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## **THE MEANING OF SERVICE DELIVERY PROTEST: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The purpose of this article is to investigate the causes of service delivery protests in South African local government. The study utilized secondary data for the purposes of data collection. Local government in South Africa has witnessed lots of service delivery protest throughout the country and the cry is for effective and efficient public service delivery to the local communities throughout the country. It is vital to highlight that most of these protests are taking place as a result of corruption and bad management in South African local government. The general population is aware of this since media coverage of comparable incidents in South Africa is often quite public. The majority of South Africans are unemployed and they have to endure insurmountable poverty and deplorable living circumstances. As a consequence, the number of violent demonstrations in South Africa has increased.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Inequality, Protests, Poverty, Service delivery.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The establishment of democracy in South Africa gave millions of formerly marginalized people hope. The new administration reformed the public sector by establishing and passing laws to achieve justice and equality in service delivery. Despite the advances, the government's inability to effectively satisfy the demands of communities has resulted in recent service delivery demonstrations (Mpehle, 2012). Violence related with service delivery demonstrations has increased dramatically in recent years, resulting in the loss of

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life and property damage. Political violence has a long history in apartheid South Africa. However, despite the democratic regime, violence in service delivery demonstrations remains, with estimates ranging from 41.66 percent in 2007 to 54.08 percent in 2010 (Netswera, 2014). Alexander (2010) indicated that South Africa has seen a significant wave of aggressive local political demonstrations since 2004. In rare instances, they have reached insurrectionary dimensions, with people briefly seizing control of their townships, and the phenomena is best described as a poor uprising. There are striking parallels between the Mbeki and Zuma period rallies, particularly in terms of the grievances expressed, which are mostly about insufficient service delivery and a lack of responsibility on the part of local councils. The new administration is more legitimate. Perhaps, ironically, this has heightened the intensity of protest, with people assuming Zuma is more inclined to fulfil their requests. Despite democratic institutions such as the Constitutional Court and regular, mostly peaceful elections, protests persist in South Africa. The majority of South Africans are unsatisfied with democracy's advantages. Unemployment, housing, water and sanitation, energy, corruption and local government, health, and crime have all been mentioned as elements in the nationwide protests (Wasserman, Chuma, Bosch, 2018). This perception of relative impoverishment and inequality within an urban setting is critical to understanding why demonstrations occur. People will wait for services, but not if it seems like everyone else in their community is receiving them first. Add to it the marginalization and alienation felt by residents in informal settlements, as well as the overall hunger for services in these regions, and you have a recipe for disaster. In this milieu, a fast-spreading rumor of incompetence, corruption, or nepotism is all it takes to trigger a violent protest (Allan, Heese, 2011). Mass rallies, marches, and petitions have characterized service delivery in South Africa. These community responses, of collective voice political pressure, have become a defining aspect of ordinary people's reactions when local governments fail to act on community concerns. Some commentators see this as part of a larger issue that might lead to a revolution in the nation. While the more immediate issue is the irritation of promises not met about service delivery, the larger issue encompasses crime, the rising divide between affluent and poor, and the deterioration of government agencies (Akinboade, Mokwena, Kinck, 2013).

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This article largely depends on secondary data for purposes of collecting data to fulfil its goals and address its underlying problem. It examined the existing literature to fulfil the study's aims, which are to analyse the reasons of service delivery protests in South African local government. Local government is the closest to the people and plays an important role in providing public services to local communities around South Africa. The numerous service delivery protests in South African local government is sending a statement about the country's present service delivery predicament. It is important to highlight that the majority of South African residents rely on social assistance. This article analyses the causes of service delivery protests in South African local government based on this assumption.

