Municipal Skills and Capacity Assessment Study

MARCH 11

Human Sciences Research Council
Developmental, Capable and Ethical State

Municipal Skills and Capacity Assessment Study

Views from municipal officials at eight South African municipalities

Principal Investigator
Dr Yul Derek Davids

Report Contributors
Dr Yul Derek Davids
Dr Gregory Houston
Prof Joleen Steyn-Kotze
Dr Kombi Sausi
Ms Diana Sanchez Betancourt
Adv Gary Pienaar
Prof Modimowabarwa Kanyane
Mr Johan Viljoen
Ms Namhla Ngqwala
Mr Ngqapheli Mchunu
Dr Gilbert Fokou

DCES Divisional Executive
Prof Narnia Bohler-Muller

Editors
Dr Gregory Houston
Prof Modimowbarwa Kanyane

For enquiries and comments contact:
Dr Yul Derek Davids
E-mail: ydavids@hsrc.ac.za
Tel.: +27 (0)21 466 7838
Mobile: + 27 (0)72 296 6755

Acknowledgements
The DCES division of the HSRC wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the Open Society Foundation for South Africa (OSF-SA). We therefore acknowledge that this research and publication was supported by a grant from the OSF-SA.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

There are growing concerns over the capability of the state to deliver services to its constituents. The National Development Plan (NDP) identified capacity issue as a main challenge undermining the creation of a democratic developmental state in South Africa (National Planning Commission, 2012). The Auditor General (AG) notes that problems exist in most municipalities, such as high vacancy rate for key positions or key officials lacking appropriate competencies; a decline in adequate consequence management for poor performance and transgressions; and a decline in the response rate to improve internal controls (Auditor General, 2018). Further to this, the Municipal Demarcation Board (2012) indicates that not all municipalities are able to perform their functions optimally as the majority were mired by capacity issues that undermined institutional effectiveness. Assessing and determining local government efficiency is therefore one of the most important components in ensuring institutional effectiveness within municipalities. It I the most important factor that has a direct bearing on the institutional effectiveness of local government is institutional capacity.

Capacity has been defined in several ways, and there appears to be no common definition acceptable to all. For instance, Hilderbrand and Grindle (1994: 10) define capacity as 'the ability to perform appropriate tasks effectively, efficiently and sustainably'. Loubser (1993: 23) argues that capacity consists of several elements, including specified objectives, i.e., vision, values, policies, strategies and interests; efforts, i.e., will, energy, concentration, work ethic and efficiency; capabilities, i.e., intelligence, skills, knowledge and mental sets; resources, i.e., human, natural, technological, cultural and financial resources; and work organisation, i.e., planning, designing, sequencing and mobilising. Morgan (1998) defines capacity as the 'organisational and technical abilities, relationships and values that enable countries, organisations, groups and individuals at any level of society to carry out functions and achieve their development objective over time'. Finally, according to Gargan (1981: 652), local government capacity is multi-dimensional, and includes expectations, i.e., 'perceptions and attitudes on "adequate" levels of public services, appropriate styles of political leadership, and accepted ways of conducting public affairs'; resources, i.e., 'money, knowledge, administrative skills, private sector associations, neighbourhood organisations, and political popularity', among other problems, i.e. 'community issues that involve different preferences regarding the accomplishment of some objective'.

Capacity constraints can be defined as the lack of adequate and suitable human, scientific, technological, organisational, institutional and resource capabilities to deliver on the constitutional mandate of government (Soko, 2006; Development Network Africa, 2006). Capacity constraints might exist at three different dimensions, that is, at the system, institutional and at the individual levels. In addition, these constraints could be evidenced in many different ways, such as, an absence of qualified people, an absence of people who are qualified and meet ancillary criteria, the quality of certification possessed by job incumbents, and deficiencies in attributes like experience and skills less likely to be certified such as leadership (Development Network Africa, 2006).

Skills are one of the components of capacity, and skills constraints can be defined as the shortage of a particular set of attributes, qualifications and competencies in an individual, and can include so-called "soft skills", possession of appropriate educational qualifications, and the ability to produce a particular product or perform a

particular service; and shortages in the number of individuals with a particular set of attributes, qualifications and competencies in particular departments in an institution, and can include skills shortages in departments such as supply chain; finance, ICT and human resource development.

Overall, the study conducted skills and capacity assessments to understand municipal officials' capacity realities and support requirements to inform training and capacity-building interventions. It assessed whether capacity-building strategies and interventions were appropriately aligned with the National Development Plan priority needs. To this end, it attempted to Include in the assessment whether such strategies and interventions identify and include professionalising the ethos of the targeted officials, including their ability to effectively manage the political-administrative interface to enhance accountability for a more efficient and effective capable state.

Capacity realities in public service delivery and training and capacity-building interventions

Local government is the sphere of government closest to the people. It has an important social function in providing basic services to the community (Reddy, 2016) and Khambule and Mtapure, 2018). Van der Waldt (2006: 142) writes that 'local government is at the coalface of public service delivery'. Thornhill (2008) views the local government as the first point of contact between an individual and a government institution. The local sphere is often referred to as grass-roots government because of its direct association with communities at a local level (Ndevu & Muller, 2017). It is at this sphere that citizens interact directly with government and experience the nature and quality of service provided (Reddy, 2020). However, the impetus that informs the drive for a developmental state that promotes growth and development hinges on the capacity of the local sphere of government to effectively discharge its responsibilities (Koma, 2010; Steiner, 2010). McGill (2010) argues that, generally, developing countries are faced with the enormous task of rebuilding capacity across all spheres of government with the local sphere being the most critical.

In the South African context, the mandate of local government as preserved in the Constitution requires that they work to improve the lives of all the citizens in their municipality (Nene, 2016). According to Ndou and Sebola (2016), the delivery of services requires enhanced capacity. Consequently, frameworks are adopted by government through organisational development as well as human resources to respond to this increase in demand for service delivery. Moreover, this must be achieved through the provision of basic services, development, and growth of the economy, recognising and harnessing the skills potential of people living in the municipality, job creation, and mobilising people to make their own contribution to improve their living conditions (Scheepers, 2015).

