

Necessitating a Germane Developmental Local Government Agenda in South Africa: A Post COVID-19 Contemplation

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Abstract

Development initiatives in developing countries where experiences of inequalities are prevalent, mean that sustainable livelihoods of citizens need prioritisation. Local government's constitutional mandate in South Africa includes realisation of a development agenda wherein citizens can participate in the economic activities and improve their well-being. However, since establishment of the South African democratic local government in the year 2000, certain features which have served to impede interventions to make municipalities functional are observable. These impediments include several of the following critical elements: firstly, a lack of transformation on the rural municipalities. Secondly, municipalities continue to demonstrate a lack of institutional capacity and skills. Thirdly, the need to maintaining municipal efficacy in organising and coordinating developmental plans. Fourthly, a lack of robust use of technology and access to reliable data to inform decisions making processes. In addressing these issues within the post COVID-19 environment, this conceptual article relies on a human-centred development approach to critically appraise these specific features of local government. A human-centred approach argues that the nature of institutional architecture, developmental agendas and technology need to resonate with context specific needs of certain municipal residents. It is clear from the literature, municipal reports and auditors' reports reviewed that the disruptions of COVID-19 outbreak mean that most municipalities would not survive the impact of this pandemic. In its final analysis, it is a considered view of this article that human-centred approaches, context driven solutions and access to technological devices should form a post-COVID-19 pandemic approaches to developmental local government in South Africa.

Key words: COVID-19, development, capacity, local government, technology.



Introduction

The notion of a developmental local government seeks to address localised socio-economic issues such as the provision of basic municipal services, infrastructure, inclusive local economy and employment, among other goals. These are germane concerns which have a bearing on local communities, and municipalities need to develop practical plans and priorities to maintain a viable developmental agenda. Participation of relevant stakeholders including local communities (Phago, 2008; Van der Waldt, 2018) remains a cog in the overall approach to ensure that development is people-centred. Such a consideration means that the formulation and implementation of municipal policies are evidence-based and context-specific. Accordingly, the *White Paper on Local Government* of 1998 provides an envisioned and a core characterisation of developmental local government through maximisation of social development and economic growth, integration and coordination, democratic development, and leading and learning (Koma, 2012; Landsberg & Graham, 2017). In highlighting these characteristics, the White Paper also outlines expectations for local government to play a role in facilitating local economic development to support creation of employment and boost local economy. With all its good intentions, developmental local government in South Africa is confronted with multiplicity of challenges. Such challenges include appointments of inexperienced political deployees, discouraged employees and political interference, poor institutional culture out of sync with new realities, archaic institutional structures and poor technologies, dwindling funding, and inability to adjust to new policy imperatives (Parnell, Pieterse, Swilling & Wooldridge, 2002). With these perpetual challenges, developmental local government agenda has clearly drifted in many rural municipalities, which make up a significant percentage (over 60%) of local government in South Africa (Ncube & Monnakgotla, 2016:90). Rural municipalities often lack necessary human and financial skills as well as capacity to develop and implement their own policies (Munzhedzi, 2020).

This article contends that the post COVID-19 environment would expose many municipalities as irredeemable, dysfunctional and unable to realising their developmental agendas. The article used a human-centred development approach to critically appraise these specific features of local government which are largely rural; deficiency of skills and capacity, inadequate procurement procedures, leadership problems, deficient management and political interference (Ababio, Vyas-Doorgapersad & Mzini, 2008:6). Through this lens of a human-centred approach, a new paradigm shift is required to usher in a professional local government as opposed to the current politically induced setup plagued by the socio-economic challenges as outlined in this article. This article further considers a discussion on the question of development and rurality challenges where viable developmental initiatives are lacking. Deficient institutional capacities have become



a norm where municipal interests often serve political agenda rather than community needs. The municipal development plans are facing an emerging need to consider the COVID-19 effects and government regulations where adherence need to be maintained. Therefore, the need to bring in digitised approaches accessible to both residents and municipal officials is pressing.