### **3. RESULT**

#### **3.1. Corruption as a barrier to service delivery in South Africa**

Corruption is more likely to occur in local government because of the procurement procedure. When it comes to service delivery, poor audit results, and financial management issues like corruption are common in South Africa's local governments (Munzhedzi, 2016). Mawenya, (2008) indicated that corruption occurs when clients and suppliers work together and disobey the law for personal gain, resulting in bribery. In most cases, bribery and fraud are involved. Because bribery needs to be disguised via deceit and dishonesty, it usually includes some degree of fraud. In contrast to bribes, unscrupulous procurement methods typically result in more financial waste. Public procurement is riddled with minor and grandiose corruption. Contracts for commodities, services, and modest projects for municipal governments are the most common places for petty corruption. Odeku (2018) indicated that the majority of South Africa's local governments have considerable degrees of corruption in their supply and procurement systems. As a consequence, establishing effective procurement and supply chain management agencies is critical for preventing corruption in local government. Corruption is one of the issues facing South African municipal governments and slowing service delivery. Local governments, via public officials, are intended to be foot soldiers in the delivery of public services; yet, they are vulnerable to corruption. Among the numerous issues confronting public service organizations in developing countries, corruption is one of the most ubiquitous and least addressed (Sebake, Sebola, 2014). Service delivery is critical in South Africa since it has been guaranteed, is anticipated, and is considered as important from the poorest to the richest for the country's progress in many fields. If corruption hampers efficient and timely service delivery, the country would be in jeopardy. Corruption also affects the financial resources that are available for service delivery since what is available is not used effectively. Arcane political judgments based on favours due and future electoral chances do not direct it to the most deserving or needed individuals or areas (Khotseng, Tucker, 2013).

#### **3.2. Disparity between urban and rural areas in service provision**

Most rural settlements in South Africa were left undeveloped after 1994, causing most inhabitants to struggle to make ends meet. Prior to 1994, municipalities were deliberately focused on supplying products and services to metropolitan regions at the cost of rural populations (Maramura, 2022). Inefficient and inadequate local government public service delivery is a key motivator for rural-urban migration. Many rural South African migration patterns are ascribed to push factors such as inadequate public service delivery caused by poverty, lack of employment opportunities, poor healthcare and education. The isolation of many rural areas has a detrimental influence on rural service delivery and, in general, contributes to rural-urban migration (Mubangizi, 2021). Rodseth, Notten and Von Blottnitz (2020) alluded that the influence of this difference is most obvious in the way that service is provided. In most cases, the number of services that are provided to households in rural areas is much lower, and the quality of those services is often worse as well. The historical inequities in the provision of development and services are crucial elements that contribute to this disparity. Other variables also contribute, but these are the most important owing to the political history of the country, the significant degree of poverty, as well as the logistical and financial challenges connected with expanding services to distant rural or inaccessible

informal regions. Akinboade, Mokwena, Kinfack (2013) indicated that the majority of the people in Africa, particularly in rural regions, does not have access to the most fundamental of the country's public services. The causes for defective service delivery are many and complicated, but the majority of the time, they are related to a lack of accountability, transparency, and dedication to making services work for individuals who are poor or disadvantaged. According to Booysen (2003), urbanized provinces in South Africa have benefits over more rural provinces when it comes to the supply of infrastructure, the ease of demographic transition, and the upgrading of standards in secondary education. Makale (2015) stated that the majority of South African municipalities are having trouble accomplishing their goals, which are outlined in the country's constitution, despite the fact that local authorities have been granted the authority to distribute and manage their own resources. An analysis of the performance of local governments finds that service delivery has improved in urban regions, however in rural areas, backlogs are being resolved at a very sluggish rate or, in some instances, neglected, which explains why there have been demonstrations over service delivery in rural areas