However, most municipalities experience capacity constraints. Within and across municipalities there are tremendous disparities, economically and politically and in terms of location (urban versus rural), performance and capacity (either human resource, financial and institutional) (Monkam, 2014). Despite the existence of numerous reports detailing the large spectrum of problems facing local government, three main systemic issues have been identified. These key problem areas are political appointments, lack of capacity, and lack of accountability (NDP 2014).

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to conduct a skills and capacity assessment of municipalities to understand the capacity realities and support requirements of municipal officials to inform training and capacity-building interventions ultimately leading to improvement in the performance of municipalities.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Conduct a skills and capacity assessment to understand the capacity realities and support requirements municipal officials to inform training and capacity-building interventions.
- Assess whether existing or envisaged/planned training and capacity-building strategies and interventions, for example, as developed by the sampled municipalities (and others), and by the Local Government Service Training Authority (LGSETA), South African Local Government Association (SALGA), and the National School of Government, are appropriately aligned with (a) expressed; and (b) actual priority needs as identified, for example, in the National Development Plan (NDP).
- Include in the assessment whether such strategies and interventions identify and include professionalising the ethos of the targeted officials, including their ability to effectively manage the political-administrative interface to enhance accountability for a more efficient and effective capable state.
- Include in the assessment the expressed need by officials for, and availability, of tools and capacities, including legal and non-legal mechanisms, to "reinforce [and enable and support] ethical behaviour and leadership" and to enable 'public officials to resist corruption' and maladministration.

Research Approach

The findings presented in this Executive Report are based on a mixed-method approach consisting of both quantitative survey data and qualitative key stakeholder interviews with municipal experts, civil society representatives and community activists. Focus groups were conducted with municipal officials in the Free State Province. In addition, we conducted secondary data analysis on eight target municipalities. In the Free State, we visited the Mangaung Metropolitan and Fezile Dabi District Municipalities; in the Eastern Cape we visited the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan and Makana District Municipalities; in Limpopo we included the Elias Motsoaledi and Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipalities; and in the North West we visited the Bojanala Platinum and Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipalities. This Executive Report therefore outlines how the study was carried out across these eight municipalities and what resulted from this municipal skills and capacity assessment.

Key findings

The Executive Report draws on the findings that emerged mostly from the key informant interviews. More specifically, the findings from the key informant interviews are triangulated with the findings from the municipal case studies as well as the literature review largely from secondary sources to give us a more comprehensive and balanced picture of the skills and capacity constraints municipalities are experiencing. It should be noted that case study reports were produced for each of the eight targeted municipalities that respectively report more in detail, the findings for each municipality.

The sections that follow therefore present the findings and recommendations for training and capacity-building interventions to contribute in improving the performance of municipal officials. Participants were asked to reflect on the key capacity and skills constraints of local government. The key constraints identified include inadequate economic and human resources, skilled leadership, institutional environment and culture, infrastructure and work tools, and finally, skills development, among others.

Improving financial resources

The empirical research conducted for the study supports the findings in the literature and illustrates that one of the main capacity constraints of local government in South Africa is inadequate financial resources. Lack of financial resources influence almost every other aspect of local government. Municipalities struggle to collect revenue as a result they do not have sufficient funds for service provision. The payment for services is a two-way process. If municipalities are not delivering services, the communities will be reluctant to pay. On the hand, municipal officials complained that some government departments do not pay municipalities for their services. As a result, municipalities debt continuously balloons and this place unnecessary pressure on the municipalities to collect the revenue and to provide uninterrupted services. Strategies must be put in place for better revenue collection. Revenue collection efforts must make sure that service beneficiaries pay the entire bill and not just their rent. Revenue collection strategies must be better targeted and be aware that rural municipalities compared to urban ones find it more difficult to collect revenue from their communities. Municipalities must make sure they deliver excellent services to receive payments from communities. Financial systems should therefore be improved to ensure better revenue collection from government departments. Overall, officials in the study felt that lack of revenue contributes to service delivery failure which in turn have a negative impact on the economic development and investment potential of the municipality.

Improving human resources

Most municipalities in the study were characterised by high vacancy rates, high staff turnover, incompetent staff, and several appointments in acting positions. Municipal officials also pointed out that there is a lack of staff in key managerial and leadership positions and that staff often act in these positions or are on short-term contracts. The municipal officials indicated that municipalities that struggle with finances are also the ones that find it difficult to attract and appoint people with the skills needed for improved service delivery. This shortage of staff with the required skills has a major impact on the performance as well as the institutional environment of the municipality. Human resource departments must therefore put in place well developed recruitment and retention strategies to source the necessary skills because failing to appoint people with the proper skills and qualifications can lead to poor audit outcomes as well as financial instability among others. More capacity is therefore needed to deal with regulatory requirements. Contract positions must be converted to permanent positions informed by performance evaluations since this negatively influence the recruitment process. Proper succession planning is needed to ensure that staff at the lower levels benefit from the institutional knowledge, skills and expertise of staff at the higher levels as well as from those staff that have been working for several years at the municipalities. Special targeted interventions are needed to keep and attract skills in municipalities in rural areas. Human Resource Departments must make sure that the institutional environment and working conditions of especially rural municipalities is improved. The unevenness of capacity and skills resources between municipal departments must be addressed. For example, municipal officials felt that the finance and human resources are better resourced than the service departments.

Improving skilled administrative leadership

A major concern raised by the study participants was the absence of good ethical and accountable leadership because it is crucial for the strategic direction of the municipality, the institutional environment and culture, staff morale, relationships with stakeholders, and many other aspects of the function of the municipality. Municipal officials felt that the following leadership qualities must be considered when appointing leaders: 1) leadership that is visionary and accountable, 2) leadership that is ethical, 3) leadership that is engaged and democratic, 4) leadership that is able to build partnership, and 5) leadership that is able to collaborate with people and organations at various levels. The appointment of leaders with good intergovernmental relations and partnerships with other institutions, at all spheres of government is important because lack of effective leadership has caused delays infrastructural projects among other. Municipal leaders should be encouraged to improve coordination between departments in terms of information and resource sharing to foster a team culture and a collective integrated approach to service delivery. Participants in the study felt that leaders must see it as a priority to become more people centred because officials are ultimately providing a service to communities. This community centred approach must be embraced, and municipal leaders must be responsible for creating and maintaining this type of organisational culture. Link to the community centred approach is the issue of politically motivated appointments at municipal leadership positions. Some study participants felt that political appointments compromise necessary skills and qualifications and this result in poor service delivery. It is therefore important that municipal officials be appointed on merit with the necessary skills and qualifications to prevent this growing skills gap.