Human Centred Development Approach

This article adopts a Human Centred Development approach as its model to examine a developmental local government agenda for a post COVID-19 period in South Africa. This is because the focus of Human Centred Development is on people and not processes or systems. The legislative provision in municipalities to maintain public participation is also an essential component of realising human development. With this kind of approach to examining the developmental local government agenda and its relevance for a post COVID-19 period, the focus on improving the conditions of residents in rural municipalities could be better understood through a Human Centred Development approach lens. Development characterisation in the context of a developmental local government need to consider support for social groupings such as local businesses forums, maintaining integration in the planning and implementation process and adaptive, and responsive municipal systems to new demands such as COVID-19 conditions (Kotze & Kellerman, 1997: 36-37). It is also paramount to consult various affected parties when initiating development programmes in communities. Phago (2008) highlights several participation mechanisms often applied by municipalities such as *izimbizo*, metropolitan sub-councils and community ward structures, traditional leaders, public meetings or hearings, conferences and workshops. For a post COVID-19 period, most of these mechanisms may need revision to adhere to the emerging new normal of social distancing and regular sanitising, among others. The development of applicable technology and infrastructure, which are the often the main focus of development should not be at the expense of the affected communities but need to maintain the necessary human centred approach. Maserumule (2011:498) concurs with this view and posits that human centred development propagates the notion that ordinary people should be the direct beneficiaries of development initiated by government. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, development initiatives in rural municipalities should be what underpins the regulations emanating from the *Disaster Management Act, 2002* (Act 57 of 2002).

Development and the Challenge of Rurality in Local Government

Countries in Africa are characterised as developing since they are economically dependent on raw materials and agriculture with serious experiences of social deprivation and low-



income levels (Todaro, 1994). Many Africans have common development denominators which include a lack of inclusive development, poverty and underdevelopment, absence of human development, and limited employment opportunities for the citizens (Ukwandu, 2014). However, there is no consensus on the real causes of underdevelopment. Common factors considered for this categorisation of both underdeveloped and developing countries have underlying causes such as decades of colonialism, slave trade, globalisation and racial exploitation (Nkrumah, 1965; Sachs, 2001; Mamdani, 2005; Ukwandu, 2014). Meaningful development is measured by its ability to successfully address societal unemployment, poverty and inequality (Phago, 2017) by applying mechanisms such as the human centred approach to mitigate the anomalies. According to Van der Walddt (2018:157), prior 1994 democratic elections, development was racially based in that it occurred exclusively to areas dominated by white minorities. The African majorities were excluded from any meaningful participation in the economy where both social and economic opportunities were exclusive for the whites. A series of policy interventions of the democratic government through Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, Macroeconomic Reform Strategy, broad based black economic empowerment (BBBEE), and the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) were meant to address the anomalies and inequalities of the colonial and apartheid South Africa within the government superstructure (Van der Walddt, 2018:157). Local economic development back to basics approach are also some of the initiatives meant to address local government challenges.

The notion of local government is a well-established global sub-national government structure meant to consolidate governance and administrative interventions in the development of local communities. Section 152 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* of 1996 (hereafter referred to as 1996 *Constitution*) sets an agenda for local government to, among others, prioritise social and economic development. While development needs to be considered as a moving target, key milestones must be recorded to demonstrate resilience and sustainability of municipal institutions. This constitutional imperative of socio-economic developmental mandate for municipalities, calls for creation of a vibrant local economic development initiatives where businesses and employment creation abound. However, the demarcation of local government has inevitably maintained apartheid spatial planning where unlike towns and cities, rural municipalities continue to struggle for meaningful socio-economic interventions. The Government Communication and Information Systems (2000) define rural areas as having the following two characteristics:

- *Sparsely populated areas in which people farm or depend on natural resources, including villages and small towns that are dispersed through these areas.*



- *Areas that include large settlements in the former homelands, which depend on migratory labour and remittances as well as government social grants for their survival, and typically have traditional land tenure systems.*