### **3.3. Income disparity as a driving force in the protests against service delivery**

South Africa is consistently recognized as one of the countries in the world that has the greatest income gap between its rich and poor citizens (Hundenborn, Woolard, Jellema, 2019). Inequality in terms of income has to be considered one of the most important underlying causes of the demonstrations in South Africa (Alexander, 2010). The Marikina Massacre, which occurred in August 2012, brought to light the most precarious configuration of forces in post-apartheid South Africa. This configuration was created as a result of deeply ingrained social and financial disparities, as well as ecological degradation, indebtedness, and corruption. Over the course of many years, dissent against the established power relations had been building up, with impoverished communities registering thousands of so-called "service delivery protests." These demonstrations appeared to have neither been resolved nor developed into long-lasting social movements (Bond, Mottiar, 2013). South Africa is nevertheless plagued by high rates of unemployment, economic inequality, and poverty, despite the fact that it is one of the richest countries in the area. Inequalities in service delivery in South Africa may be traced back to historical remnants (legislation) that have had an effect on the resources and effectiveness of local governments. On the other hand, inequality is a problem that affects people all over the world, and city planners have traditionally given priority to providing limited resources to the wealthy at the cost of the poor (Sartorius, 2016). South Africa has experienced an upsurge in 'service delivery demonstrations' – protests connected to insufficient service provision – in recent years as a consequence of rising public anger caused by high levels of income disparity. The demonstrations are about more than simply service delivery; they are also about inequality and overall socioeconomic unhappiness, as well as residents' perceptions that the government is not listening or reacting to their predicament (Wasserman, Chuma, Bosch, 2018). The level of income disparity in the South is among the greatest in the world. This is one of the reasons why the local government sector has seen plenty of demonstrations; this is due to the fact that the majority of rural residents are dependent on the services provided by the local governments (Ataguba, Day, McIntyre, 2015). The majority of impoverished people in many South African rural communities do not have access to essential amenities. As a result, people protest by going to the streets and demanding improved service delivery. Protests over service delivery are common in South

Africa. Those who are socially excluded perceive no difference between the present political regime and the previous one. Protests against service delivery take place at the local level, closer to the people who use these services (Sartorius, 2016).

#### **3.4. Poverty and unemployment as a factor in the protests against service delivery**

The South African government recently commemorated the first quarter century of democracy. While the festivities marked significant progress in the realization of democratic ideas, they were not universally welcomed by residents living in poverty and unemployment. South Africa has a 27 percent unemployment rate, with more than 55 percent in poverty. The government's inability to deliver on its promises has fuelled growing rage among residents imprisoned in poverty, unemployment, and landlessness, as seen by the continuous service delivery demonstrations (Khambule, Nomdo, Siswana, 2019). Protests against service delivery are more common in informal residential areas, where unemployment and poverty are highly prevalent. The bulk of these protest acts take place in South African local government informal areas. South Africa's shift from apartheid to democracy may be characterized as a period of "thwarted aspirations" and unmet promises, which sparked violent riots. These are the areas with the highest rates of unemployment and poverty (Breakfast, Nomarwayi, Bradshaw, 2020). Pekeur (2018) indicated that poverty is one of the primary issues confronting municipalities. Many houses under the authority of smaller towns are impoverished, with just a tiny fraction of household members working. This has hampered families' ability to pay for municipal services. This has larger ramifications for service delivery since it limits a municipality's capacity to reinvest funds in service delivery rollouts. Rurality has caused poverty to residents of townships, villages, and agricultural communities, especially black women. Their lives are defined by a scarcity of fundamental commodities and services such as food, clothes, and shelter. Protests against service delivery are sparked by the difficulties experienced by women and youth. The demonstrations show that many criticize the government and local governments for not doing more to alleviate poverty among citizens (Thaba-Nkadimene, Molotja, Mafumo, 2019). In other circumstances, hostility against governmental institutions may emerge from frustration caused by poverty and unemployment. In many cases, though, responsibility is assigned in a manner that discourages mobilization (De Juan, Wegner, 2019).

#### **3.5. Disruption to service delivery caused by Cadre Deployment**

Cadre deployment is marked by issues such as a lack of transparency and accountability, misappropriation of funds, fraud, corruption, and overall poor performance, as seen by service delivery caseloads in the supply of water, shelter, and sanitation. The scarcity of skills to provide basic products and services generates service delivery demonstrations against inadequate governance and consequent conflict. Several towns around the county are consistently failing to successfully organize their work, manage their projects skilfully, and plan their budgets sensibly, and a shortage of skilled professionals in technical sectors limits their capacities (Shava, Chamisa, 2018). Since the ANC gained power in the first post-apartheid democratic elections in 1994, it has established a strong loyalty to its members, putting 'cadres' in all areas of government. Because of the military battle against the white National government under apartheid, the word "cadres" has been used to identify ANC followers. South Africa is at significant danger because the governing party (ANC) is choosing and deploying cadres inside municipalities, which is an indication that politicians are abusing their position. The amount of risk in municipal government is significant since