Improving the political leadership and administrative interface

Municipal officials generally agreed in the present study that relationship between the political and administrative leaders' impact negatively on the performance of the municipality as well as the municipal officials. It is therefore recommended that this relationship between the administrative and political interface must be improved if municipalities want to deliver efficient and effective services to their communities. The interest of communities must be made a priority while political party activities and agendas must not prevent performance and especially service delivery to communities. Politicians must not be involved in the day-to-day operational activities of the municipalities, but rather focus on the policy strategic direction and monitoring. In other words, the political leader must concentrate on policy alignment, oversight on legislative processes. Strong ethical and visionary leadership are thus required from politicians with no political interference in terms of the work of the municipal leadership and officials. Protocols must therefore be respected to prevent role confusion because it impacts on performance as well as the municipal working environment. This is crucial because it can destabilize the effective functioning of the municipality. A more transparent and objective appointment system is thus needed to prevent role-confusion. It is therefore recommended that 1) Political party affiliation and nepotism should not influence appointments of officials in municipalities, and 2) Political parties should give space to municipal administration and HR department to recruit competent and skilled workers based on the outcome of the recruitment policies and processes.

Improving financial management capacity

According to the study participants sound financial management was a major challenge at almost all the target municipalities. For instance, municipal officials interviewed felt that it is a waste of human resources to work overtime or use outsourcing when it is not necessary. In other words, the leadership and the managers need

monitoring mechanisms to ensure that municipal officials reduce unnecessary overtime. On the other hand, municipal officials indicated that the institution has the culture of bringing in external consultants while the requisite skills for the task exist internally. This practice is even more worrying because some municipalities have budget constraints. Some municipal officials also shared that their municipality has been unable to pay service providers on time and consequently they feel that there are risks that the municipality might be unable to pay their own salaries due to overstretched financial resources. Overall, municipal officials reasoned that the budget constraints not only impact on training and capacity building interventions, but it has a negative influence on staff morale and the general institutional environment. There is therefore a need for better financial oversight by the municipal managers and senior officials.

In addition, municipal officials participated in the study indicated that the implementation of adequate training must take place to ensure finance staff have the minimum competencies and skills to perform their jobs. While study participants indicated that there is a lack of financial skills and expertise, training initiatives must ensure that interventions and monitoring mechanisms must not overburden municipal officials with a cumbersome and rigid financial regulatory environment. To improve compliance, municipalities must consider ensuring that there is capacity in municipalities to engage in oversight as a continuous process and not a once-off event because of misconduct or transgressions. In other words, municipalities must be given the capacity to conduct oversight regularly according to a regulatory framework that is well communicated to all municipal officials. The study also found that there is a disconnect between the budgeting and planning processes, which negatively impacted municipal officials' ability to meet compliance requirements. Training is therefore needed to improve budgeting and financial reporting. It is therefore essential that the management of the finances of municipalities at all levels be improved because financial instability coupled with high staff turnover and vacancies in finance positions impact negatively on the overall performance of the municipality.

Improving municipal service delivery

It is well documented fact that the South African government have made great strides in providing basic services close to three decades, but challenges in some areas remain and this study showed that service delivery failure is linked to a range of factors including poor governance, institutional as well as financial weaknesses such as the poor revenue collection. It is therefore important that the municipalities improve their performance in all areas such as financial management, consequence management, community engagement and skills development to prevent negative consequences for the capacity of municipalities to deliver services. To provide better services the participants in the study recommended that there should be an overall improvement of the skills of municipal officials as well as better knowledge on how to perform their duties. Furthermore, officials on short-term contracts must be given full-time employment because they are often forced to leave after a great deal of training time is invested to capacitate them to deliver services. Consequently, when they leave this skills gap contributes to service delivery failure. Study participants indicated ICT is one of the key skills that most municipalities lack. ICT skills are particularly lacking in the engineering field and to a lesser extent among health and safety officers. It is recommended that municipalities pay these staff competitive salaries to retain their skills but also do some work to recruit these skills.

In addition, municipalities must be allowed to negotiate outside of the prescribed salary band if they want to attract or retain scarce skills. Appointments in key strategic positions is not always possible because municipalities must comply in terms of under-represented designated groups. It was therefore suggested by study participants that municipalities must in some instances get exemption to appoint people even if they do not come from the designated groups to ensure optimal service delivery. Another participant indicated that the skills constraints are also experienced when officials are appointed in jobs where they lack the necessary qualifications. For instance, you will find qualified engineers in administrative positions. This mismatch of skills must be addressed because it further contributes to poor service delivery.

Improving the institutional environment

In this study we highlighted that the public sector workers' (including municipal officials) morale are extremely low and that their overall performance is very poor. This negative institutional environment is caused by several factors such as lack of resources, infrastructure, recruitment of unqualified and unskilled staff, high vacancy rates, and lack of incentives as well as political instability. This unhealthy institutional environment must be addressed if municipalities want to provide effective and efficient services to their respective communities. The study therefore recommended improvements in four core areas: 1) leadership, 2) financial management, 3) regulatory environment and 4) consequence management.

Leadership: The participants in the study argued that poor leadership resulted in fostering antagonistic institutional culture, which impacted directly on the ability of senior officials to perform their oversight functions. It is therefore suggested that the performance and actions of municipal leaders be monitor on a regular basis. Political appointments in leadership position create frustration among staff but also division between the administrative and political functions of the municipality. Consequently, many officials highlighted the need to strengthen the team-work ethos and tackling the individualistic and factional culture within municipalities. The municipal officials believe that strong strategic leadership is needed to prevent a culture of ill-discipline and a culture of letting things that are wrong to go through.