The National Treasury (2011) in outlining a fiscal infrastructure framework highlights that: *Given most rural municipalities' weak economic base and high levels of poverty, the fiscal framework is primarily focussed on addressing backlogs in basic infrastructure and subsidising basic service delivery.*

The issues of weak economic base and poverty are significant impediments to local economic development initiatives in rural areas. Despite a complex definition on what constitute rural areas, some key aspects such as farming activities and villages have become commonly applicable (Government Communication and Information Systems, 2000:7). Thus, a struggle for meaningful socio-economic interventions as premised on the notion of rurality is characterised by low revenue base, lack of skills base and capacity, few apolitical citizen activism and poor infrastructure (Munzhedzi, 2019) which has directly impacted on the municipal development agenda. Infrastructure in the context of a municipality refers to public roads, healthcare centres, water and ICT infrastructure amongst others as outlined in Part B of Schedule 4 of the 1996 *Constitution*. The thrust of the developmental local government agenda requires municipalities in a rural set up to generate their own revenue which remains impracticable with the current socio-economic conditions of high poverty levels and reliable income streams.

Cases of Local Economic Development (LED) programmes in rural municipalities are further setup for failure with imbedded rurality features. LED is a programme of local government, which requires resolute collaborations with relevant stakeholders to boost local economy. The National Treasury (2011:204) observes that part of the reason for failing LED programmes are due to a poor selection, which are usually unsustainable and corrupted decisions serving interests of individuals and cronies rather than the entire community. Munzhedzi and Makwembere (2019) highlight what could be considered an additional layer of LED challenges for rural municipalities in South Africa. These are inadequate monitoring and evaluation, weak municipal reporting structures, poor human resources capacity, limited financial resources, corruption, inadequate ownership of land, lack of coordination, weak leadership and lack of accountability. These challenges contribute to the implementation of the LED programme to be a cumbersome and a difficult process. For rural municipalities, this means that their chances of success are based on fortunes, rather than the requisites administrative or policy interventions.



As highlighted above, some of the key considerations for LED in the context of rural municipalities should bear in mind lack of viable agricultural activities, poor infrastructure (such as untarred roads), and brain drain in the rural areas (Government Communication and Information Systems, 2000:7; National Treasury, 2011). These barriers are discussed in the ensuing section of the article.

Lack of Sustainable Agricultural Activities

South Africa has vast lands which lie fallow despite the problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality (National Development Plan, 2011). The transformation of agriculture has been a dismal failure without any meaningful support for local farmers by rural municipalities. It must be noted that agriculture is not entirely the competency of local government, but the local government sphere has a role to play. The local sphere of government in collaboration with other spheres has a responsibility to assist local businesses within their jurisdiction, including agricultural businesses. The assistance may take the form of Local Economic Development (LED) programme or similar initiatives from municipalities. In this case, LED programme should subsidise small businesses to sustain agricultural farming activities. However, the impotency of most rural municipalities due to lack of adequate human and financial resources, and the political will and consequence management have paralysed any potential for this sphere of government. Corruption have also thrived significantly (Mafunisa, 2007; National Treasury, 2011: 204). Golele, Mautjana and Makombe (2018) posit that land claim and agricultural programmes are both political and economic activities, since the exclusion of blacks from owning land and farming was a political decision of the apartheid regime. It is an economic activity in that blacks were denied economic opportunities like employment, economic empowerment and wealth. Equally important is that many black farmers need requisite farming and general agricultural experiences (Makombe, 2018). For municipal agricultural activities to be sustainable, municipalities need to develop clear annual performance targets and support so that accountability may be fortified. Lack of sustainable agricultural activities has a negative effect on the creation of employment in rural areas. Most municipalities either lack resources and capacity to support small farmers or they lack the necessary political will to make necessary interventions in their respective jurisdictions.