there is no merit system in place for hiring (Masuku, Jili, 2019). Cadre-deployment has a detrimental influence on service delivery since persons in crucial positions are not qualified for the role but are merely politically powerful. Corruption has grown in South Africa as a result of cadre deployment. Political detainees are not assigned based on merit, experience, or academic qualities. They are merely being used to prolong patronage and monopolize power among individuals politically linked to the ANC (Nomarwayi, Bradshaw, Breakfast, 2012) The ANC's cadre deployment strategy, which emphasizes hiring individuals based on their loyalty and lengthy service in the organization, has an influence on service delivery since it employs inept and unqualified staff who fail to execute their jobs. This has resulted in poor service delivery in local government around the country, as seen by the country's periodic service delivery protests (Mngomezulu, 2020).

### **3.6. A link between maladministration and service delivery protests**

In situations where there is no public official are not accountable, there is a clear possibility for misbehaviour and maladministration to reveal itself, which ultimately results in the government being unable to fulfil its duty of service delivery (Rulashe, Ijeoma, 2020). The provision of municipal services is often hampered by allegations of financial irregularities, maladministration, and mismanagement; this, in turn, causes residents to lack faith in the system and to protest against the provision of municipal services (Kroukamp, Cloete, 2018). The municipalities in South Africa experiencing issues such as losing reputation, investors refusing to invest in them, communities opposing service delivery, maladministration and unexpected changes in leadership. This is occurring in South Africa. This is often due to councillors lacking the necessary expertise or towns lacking a framework for implementing corporate governance. Municipalities will struggle to choose which aspects of governance to control and how to manage them without robust corporate governance systems (Masegare, Ngoepe, 2019). Most local governments lack experience in disciplines like as financial management, engineering and project management, leaving them understaffed, resulting in enormous service delivery backlogs throughout the country. This has hampered municipalities' ability to deliver basic services and finish development projects, denying underprivileged people in South Africa access to the services they are legally entitled to. Inability to supply services is linked to maladministration and inability to finish development initiatives. Most municipalities in the country are struggling to manage their budgets (Mashamaite, 2014).

### **3.7. Poor Public Participation and service delivery protests**

Many protestors are frequently upset over being excluded from local government decision-making processes. Municipalities are obligated to create an inclusive and participatory culture of municipal government, as stipulated by Section 16 subsection (1) of the Municipal Systems Act (2000). It is vital for local administrations to promote citizen engagement in decisions that directly affect them. The service delivery demonstrations and rallies show that participatory democracy is a major difficulty in democratic South Africa, and as a consequence, low public engagement contributes to local government underdevelopment (Modise, 2017). The right of the people to participate in the governance process is a constitutional requirement that is safeguarded by several policy frameworks that regulate local governments. The goal of community engagement is to give knowledge while also improving public choices, programs, and initiatives. Without a doubt, public engagement is a constitutional as well as a legal need (Mamokhere, 2020). Municipal