Financial management: Municipal officials indicated that the institution has the culture of contracting external consultants and that this practice should be restrained because study participants felt that most municipalities have budget constraints and are unable to pay service providers on time. Consequently, officials felt that there are risks that the municipality might be unable to pay their own salaries. Budget constraints make it difficult to implement training and capacity building interventions and the lack of training negatively influence the staff morale as well as the general institutional environment.

Regulatory environment: The rigid regulatory framework impacts negatively on creative thinking and problem-solving of officials and it leads to institutional inertia whereby municipalities cannot be agile in their institutional responses to emerging development needs. It therefore recommended that the regulatory environment must be reviewed to establish areas where it can be streamlined to encourage creative thinking and a problem-solving culture.

Consequence management: The lack of consequence management in municipalities are a major concern and can be attributed to an inadequate institutional environment and culture, and skilled leadership. If consequence management is not sufficiently implemented it will lead to low morale, high staff turnover and low-quality service. Consequently, the ability of municipalities to deliver services. It is recommended that consequence management

must be implemented objectively and consistently to ensure that wrongdoing is corrected and that staff account for their failures and inefficiencies.

Improving infrastructure and work tools

The literature review conducted showed that good governance and technical capacity is essential to improving municipal functioning. Overall, it is recommended that infrastructure and work tools be regularly assessed and upgraded to ensure that municipal officials' ability to deliver services to their communities are not negatively influenced. The present study showed that municipal officials were more positive about their work environment and their performance in municipalities where ICT infrastructure was upgraded. The officials felt that the ICT infrastructure improved the communications among staff within the municipality, with other government departments as well as with their communities. Besides ICT infrastructural improvements, it is recommended that municipalities also automate their operations. A municipal official indicated that their operations are hugely improved now that they use automated clock-in registers, which allow workers to clock-in on site. In-service training must be conducted to upskill staff to use new ICT tools and resources. If training is not implemented together with the provision of new tools municipal officials will struggle to optimally use the new digital resources. Municipalities must share knowledge and experience about ICT training and skills development because it will be of great value and help municipal officials to adjust to disruptive changes in technology. Those municipal officials that were more negative about their resources and work tools strongly felt that municipalities must do more to improve internet connectivity problems and maintenance of equipment and machinery. Another municipal official and head of Waste Management felt that they need a vehicle to do inspection, while other officials indicated that the lack of mobile phones prevent them from doing their job adequately. There is a need to make capacity and skills development an ongoing process and accessible to all municipal officials. The current technological advancement training should also be tailored toward adaptation to the 4th industrial revolution.

Improving community engagement

Overall, municipal officials suggested that community engagement could be improved as well as skills interventions tools to facilitate community engagement. The biggest drawback is that most municipal officials regard community engagement as a mere compliance exercise and are less concerned about the well-being of the community they serve. Effective community engagement is further hampered by political representatives who fail to keep to their community commitments. Community members are therefore often distrustful and dissatisfied with the leadership of municipalities.

The municipal officials also felt that a lack of strategic planning and good leadership negatively influence cooperation and integration among the various municipal duties and structures around community engagement functions. Besides the various departments, alignment is also needed among the different spheres of government to ensure that there are sufficient resources and human capacity available for community engagement. Unfortunately, over-regulation and political interference often detract municipal officials from focusing on community engagements. As result the Integrated Development Plans of the municipalities often do not address the needs of the community members. The Covid-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on the activities of the Public Participation Unit (PPU), which had to come up with creative and new ways of engaging with communities when face-to-face meetings were no longer an option. A variety of platforms such as the internet, Facebook, radio broadcasts, WhatsApp, Zoom and Microsoft Teams meetings had to be used to provide residents with information. This was considered also problematic since only a limited number of residents have access to

technology which enables them to obtain information or provide inputs into municipal planning activities. Stakeholders involved in capacity building initiatives need to organize their programs for relevance and greater impact to link it more accurately to the national democratic transition.

Improving the capacity and skills of municipal officials

The views of the study participants with regards to capacity and skills development varied from 'it is well done' to 'poorly done'. There was general agreement that the implementation of skills plans, and capacity building interventions must be improved because it undermines the development of municipal officials and the overall performance of municipalities. Better coordination and management are needed from HR departments once requests for training and training needs are formulated. The allocation of funds for training and staff development must be made a priority and municipal managers must not only focus on the training cost implication related travelling and accommodation, but largely on the actual skills sets that the officials will acquire. Municipal official capacity development programmes need to empower officials with relevant and requisite skills that help them value their work and put people first. Diligent and professional performance must be key to enhancing skills and capacity of public servants.

There is a need for skills alignment in each department and clear guidelines guiding skills and capacity development. Sufficient time needs to be provided for training and monitoring and evaluation of skills learned. Municipal training providers therefore need to develop training courses that add value to the public servant skills. Training should not be done as a tick box of work skills achieved but rather as a platform to transfer skills. For instance, one day training will not be sufficient for attendees to learn and practice the skills that is being taught. There is a need to have processes in place to monitor the quality of the training that is being provided and ensure that the skills are aligned with the employees' work.

Conclusion

Local government continues to play a critical role in the rendering of essential services to residents. Services ranging from water and electricity to housing are critical for the wellbeing of residents. As such, district and local municipalities have the huge responsibility of ensuring that these services are readily available. Skills and capacity are critical particularly for municipal employees to ensure that these services are rendered efficiently whilst maintaining quality standards. Municipalities continue to face significant challenges that have been highlighted. However, efforts relating to financial support, capacity and skills development and competitive recruitment practises will ensure that the municipality is able to attract the best talent available in the market. Furthermore, better coordination, management and implementation of capacity and skills development plans as well consequence management will help resolve some challenges which can only improve the functionality of municipalities.