Poor Infrastructure

The Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) programme is a mechanism used by government to invest in public infrastructure through municipalities. Billions of rands are annually invested in this enormous drive to ensure that municipalities build public infrastructure, which will attract private businesses to also invest in the infrastructure. Swilling (2006) concurs and claims that MIG is the biggest funding injection to local government from higher spheres. Unlike in national government where the focus of infrastructure



investment is on such things as railway, dams and national roads, the focus of MIG is on municipal projects such as local roads, municipal parks and sanitation as guided by the Schedule 4B of the 1996 *Constitution*. However, there are many instances where municipalities failed to spend allocated MIG in South Africa (Auditor General of South Africa (AGSA), 2018). Such municipalities which are largely rural often lack skills and capacity to achieve critical targets and complete projects timeously. It is through carefully conceptualised MIG projects that municipal infrastructure is immensely developed.

For instance, most of the roads in rural municipalities remain untarred and in bad conditions as well as lack of good sanitation. Deplorable conditions of this nature impede investments from business sector such as banking and retail stores, which could contribute significantly in creation of employment and other local economic development activities. The effects of poor infrastructure are also social in nature, since access to social and welfare services such as social grants and food parcels is directly impacted by these appalling conditions. This is one clear demonstration of the failure of a developmental role of local government in linking rural areas with urban centres to promote their local economies.

Brain Drain

The urban-rural linkages manifest through several forms of complex movement of people for mainly economic reasons. The Government Communication and Information Systems (2000:7) outlines some of the pertinent considerations for complexities in urban-rural linkages. Accordingly, rural-urban linkages take various forms, which may include the more dynamic types of linkages such as those that:

- *The movements of people between rural and urban households (many of which are of a circular nature), and these include temporary migration (as in seasonal moves) and labour migration (including weekly commuting).*
- *The more permanent migration of people from rural to urban areas and vice versa.*
- *The movement of people operating from a single (urban or rural) household (as in daily commuting or school trips, shopping trips and short-term visits).*
- *The movement of resources (such as money and remittances), commodities (as in the production-market chains for agricultural produce), and services (e.g. mail delivery) (Government Communication and Information Systems, 2000:7).*

These movements come with brain drain in which highly skilled professionals are likely to serve the interests of urban centres (Munzhedzi, 2013). For instance, qualifying engineers, health care professionals and accountants, among others, usually invest and spend their resources in cities where development and economic opportunities for employment and business opportunities are much better. This movement of people from rural areas to towns and cities in search of better life is called urbanisation (Van der Waldt, 2018:10).



Inadvertently, due to this situation, rural municipalities lose out on experienced individual who are attracted in towns and cities. For rural municipalities such a cyclical situation regarding lack of viable developmental agenda, perpetuate underdevelopment (World Cities Report, 2016:1).

The discourse pertaining to development and challenge of rurality as discussed above need interventions to expedite development dismantled underdevelopment. This means that a failure to resolve socio-economic development issues of sustainable agricultural projects, infrastructure and incessant brain drain would continue to compromise viability of rural municipalities. This matter has become an exigency because many of the existing models of doing businesses within the context of COVID-19 period would require digitisation. The argument advanced herein is that relevant interventions are key to ensure viability of rural municipalities through maintaining developmental mandates. However, it is clear that many of the rural municipalities are under prepared for the age of advanced digitisation. While there are several other factors for the failures, the foremost reason needs to be considered as political. This problem is also explained through deficient institutional capabilities of rural municipalities for a 20-year period since establishment of democratic local government in the year 2000.

