



COMMENT



HOW TO FIX DYSFUNCTIONAL MUNICIPALITIES

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IN SOUTH Africa, barely a day goes by without reported treasonous revelations of fraud and corruption, wastage, infrastructure deterioration and sometimes violent "service delivery" protests.

The latest report by the Auditor-General (A-G) confirms that some municipalities have become dysfunctional as unbridled looting and incompetence abound.

The District Development Model (DDM) is the government's latest response to arrest the governance collapse of municipalities.

The DDM is built on a set of principles advocating a joint "One Plan" effected through collaborative, integrated planning sessions reflecting on research, evidence, solution and innovation-oriented dialogues based on each district/metro's own dynamics.

It's not about ticking boxes but identifying strategies and interventions that will enable change and impact.

One of the challenges is the absence of an automated system to manage DDM operations, reporting, monitoring and governance as there is no centralised data to enable the government to realise the vision of co-ordinated planning and budgeting.

The institutional vehicle for the DDM is the district hub governed through: the Integrated Planning & Implementation stream tasked to co-ordinate research related to service delivery and development; the Capacity Building stream that oversees the implementation of capacity building; and the Monitoring stream will develop baseline monitoring information and data to ensure service delivery.

But have we not seen this before? It's a big ask to trust those behind the failure of local government to rebuild it – those who via tick-box compliance governed us into this mess.

Over the past two decades there have been many initiatives, plans, strategies and even direct interventions by national and provincial governments – with very little impact – as confirmed by the A-G data. So what hope is there that the DDM will be the panacea for local governance ills?

I concur with the A-G that the only way to turn this around and ensure good governance, is if ethical, accountable local government leadership drives the behavioural change.

This requires a leadership that understands the why (purpose), how (competencies) and what (innovative service delivery) of public office.

This is a non-partisan endeavour. When elected leaders unify their purpose and focus only on impact and results, the community will benefit.

This is achieved through disciplined and committed constitutionalists such as Mayor Nomvuyo Mposehwa, and chief financial officer (CFO) Kenneth Fourie of the rural Sengu municipality in the Eastern Cape. The pair led the municipality to another clean audit by getting the basics right. Fourie ascribes the success to adherence to daily disciplines (implementing procedures, systems, planning). Mayor Mposehwa makes sure the job gets done by not interfering with tenders or finances.

In addition municipalities will need human resource development (HRD) practitioners skilled in helping municipal leaders navigate the complex organisational change management programmes such as the DDM, given that 70% of change management initiatives fail or partially succeed.

These practitioners should align people, strategy, and performance.

Although I choose to remain optimistic, I am afraid that the DDM may very well be our last chance to get our local government house in order.

Communities are fed-up with municipal mediocrity. And there must be consequences for poor performance. It's a big ask, but communities must claim back their agency and vote in their numbers in the next local government elections.

Getting things back on track will require a whole-of-society approach and tertiary institutions must partner with municipalities to strengthen local government through evidence-based policy making and the science of implementation (delivery).

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