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Abbreviations

AG	Auditor General
ATR	Annual Training Reports
BPDM	Bojana Platinum District Municipality
CFOS	Chief Financial Officers
CM	City Managers
COGTA	Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DCES	Developmental Capable and Ethical State
DDG	Deputy Director General
DG	Director General
DDM	District Development Model
DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
EMLM	Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GM	General Managers
HRM	Human Resource Management
HSRC	Human Science Research Council
HODs	Head of Departments
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
LGSS	Local Government Service Standards
LGSETA	Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority
LED	Local Economic Development
LBPC	Lower-Bound Poverty Line

MMM	Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality
MLM	Mangaung Local Municipality
MFMA	Municipal Financial Management Act
MPAC	Municipal Public Accounts Committee
MTSF	Medium-Term Strategic Framework
MM	Municipal Manager
NDP	National Development Plan
NIF	National Implementation Framework
NMBMM	Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality
NSG	National School of Governance
OSF-SA	Open Society Foundation of South Africa
PALAMA	Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy
PAIA	Promotion of Access to Information Act
PAJA	Promotion of Administrative Justice Act
PoPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act
PSC	Project Steering Committee
REC	Research Ethic Committee
SARS	South African Revenue Services
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
STATS SA	Statistics of South Africa
SDL	Skills Development Levies
SETA	Sector Education Training Authority
SI	Social Innovation
SMS	Senior Management Services
SSP	Sector Skills Plan
TSMS	Technical Services Managers
URL	Uniform Resource Location
WPS	Workplace Skills Plan's
WPTPS	White Paper on The Transformation of the Public Services

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Introduction

This report is presented against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 Local Government Elections that took place on 1 November 2021. Both the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the local government elections present us with unique opportunities as well as challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic especially has highlighted the plight of the poor and marginalised communities that often lack basic services due to poor municipal performance. In Section 4 of this report, we indicate that most South African families struggle daily because of high levels of poverty and income inequality due to 'low levels of formal employment that exclude a large section of the population from actively taking part in the economy' (NPC, 2012: 354). As a result, South Africa has frequently experienced unprecedented municipal service delivery protests due to inadequate provision of basic municipal services.

The findings from the present study reveal that the underperformance of South Africa's municipal officials contributes to service delivery protests. The following factors were found to be responsible for their lack of performance: an unsupportive institutional environment, over-regulated environment, a tense and bureaucratic environment, political interference, power struggles, lack of coherent management systems, the absence of a culture of excellence, skill implementation, poor oversight mechanisms, weak capacity to engage in collaborations and lack of trust between councillors from different political parties. Our study concludes that for South African municipalities to optimally achieve their constitutional obligations of delivering basic services to the people, government need to invest in building the capacity of municipal officials through skills development, among other crucial local government transformations.

The findings presented in this report is based on a mixed-method approach consisting of both quantitative survey data and qualitative key stakeholder interviews with municipal experts, civil society representatives and community activists. Focus groups were conducted with municipal officials. In addition, we conducted secondary data analysis on eight target municipalities. In the Free State, we visited the Mangaung Metropolitan and Fezile Dabi District Municipalities; in the Eastern Cape we visited the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan and Makana District Municipalities; in Limpopo we included the Elias Motsoaledi and Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipalities; and in the North West we visited the Bojanala Platinum and Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipalities. This Executive Report therefore outlines how the study was implemented across these eight municipalities and what resulted from this municipal skills and capacity assessment.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The ***aim of the study*** was to conduct a skills and capacity assessment to understand the capacity realities and support requirements of municipal officials to inform training and capacity-building interventions that will ultimately lead to improvement in the performance of municipalities.

The ***objectives of the study*** were to:

- Conduct a skills and capacity assessment to understand the capacity realities and support requirements municipal officials to inform training and capacity-building interventions.[1]

- Assess whether existing or envisaged/planned training and capacity-building strategies and interventions, for example, as developed by the sampled municipalities (and others), and by the Local Government Service Training Authority (LGSETA), South African Local Government Association (SALGA), and the National School of Government,[2] are appropriately aligned with (a) expressed; and (b) actual priority needs as identified, for example, in the National Development Plan (NDP).

- Include in the assessment whether such strategies and interventions identify and include professionalising the ethos of the targeted officials, including their ability to effectively manage the political-administrative interface to enhance accountability for a more efficient and effective capable state.[3]

- Include in the assessment the expressed need by officials for, and availability, of tools and capacities, including legal and non-legal mechanisms, to "reinforce [and enable and support] ethical behaviour and leadership"[4] and to enable 'public officials to resist corruption'[5] and maladministration.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

There are growing concerns over the capability of the state to deliver services to its constituents. The National Development Plan (NDP) identified capacity issues as a leading challenge that undermines the creation of a capable democratic developmental state that can respond to the immediate social and economic challenges that South Africa is facing (National Planning Commission, 2012). The Auditor General (AG) notes that problems exist in most municipalities such as a high vacancy rate for key positions or key officials lacking appropriate competencies; a decline in adequate consequence management for poor performance and transgressions; and a decline in the response rate to improve internal controls (Auditor General, 2018). Further to this, the Municipal Demarcation Board (2012) states that not all municipalities are able to perform their functions, with the majority mired by capacity issues that undermined institutional effectiveness.

Assessing and determining local government efficiency is one of the most important components in ensuring institutional effectiveness within municipalities. The most important factor that has a direct bearing on the institutional effectiveness of local government is institutional capacity. The institutional capacity of municipalities has been covered in many studies that reveal the state of South African municipalities. According to Monkam (2014: 285), the institutional capacity of municipalities in South Africa is assessed by the number of "job vacancies in local government and the educational level of the municipal managers (MMs), the chief financial officers (CFOs),

[1] OSF-SA Solicited Call for Proposals 13 July 2018 at p1.
[2] For example, those listed here: https://www.thensg.gov.za/course-type/local-government/. Accessed 22 July 2018.
[3] OSF-SA Solicited Call (above) at p2.
[4] President Cyril Ramaphosa (2018) State of the Nation Address. Available at https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-2018-state-nation-address-16-feb-2018-0000. Accessed 19 February 2018.
[5] OSF-SA Solicited Call (above) at p1.

and the managers for technical services (TSMs)". This implies that senior level municipal officials have an important role in promoting the institutional effectiveness of local municipalities. This understanding of institutional capacity cannot be generalised, because having competent officials at managerial level does not always translate to competent officials within lower positions. As such, it is important to assess middle level and entry level positions within municipalities.