Deficient Institutional Capacities

Section 53 of the 1996 *Constitution* spells out the core developmental mandate of municipalities which include the need to structure and manage administration as well as budgeting and planning accordingly. This constitutional provision continues to outline this duty in that priority must be given to the basic needs of communities with a promotion to the socio-economic development of community members. Unfortunately, deficient institutions have emerged with systems penetrated and paralysed by political interests, which have diverted public resources and undermined the constitutional mandate of municipalities. AGSA (2018) is one among many official reports which clearly demonstrate failure to achieve their set performance targets, in functional areas such as service delivery and budget implementation plans (SDBIPs). These kinds of deficient institutional practices have become normalised as many municipalities are unable to account for their finances and poor administrative decisions. As a consequence of these glaring political failures to achieve their developmental agenda, recklessness and obduracy have prevailed. This section identifies interference in municipal administration, corruption culture and lack of critical skills as some of the key contributors to deficient institutional capacity, which would inevitably require bailouts and massive budget injections for a post COVID-19 period in order to digitise (AGSA, 2018). These are discussed in detail in the subsequent paragraphs.



Political Interference

Political interference refers to the meddling in the administrative affairs by politicians for purposes that are likely to benefit them or their political party. There are policy frameworks that guide the relationship between politicians and administrators in all spheres of government. More often than not, political interference has negative outcomes, hence it is against the municipal policies. The report of the AGSA (2018) highlights that nearly thirty-one percent (31%) of municipalities in the country are not financially viable. The AGSA (2018) ascribes this challenge to many other factors including political interference and infighting municipal councils. Sebiloane (2009:93) advances that political interference is a challenge that hinders effective municipal planning and implementation by the municipal administrative officials. Most importantly, political interference hinders effective implementation of municipal policies, including the integrated development plan and the budget. With COVID-19, some municipalities cannot effectively manage the pandemic since they are failing to fulfil their developmental agenda. Municipality are even failing to provide clean water and sanitation, which are required to manage the spread of COVID-19. In actual fact, political interference has resulted into corruption and blurred accountability lines (Cameron, 2009; Minnaar, 2010). Political interference undermines accountability measures because councillors who interfere with the municipal procurement processes are not the ones to account to the municipal council and municipal public accounts committee (MPAC). There were allegations of nepotism and corruption in the allocation of food parcels in Mpumalanga and other provinces during the current Covid-19 pandemic in the manner politicians were involved the provision of relief grants and food parcels for poor people (Economic Freedom Fighters, 2020). Other glaring examples of political interference reported in the media recently are highlighted below:

- Ms Lindiwe Msengana-Ndlela, a municipal manager for the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality whose relationship with the Mayor was marred by political interferences (Mail and Guardian, 2015). In one instance, she was given illegal instructions to appoint 16 members of the *Umkhonto weSizwe* Military Veterans' Association (MKMVA) as bodyguards for the mayor and the deputy mayor without following correct procedure (Munzhedzi, 2019).
- A tension which resulted in the suspension and ultimate dismissal of Mr Makonde Mathivha who was the municipal manager of the Thulamela Local Municipality because of fighting over appointment of service providers with the political principals at the Vhembe Region of the ANC (The Citizen, 2015).



- A municipal manager of *Ingquza Hill* Local Municipality complained by writing a letter to President Cyril Ramaphosa and alleging that the Mayor and the MEC in the Eastern Cape Province are suspending him because of a political witch-hunt by politicians wanting to gain access to the municipal resources (City Press, 2018). The municipal manager complains that the mayor intervenes in his administrative responsibilities even when *the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003* (Act 56 of 2003) and other relevant policy frameworks do not allow for such (Munzhedzi, 2019).

All the examples discussed in the preceding paragraphs are an indication that politicians interfere in the administrative processes of municipalities. It is unfortunate that political interferences of this nature infringe on the policy frameworks and effective functioning of municipalities without consequence management. The outcome of a politically interfered process is often marred by incompetence, maladministration and corruption.

Corruption

The African National Congress (ANC) (2016:5) promised in its local government election *manifesto* to intensify the fight against fraud and corruption in local government and social fabric crimes in communities. Similarly, several other opposition parties such as Democratic Alliance (DA) and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) highlighted in their respective *manifestos* intentions to address corruption issue in municipal institutions. Ambe and Badenhorst-Weiss (2011) posit that corruption particularly in the procurement process is so severe that municipal service provision is affected enormously. The promise by the ANC was necessitated by the fact that corruption and maladministration were and are rampant in the local sphere of government (Munzhedzi, 2019). Corruption and failure to punish those involved in corruption is one of the biggest challenges confronting municipalities in South Africa. Munzhedzi (2016) also claim that municipal procurement and corruption are like inseparable twins in that there is none without the other. This actually means that most of the corrupt practices in municipalities are in the municipal procurement processes.

