014). Poor service delivery remains a major concern across the country which places local municipalities in distress and the spotlight (Managa, 2012). Research studies demonstrated that many municipalities have worked hard over the past years at creating a democratic and accountable government.

The delivery of services such as potable running water, electricity, roads, and waste collection services has improved in many township areas of South Africa (Mukwevho, 2012). The improvement of such services is attributed to municipalities complying with the service delivery budget and targets over their Medium-Term

Expenditure Framework (MTEF). Nevertheless, the low level of service delivery is influenced by a lack of financial capacity and inadequate skills for planning and budgeting (Beyers, 2015). Consequently, poor people in South Africa continue to suffer from a lack of basic services even though access to services is recognized as a fundamental human right (RSA, 1996). It is also clear that the optimal governance system to ensure effective service delivery of social and economic services to meet the aspirations of people seems not to be effective (Nnadozie, 2011). The state of service delivery across the country witnessed enormous backlogs and challenges. The latter is characterized by inadequate provision of water, poor roads, and electricity shortages (Beyers, 2015). The IDP report of the municipality also indicated that more noticeable progress still needs to be made in the different villages of the municipality in providing basic services to ensure a quality living standard in communities (Kotze & Taylor, 2010).

Capacity and Skills for Implementation of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP)

The development literature demonstrated that the capacity building and skills for implementation of various development programmes and projects at the local government level is a major concern (Asha, 2014b; Beyers, 2015). Many local municipalities are still in serious distress when it comes to the capacity to implement the municipal IDP (DPLG, 2000a). Therefore, capacity in government refers to the process of identifying and developing the management skills necessary to address policy problems, attracting, absorbing, and managing financial, human, and information resources, and operating programmes effectively, including evaluating outcomes to guide future activities (Asha, 2014a).

Given the capacity challenges confronting local government, the government is taking a positive stance in trying to resolve the issues of capacity and skills for implementation. For example, South Africa adopted a project consolidation in 2004 as an initiative for building local capacity through capacitating underperforming municipalities. The initiative was aimed at improving the planning and performance through partnership and technical support of expertise, including the training of Community Development Workers (CDWs) and equipping ward committees (Asha, 2014b). The initiative was further criticized because of its methodology of a "one size fits all" approach in capacitating underperforming municipalities. Venter (2014) stated that project consolidation has some loopholes and is not entirely useful, since every municipality faces different socioeconomic conditions and has different performance levels and support needs. In 2009, CoGTA conducted a diagnostic study in order to establish the status of local government. The study concluded that many local governments were performing inadequately and were in a state of serious distress due to the following challenges: lack of effective performance management system and a skills shortage (CoGTA, 2009a). Therefore, in response to the challenge, the national government launched the Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTS). The strategy includes improving the functionality and performance in municipalities, and strengthening partnerships between local government, communities, and civil society (Venter, 2014).

Conclusion

This paper argues that the ANC dominance of the South Africa political landscape declined in the local government and also the policy of cadre-deployment for promoting party interest has the capacity of the human resource department to function properly. The interest level of corruption in local municipalities under the ANC-led government hampers the ability of the municipality to fulfill its obligations properly. This policy of cadre-deployment is declining the standard of performance of the municipalities due to the incompetence of public

officials. The governance program becomes ineffective due to the policy of cadre-deployment. This article promotes calls for the reviewing of authoritative structures that govern local municipalities with the goal of adhering to Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The ruling party in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC), seeks to build a developmental state to resolve problems of poverty, unemployment, and inequality. The continuing underperformance of municipalities has frustrated the hope of South Africans. There is a need for continuous in-house professional training of councillors for them to be responsible for policy expectations. Local government legislation delegates serious developmental work to the council, which is a body of councillors functions such as strategic planning, budgeting, translations of plans into programs, and engagement with the municipal staff. Municipal staff are bound to fail if councillors are not adequately capacitated. Given the relationship that could influence the process of service delivery in the local government, the stewardship construct should be seen as embracing accountable leadership that builds public trust in that institution.

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