Previous studies have been able to find a relationship between municipalities located in poor socio-economic areas and a failure to deliver adequate services to constituencies. Loikkanen and Susiuoto (2005) concluded that municipalities that are in rural outskirts are most inefficient when it comes to delivering services to their communities. Similarly, work by Monkam (2014) found that a lack of fiscal capacity also has a negative impact on the efficiency of municipalities. These studies speak to one fundamental issue, i.e., that municipalities are facing greater capacity challenges due to their failure to raise revenues and attract competent officials. Rural municipalities face the heaviest backlog in terms of revenue collection and attracting competent officials. Various factors, such as the role of political leadership, geographical locations and socio-economic conditions play a key role in influencing the ability of local governments to deliver services.

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA), the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) and the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) have embarked on numerous programmes aimed at improving the capacity of local government officials. SALGA's approach aims to support the development of the education and workplace training environment, focusing on systems improvement and transferable learning. Notably, often these skills development interventions are not aligned to skills audits and needs analyses. Training is interventionist and programmes are implemented without necessarily conducting an effective plan or measuring the link between training and improvement. Despite the efforts of SALGA and LGSETA, there is a lack of comprehensive information about skills gaps in local government. The present study is therefore aimed at identifying these gaps and to make recommendations for improved service delivery among municipal officials.

1.4 Research Approach

The study began with an Inception Phase, which formed an integral part of the planning of the project. This began with the development of a detailed work plan, and the nature and extent of activities were agreed upon in consultation with OSF-SA. The HSRC then hosted an *Inception Workshop* to review the proposed research approach and assess the methodology and research instruments and all key project documents to ensure that the study meets the highest possible scientific, technical, and ethical standards. The HSRC completed this task in consultation with OSF-SA and the Project Steering Committee (PSC). During the study period the HSRC also consulted with SALGA. As indicated, the HSRC also formed a PSC that played a key role in terms of guidance and technical advice to improve the study. For instance, the PSC made a significant contribution at a subsequent Validation Workshop where they provided key comments regarding the preliminary findings of the municipal case studies. This PSC consisted essentially of academics from three different universities in South Africa.

The HSRC proposed a mixed-methods approach that included both quantitative and qualitative data techniques. We believe that there are several benefits to a mixed-method approach. Firstly, it enabled us to generate a

comprehensive sense of the skills and capacity constraints for municipal officials across the different categories of municipalities. Secondly, and related to this, is the benefit of triangulation, that is the use of different methods to reach convergence of findings. For example, the focus group discussions with municipal officials in the Free State allowed us to corroborate the information provided by participants that participated in the in-depth key stakeholder interviews. The mixed-method approach also allowed us to detect mismatches and gaps, for example expectations from the municipal officials with those of the key stakeholders. The third advantage of employing the mixed-method approach is research development, which is the use of one method to guide the second in terms of decisions made about sampling, measurement, and implementation. An example of this in the study was the use of information gathered through the secondary literature review to inform the qualitative in-depth one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders.

In essence, the study involved a literature review to inform the theoretical and research approach adopted by the study as well as the construction of the research instruments. In addition to the literature review, the researchers conducted qualitative in-depth one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders such as SALGA and LGSETA, and an online survey conducted among, as well as four focus groups with municipal officials working at the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality and Fezile Dabi District Municipalities. While a mixed-method approach was mostly employed in the Free State municipalities, the HSRC researchers were forced into conducting case studies that employed secondary data analysis in the rest of the municipalities: the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan and Makana District Municipalities in the Eastern Cape; the Elias Motsoaledi and Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipalities in Limpopo; and the Bojanala Platinum and Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipalities in the North West. To further contextualize the present study, a brief description of each selected municipality is provided in the section to follow.

1.5 Study locations

1.5.1 Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality

Mangaung is one of the eight metropolitan municipalities in South Africa. It was founded as a Metro in 2011. Prior to that, it was a local municipality under the Motheo District Municipality. In 2016, the Metro was merged with the Naledi local municipality to form the current municipal boundaries. The Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (MMM) covers 9 887 km² and comprises three prominent urban centres, which are surrounded by an extensive rural area. The name Mangaung is a Sesotho name meaning 'place of Cheetahs'. It was previously known by the name of its Central Business District, Bloemfontein, which is Dutch for 'fountain of flowers'. Bloemfontein was established as a British Fort in 1846 and is currently the judicial capital of South Africa (COGTA, 2020).

The Mangaung Local Municipality (MLM) was established in 2000 with the amalgamation of four former transitional councils but was elevated from category "B" to a category "A" metropolitan municipality in April 2011. On the 3rd of August 2016, it was decided that the former Naledi Local Municipality and Ikgomotseng which was part of Masilonyana Local Municipality, would be merged with the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (MMM) to form one Municipality. The MMM is centrally located within the Free State province, the central interior of South Africa. Mangaung shares its boundaries with the Districts of Lejweleputswa to its north, Thabo Mofutsanyane to its north east and Xhariep to its south. To its south east, Mangaung shares a border with Lesotho.

There are seven main administrative areas in the municipality: Bloemfontein (the sixth largest city in South Africa and the capital of the Free State Province), Botshabelo located 55km to the east of Bloemfontein, Thaba Nchu a "tribal area" located 12 km to the east of Botshabelo, Dewetsdorp located 75km south-east of Bloemfontein, Wepener (border of Losotho), Van Stadensrus located 30km from Wepener, and Soutpan, a small town located 38km to the north-west of Bloemfontein. There are currently 861 651 people living in Mangaung comprising of 276 905 households. The population growth rate has been declining from 1.6% in 2011 to 1.0% in 2019. However, the expected population of municipality is estimated to reach nearly a million inhabitants in 2030 (COGTA, 2020). Over half of the population is concentrated in Bloemfontein (63%), followed by Botshabelo (24%), Thaba Nchu (9%), Dewetsdorp and Wepener (1.5%), Soutpan (0.8%) and Van Stadensrus (0.2%) (Statistics South Africa, 2017). The rural area has the lowest concentration of people.