The EFF (2020) claim that there are many cases in Mpumalanga and elsewhere in South Africa where food parcels specifically meant for COVID-19 beneficiaries are being channelled to member and supporters of the ANC by its councillors. This basically means that there is biasness in the distribution of food parcels by certain councillors in some municipalities. This is not only regarding the issue of food parcels, but the procurement of goods and services needed during COVID-19 pandemic environment. Mba and Lungisa (2020) declare that the management of COVID-19 and the achievement of developmental



agenda is likely not to be realised if the sphere which should play a critical role is still riddled with corruption incidences. These authors allude to the fact that the relaxing of *Public Finance Management Act, 1999* (Act 1 of 1999) and *Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003* (Act 56 of 2003) in as far as procurement of necessary goods and services relating to COVID-19, is a contributory factor. The relaxation of these two legislations make it easier for those with corrupt appetites to manipulate the good intentions of government. The intention of relaxing these legislations is intended to minimise bureaucratic delays on procurement processes. It means that municipalities may appoint a service provider to provide sanitisers, face masks, water tankers, and temporary shelters for the homeless people without following the long procurement processes. However, with non-advertisement of tenders, possibilities exist for corrupt practices to be undertaken through the appointment of friends and family without relevant capacities and expertise. Corruption does indeed have a negative effect in achieving a developmental local government agenda since resources meant to be used by municipalities in working with other stakeholders in meeting needs of their communities are diverted to the wrong beneficiaries.

Lack of Critical Skills

Many rural municipalities in provinces such as Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West are struggling to achieve clean audits (AGSA, 2017; AGSA, 2018). Some of the inability to clean audit include lack of critical skills including but not limited to accountants and internal auditors. In addition to the lack of finance related skills in many of the largely rural municipalities, they continue to fail recruiting engineers, project managers and experienced managers (Munzhedzi, 2013). These skills that are lacking are what is necessary for the realisation of a development agenda in South Africa. Without these skills and capacity to renders basic municipal services, the local sphere of government would not be able to achieve its constitutional developmental mandate. The municipality must work with the local communities and other stakeholders within their jurisdiction to achieve the development agenda, which includes in the current context the proper management of COVID-19 pandemic. Without proper skills and capacity to develop well balanced budgets, internal auditors to advice on early deviations, and internal accountability mechanisms to curtail corruption, municipalities are more likely to fail in their development agenda. In certain instances, it is a question of location where rural municipalities are based. Municipalities that are largely rural are unable to attract and retain good candidates for strategic positions as well as lack of capacity in most rural municipalities. Auditor General (2017) has also raised concerns about the skills and capacities of most municipalities in South Africa.



The foregoing provides a detailed description through references to reports, cases and academic discourses on some of the political problems contributing to deficient institutional conditions in municipalities. These manifestation of political interferences in administrative processes without consequence management feed further into rampant corruption, especially in procurement processes and subsequent loss of critical skills within the rural municipal environment. Thus, compromising the ability of rural municipalities to respond to the post COVID-19 demands, which would require advanced digitisation. Advanced digitisations mean that critical skills are needed to handle such demands. In this case, the situation is paramount because the critical skills implications would mean that municipal developmental plans need to be reconsidered on how to leapfrog to the advanced digitisation period of post COVID-19.