community engagement practices have an impact on service delivery and, perhaps, incite violent unrest. While protest is one of the rights guaranteed by the constitution, the violence that has followed protests concerning service delivery has highlighted problems about public ownership and responsibility in relation to municipal prioritization of services to be supplied. In recent years, South Africa has confronted a problem of strong violent service delivery protest (Nembambula, 2014).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Managa (2012) alluded that among the key obstacles confronting local government are significant issues of institutional capability, mishandling of finances, high levels of corruption, and a lack of public involvement. These are major difficulties that impede local government functioning and lead to service delivery protests and demonstrations. Corruption is a major concern in the country's bureaucratic culture, political development, and social history. As a result of pervasive corruption, which poses a dangerous threat to the Constitution, local governments are perceived as "havens for those who are milking" those same state resources. Even more worrisome is the fact that high-ranking national and municipal authorities have been accused of inappropriate tendering, bribery, and illegal expenditures. The stability and growth of South Africa have been severely harmed by the country's endemic corruption. Lack of ethical leaders in the public sector has developed a culture of fraud and corruption, where openness and accountability are discouraged rather than promoted. The number of high-ranking state officials who have been shown to have breached their oaths of office in South Africa is perplexing, prompting residents to stage protests and demand better service delivery (Masuku, 2019). Many rural municipalities lack the competence to establish local fiscal tools, such as tax collection. It is necessary to reconsider how the equitable share is computed and distributed in order to make the allocation to rural-based municipalities more equal. Municipalities depend largely on national transfers to meet their constitutionally required water, transportation, and economic development duties. Many rural municipalities lack enough means to provide effective services to rural areas as a result of inequitable resource allocation from the national treasury, which has resulted in service delivery protests and demonstrations. Local governance in rural regions is neglected in comparison to local government in metropolitan areas (Mubangizi, 2021). Basic sanitation, much alone garbage disposal, is a dream in some towns, particularly in rural areas. Most individuals utilize 'rubbish dumps' behind their homes or put garbage wherever it is convenient. In other words, fundamental service levels are poor and, in many cases, non-existent, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas of the country (Koelble, LiPuma, 2010). Protests in South Africa occur for a variety of causes. The main cause is discontent with basic municipal amenities such as running water, electricity, and toilets, particularly in rural and informal settlements. service provision Protests in rural regions demonstrate how a lack of knowledge often leads to the quick spread of rumors of favouritism, corruption, and incompetence (Mamokhere, 2020). Protests against service delivery are becoming more common in rural villages, where unemployment and poverty are prevalent and municipalities lack technical and organizational capacity. Poverty with local origins, a lack of financial stability, and poor living conditions are all connected to service delivery protests, as is a high crime rate and a lack of participation in community activities such as meetings or groups (Ngcamu, 2019). The cadre deployment strategy has had a detrimental effect on both governance quality and

service performance. The ANC's cadre deployment policy has placed inexperienced political officeholders in charge of public service delivery in several government ministries. This is the source of the problem (Mlambo, Zubane, Thusi, 2022). Transparency has never prevailed in practice, even when inquiries are received on a specific transaction or for an individual appointment. The municipality does everything behind closed doors. Instead of skills and qualifications, appointment is based on corruption, favouritism, and cadre deployment. The municipality in South Africa allocate certain contracts to official's relatives. In South African local government, the political-administrative relationship also trumps openness (Maramura, 2022).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

South Africa is categorized as a developing country, and citizens rely more on government services. This is because growing economies have less economic opportunities, resulting in more unemployment, poverty, and social inequality. This is also true in South Africa, where the majority of individuals are impoverished and unemployed, and socioeconomic inequality is widespread. This is because of the increasing demand for public services, effective and efficient service provision is an essential issue in South Africa. South African citizens were promised basic services, which explains the country's high service delivery demonstrations. Corruption, maladministration, rural area marginalisation, economic disparity, cadre deployment, poverty, and unemployment are all serious factors for the rise in service delivery protests in South Africa. South Africa's government must encourage and enable local governments in both rural and urban regions in order to provide equitable service delivery to all inhabitants. It was the aim of this paper to investigate the causes of service delivery protests in South African local government. Therefore, the aforementioned are amongst the central causes of service delivery protests in South Africa. This paper further suggests the following measures for stakeholders (government, civil society, business and individuals) involved in address service delivery protests in South Africa.

Firstly, the government must devise measures to address corruption in local government, which has a negative impact on public service delivery. Furthermore, Local governments must also respond to residents' demands and encourage community engagement in both rural and urban regions. Local government as the sphere that is closer to the people will always be impacted by service delivery protest, therefore the central government must recognise that the promised democracy is vested on the local government sphere and it should be prioritised in the public sector through sufficient financial support and attraction and retentions of skilled employees who are meets the requirements of the post and also establishment of financial controls in local government to deal with issues of fraud and corruption. Thus, the public service delivery will be enhancement and service delivery protest might be reduced.

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