1.5.2 Fezile Dabi District Municipalities

Fezile Dabi District Municipality is located in the northern part of the Free State province and is 20 829.1 km² in size. It is situated in Sasolburg and is the smallest district in the Free State province, making up 16% of its geographical area. This area's population represents approximately 17% of the total population of the Free State. The main tourist attraction site is the Vredefort Dome, the third-largest meteorite site in the world. The municipality shares a boundary with the North West province, Gauteng province to its north and Mpumalanga to its north east. To the south, Fezile Dabi shares a boundary with the Thabo Mofutsanyana District, and to the west with the Lejweleputswa District (Fezile Dabi District Municipality Annual Report, 2019).

The municipality was established following the local government elections in December 2000. It is named after a well-known political activist known as Fezile Abraham Dabi, who was born in Tumahole (Parys) in the Free State in 1956. This District municipality is formally known as the Northern Free State District Municipality. It is one of 5 districts of Free State. Fezile Dabi District Municipality is a Category C municipality established in terms of the Free State Provincial Notice 113 of 28 September 2000. As a category C Municipality, it includes four (4) local municipalities known as: the Mafube, Moqhaka, Matshimaholo, and Nqwathe local municipalities (Fezile Dabi District Municipality Annual Report, 2019). Organisationally, the municipality consist of an Executive Mayor, Municipal Manager, Speaker of the Municipality and Council that is structured politically into six portfolio committees, and administratively into six departments (Corporate Services, Environmental Health, LED and Tourism, Municipal Manager, Finance, Project Management and Public Works) to ensure that the vision and strategy objectives of the municipality are achieved (Annual Report, 2019).

1.5.3 Nelson Mandela Bay Metro

The Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality (NMBMM) is located on the southern coast of South Africa along the Indian Ocean. The municipality includes Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage and Despatch, together with their surrounding areas. The total area of the municipality is 1 959.02 km². The estimated population size is 1 263 051 people (Community Survey, 2016), with a population growth rate of 2.09% per annum. In 2016, the NMBMM's population was 63.23% African (799 000), 12.81% White (162 000), 22.97% Coloured (290 000) and 0.98% Asian (12 400). The largest share of population is within the young working age category (25-44 years), with a total

number of 432 000 or 34.2% of the total population (Community Survey, 2016).[6] Available 2016 data on the municipality indicate that there are 368 520 households with an average household size of 3.4 people. Females head about 41.6% of the households and 92.5% are formal dwellings. According to available statistics, 90.5% of the households has a flush toilet connected to waterborne sewerage; 84.8% receive weekly refuse removal; 77.3% have access to piped water inside the dwelling and 95.4% have an electricity connection. A large proportion of the population is under the age of 15 (30.6%), while 63.6% are age 15 to 64 years old. The 2011 data revealed that NMBMM has an (official) unemployment rate of 36.6%, while youth unemployment stood at 47.3%.[7]

1.5.4 Makana Local Municipality

The Makana Local Municipality is a category B Municipality approximately halfway between East London and Port Elizabeth that forms part of the seven local municipalities of the Sarah Baartman (formerly Cacadu) District Municipality in the Eastern Cape. In 2011 it was delimited into fourteen wards. The Amatole District Municipality borders Makana on the north-east, while Port Elizabeth is 120km to the west and East London 180 km to east. It is bordered in the north-west by Blue Crane Route Local Municipality, in the south by the Ndlambe Local Municipality and in the south-west by the Sundays River Valley Local Municipality (IDP, 2019-20). Hamaamba (2004) indicates that the municipality started experiencing a rapid increase in population from 2003 due to migration from nearby farms. Stats SA presents the Makana Municipality population at 82 060. In 2019, it was estimated that 90% of the population live in the town of Makhanda.[8] It is the main economic hub of the municipality.

1.5.5 Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality

The Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality (EMLM), formerly known as the Greater Groblersdal Local Municipality, is in the Sekhukhune District Municipality of Limpopo Province. The seat of the EMLM is located in Groblersdal. The EMLM was established in 2000 as a category B municipality as prescribed by the Municipal Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998) and has a collective executive system guided by section 2(a) of the Northern Province Determination of Types of Municipalities Act (2000). The municipality was named after the anti-apartheid activist Elias Motsoaledi, who was one of eight men (the Rivonia trialists) sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island with former president Nelson Mandela in July 1963 (ANC, n.d.). The EMLM area is predominantly rural in nature, but with a high unemployment rate and elevated poverty levels. The municipality borders the Makuduthamaga Local Municipality in the south, the Ephraim Mogale Local Municipality in the east, the Greater Tubatse Local Municipality, and Mpumalanga's Dr JS Moroka, Thembisile Hani, Steve Tshwete, Emakhazeni and Thaba Chweu local municipalities in the North West. It is situated about 180 km from Polokwane, 135 km from Pretoria and 150 km from Nelspruit. The municipality is the third smallest of the five local municipalities in Sekhukhune District,

[6] https://www.ecsecc.org/documentrepository/informationcentre/nelson-mandela-bay-metro-municipality_31887.pdf

[7] Most of the data presented here is derived from official website of NMBMM: https://municipalities.co.za/demographic/1/nelson-mandela-bay-metropolitan-municipality

[8] Previously known as Grahamstown.

constituting 27.7% of the area, comprising 3 668 334 square kilometers of the district's 13 264 square kilometers. Land ownership is mostly traditional and is spread over sixty-two settlements, most of which are villages. The municipality also has thirty wards (Stats SA, 2011). The EMLM's local economy is dominated by the Groblersdal area, which is mostly dependent on mining, agriculture, ecotourism, stock- and game farming as well as an established furniture and tourism craft manufacturing industry. Data available for 2016 indicate a total population of 268 256 for the area. There are 66 359 households in the municipality with an average size of four per household. Most of the households in EMLM are female-headed (52.3 per cent) and 88.5 per cent of all households live in formal dwellings. The majority of the population is African (97.9 per cent) with other population groups making up the remaining 2.1 per cent. The unemployment rate for the Greater Sekhukhune District was 29.31 per cent in 2018 (Sekhukhune District Municipality, 2020a).