Municipal Development Plans

After twenty years since the establishment of democratic local government in South Africa, many municipalities still lack the requisite skills and capacities to develop credible integrated development plans and budgets of their own (Munzhezzi, 2020). The core requirements are that approved plans and budgets needed to be informed by the human centred conditions hence the notion of public participation. The impression is that the needs of local communities must always inform municipal plans and policies for realising developmental local government agenda. However, with clear indications in this article regarding pervasive development challenges and rurality as well as existing capacity deficiencies in local government, the need to innovate has become even greater. Municipal plans would need to consider post COVID-19 innovative approaches on how to digitise for service delivery. The following three main elements need attention, namely, community participation, LED support and access to the use of technology for both community and municipal officials.

Community Participation Approach

The impact of COVID-19 lockdown since March 2020 in South Africa meant that new ways of human interactions have become an immediate requirement. This has been termed social distancing and requires individuals in public spaces to maintain at least one metre distance and regularly sanitise in reducing the spread of this COVID-19. Government has also provided regulations in accordance with Section 27(2) of the *Disaster Management Act, 2002* (Act 57 of 2002) to limit public gatherings for only essential events to a maximum of 50 individuals. This means that the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdowns have further exposed the municipal unreadiness to adjust to new conditions, as failed implementation of developmental plans abound and serves as a lost opportunity during the past 20 years since democratisation. The essence of this is that traditional town hall



meetings would not be viable post COVID-19 and municipalities with their serious backlogs would be required to provide innovative ways to conduct their legislated community participation processes for IDP approvals (Phago, 2017). Community participation approach encompasses consultations, involvement and interactions with stakeholders which would be constrained due to the fact that large gatherings are prohibited during the lockdown in South Africa. With limited technological initiatives such as the use of social media, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Skype to mention just a few in most rural municipalities, COVID-19 has weakened the interaction between the municipalities and their local communities. Human Centered Approach which has been adopted in this article is also largely made possible through interactions with local communities and other relevant stakeholders. However, community participation approaches have largely not been effective even before Covid-19 pandemic. Local stakeholders often do not participate as desired by the legislative frameworks regulating community participation in local government including but not limited to the *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000* (Act 32 of 2000).

Proper LED Conceptualisation

The aftermath of the lockdown on popular rural informal businesses such as spaza shops, hair salons and street hawkers could not operate due to Section 27(2) of the *Disaster Management Act, 2002* (Act 57 of 2002) regulations. The impact of the local economy is expected to be severe. Delays in realising a developmental agenda in rural municipalities have now meant that these informal businesses would struggle to meet the conditions of government regulations and may become illegal to operate them. The emphasis on the need to properly conceptualise and bring about new measures to support LED initiatives should be placed on expediting basic developmental initiatives such as infrastructure provision, as earlier highlighted in this article.

Access and Use of Technological Devices

ICT access has become basic need for both local residents and municipal officials. The 21st century has seen a need for the escalation in the ICT infrastructure development of many developing nations including in South Africa (Phago, 2017). Unlike few years ago, Wi-Fi, smartphone and social media page for respective municipalities were not a consideration. The world of today revolves around technology as the mechanisms that communities rely upon for access to information from their respective municipalities (Van der Walddt, 2018). Young people visit their municipal libraries and community centres for the purpose of accessing computers and free Wi-Fi in order to conduct research, write assignments and entertainment. In essence, young people are more accessible through social media platforms than assembling them into a physical meeting and other forms of community interactions. It is also through social media platforms where information about COVID-19



is being hugely broadcast. Some of the communication through government politicians and officials also trended through these social media platforms for how and what they were communicating. So, government including the local sphere of government benefits significantly by the use of technology. In actual fact, the 4th industrial revolution dictates that countries should not only apply basic technology but use more advanced one such as robotics and artificial intelligence, cloud computing and 3D printing. Failure to adopt technological advancement serves as a barrier in addressing some of the developmental local government initiatives for post COVID-19 period. It is even a necessity in the year 2020 where meetings are held through electronics platforms such as Zoom, Skype and other technological innovations need, to adhere to government regulations on COVID-19. These regulations actually do not allow municipal councils and other meetings within the municipality in that they infringe on the doctrine of social distancing. For municipal management and council meetings to convene, the use of technology innovations is paramount.

A Post COVID-19 Contemplation

The three key developmental local government agenda should be considered from the following points as highlighted in the context of Human Centered Development Approach. As the characterisation of Human Centred Development Approach of a developmental local government in this article has focused on three aspects of development and challenges of rurality, deficient institutional capabilities and innovative municipal plans. In this case, the necessary contemplations based on the existing conditions of rural municipalities in South Africa are considered to determine possible areas where innovative interventions are needed. There are at least three emerging observations as outlined below:

- To pursue an effective developmental local government agenda, there should be a complete overhaul of the environment, human resource planning and the municipal political system. This observation is advanced on the basis that the developmental challenges in rural municipalities are real with minimal progress in areas such as infrastructure. The lack of skills within most rural municipalities need a detailed intervention of a merit-based system if municipal performance is to improve. For example, municipalities ought to recruit qualified and experienced professionals with technical capacity to implement municipal policies and programs without failure. The glaring political interferences have mainly contributed to collapsing the system which has not benefitted residents in real terms. Relevant mechanisms need to be developed to re-emphasise the concept of separation of powers and detail punitive measures for those who contravenes such mechanisms and policies.



Thus, without repurposing of the municipal institution to ensure that it maintains and does not undermine its constitutional mandate, the post COVID-19 effects would be severe on the local residents. Corruption and its manifestations must not be tolerated within the local sphere of government which is often vulnerable to abuse of municipal resources and maladministration. Municipal Public Accounts Committees (MPAC) needs to be strengthened to effectively ensure that the municipal executive and administration are held to account.

- Maintaining effective support to social groupings such as local business forums within rural municipalities could contribute to creation of opportunities for viable local economic development. The long-term spinoffs of such support would be employment creation and revenue base for municipalities thereby making them sustainable. However, a failure to identify such important groupings would undermine a notion of a Human Centred Development approach in addressing local drivers of the local economy. Perhaps, a close association with well-established institutions of higher learning such as colleges and universities offering qualifications and programmes in business management, entrepreneurship and local economic development would be ideal to generate professional plans and support. This has been a highly neglected area for the past 20 years and has created a silo approach and culture between rural municipalities and institutions of higher learning.
- At the centre of a developmental local government agenda is the need to ensure that communities take a lead in determining their future. Municipal institutions are mainly required to facilitate a realisation of this developmental agenda to contribute to a prosperous society. However, with a dismal failure of the local government participation system, a digitisation process for the post COVID-19 period would provide an opportunity for rural municipalities to maintain transparent processes on reconsider how community input regarding their needs could be incorporated into the approved municipal plans. What would remain a challenge though is in determining the new forms of participation through digitisation methods which need to be accessible to both municipal officials and residents.

The above contemplation focus highlights the essence of how a developmental local government agenda could be maintained in a post COVID-19 period. This is where failure of rural municipalities in the past 20 years has been rampant and needs an overhaul in identified areas. These approaches ensure support for social grouping needs and establishment of new forms of digital participation.



Conclusion

A germane developmental local government agenda needs to consider the potential effects of the post COVID-19 conditions. The Human Centered Development approach provides a grounding in contemplating how the developmental agenda of municipalities need to maintained. The problem of rural municipalities where development backlogs are a feature, needs innovative interventions to leapfrog and improve services. The perpetual challenges of deficient municipal institutions need to be addressed by repurposing municipalities to serve their residents in line with their constitutional mandate. In essence the political problem as an underlying issue could be addressed by professionalising the municipal system, especially for the post COVID-19 period where digitising is anticipated to take a centre stage in most of the municipal functions including in rural municipalities. The post COVID-19 period contemplation as considered through Human Centred Development approach where a developmental agenda is required maintains that an overhaul of municipal processes is needed, that merit-based system be considered, and political interference be curtailed. Furthermore, relationship with well-established higher education institutions is imperative to support rural municipalities and a determination of new forms of digital participation need to be introduced. In that way, a germane developmental local government agenda would be realised.

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