1.5.6 Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipality

The Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipality forms part of the Mopani District Municipality and is in the north-eastern part of the Limpopo Province. Ba-Phalaborwa is one of five local municipalities in the district. The seat of the Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality is in the town of Phalaborwa, which is adjacent to the Kruger National Park. The towns of Namakgale, Lulekani and Gravelotte are also part of the Municipality (Ba-Phalaborwa, 2020b). Ba-Phalaborwa was established as a category B municipality as prescribed by the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 and has a collective executive system guided by section 2(a) of the Northern Province Determination of Types of Municipalities Act of 2000. The name of the Municipality was derived from local baSotho speaking inhabitants and means "better than the south" (Ba-Phalaborwa, 2020b).

The Municipality covers an area of 7 462 km² of which 27% comprises farms that are used mainly for game and citrus farming. Tribal land under the control of five traditional authorities (Ba-Phalaborwa Traditional Authority, Maseke Traditional Authority, Makhushane Traditional Authority, Selwane Traditional Authority and Majeje Traditional Authority) also covers a significant proportion of the area (Ba- Phalaborwa, 2021). Information available from the Statistics South Africa's (StatsSA) Community Survey for 2016 indicates a total population of 168 937 for the municipal area. There are 49 100 households residing in the Municipality with an average size of 3.4. Female-headed households comprise 38.9% of households, and 96.7% of all households live in formal dwellings. Most of the population is Black African (94%) with other population groups making up the remaining 6%. The unemployment rate for the areas was recorded at 37.4%. Even more worrying was the elevated youth unemployment rate at 50.2% (Municipalities of SA, 2021c).

1.5.7 Bojanala Platinum District Municipality

The Bojanala Platinum District Municipality (BPDM) is located in the North West Province. Whilst the total land area of the North West Province is 106 512 square kilometres or 8.7% of South Africa's land area, the BPDM takes up 18 332 square kilometres or 17% of the provincial land area. According to the BPDM Integrated Development Plan (IDP) 2007-2012, the BPDM is a Category C municipality that comprises of five Category B local municipalities. These are Moretele, Madibeng, Kgetlengrivier, Moses Kotane and Rustenburg which comprises a total of 139 wards and approximately 63% of total economic activity in the province (COGTA 2020/2021:22). The four local

economies of the Madibeng, Rustenburg, Mahikeng and Matlosana Municipalities represent approximately 50% of the North West population and 58% of the North West labour force. The population of the Bojanala Platinum District is projected to be 1 323 921 people, or around 38% of the North-West province's total population. Much of the area can be classified as rural with very low densities that makes the provision of basic services very difficult and expensive. The more formal urban areas are in the southern side of the district. These include Rustenburg and Brits, which are vibrant economic nodes (Environment Management Framework Report, 2018: ii).

1.5.8 Ngaka Modiri Molema Municipality

The Ngaka Modiri Molema Municipality (NMMDM) is a district municipality located in the North West province and based in the city of Mafikeng. Estimates from Statistics South Africa's 2016 Community Survey suggest that the municipality is home to nearly a million residents (889 108). It is estimated that the district municipality experienced an overall increase of 5.21% in its population from 2011 to 2016. The NMMDM is one of four district municipalities in the North West and covers an area of about 28 206² kilometres. From a local tourism standpoint, the NMMDM is the home of the Mafikeng people, and the city is renowned for displays of the traditional SeTswana heritage. The NMMDM is a Category C municipality and is situated centrally within the province but shares an international border with Botswana. It is comprised of five local municipalities: Mahikeng, Ratlou, Ramotshere Moiloa, Ditsobotla and Tswaing. The district is home to the city of Mahikeng (previously Mafikeng), the capital of the province.

1.6 Structure of the Report

This Section provided us with a brief background and contextualization of the study. Included here are the objectives of the study, the rationale, the research approach, and background on the study locations.

In Section 2 the research methodology is discussed in detail, together with the research ethics procedures and challenges experienced by the research team during the research, accessing the officials in the target municipalities.

Section 3 builds upon the rationale introduced in Section 1 to outline how important a study on the assessment of skills and capacity of municipal officials is for the development of local communities.

To further contextualize the study, the objectives for Local Government as outlined in the Constitution of South African are presented in Section 4. This Section also discusses the various legislation and policies that the South African government adopted to improve local government.

Section 5 of the report present the main findings from the study according to key capacity and skills constraints of municipalities. The key constraints identified include inadequate financial and human resources, skilled administrative and political leadership, financial management capacity, service delivery skills constraints,

institutional environment and culture, inadequate infrastructure and work tools, community engagement, and skills development.

Section 6 summarises the lessons learned based on the findings, and outlines the recommendations drawn from the study, while Section 7 present the conclusion.

Section 2: Research Methodology

2.1 Research Approach

In the Introductory Section of this report, it is mentioned that the study employed a mixed-method approach that included qualitative and quantitative research methods as well as the analysis of secondary literature. The qualitative methods consisted of focus group discussions as well as in-depth in-depth key informant interviews. In addition to the qualitative methods, a quantitative survey to be conducted with public officials in all eight municipalities was planned but was only implemented in two municipalities due to various challenges. This mixed-method approach was important to better understand the support requirements of municipalities and gathering insights on the nuances and the possibilities for improving skills and overcoming capacity constraints. Section 1 elaborated that the mixed-method approach has several methodological benefits such as triangulation. In particular, the focus group discussions with municipal officials in the Fezile Dabi and Mangaung District Municipalities provided comparative data with the results from the in-depth in-depth key stakeholder interviews. The use of multiple methods also enabled the research team to extract information from the secondary literature review to inform the construction of the qualitative in-depth interview as well as the focus group schedule. This Section presents more details on the research methodology.

2.2 The Municipalities Selected for the study

The research team visited eight municipalities across four provinces in South Africa. In the Free State we visited the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality and Fezile Dabi District Municipality. We also included the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan and Makana District Municipality in the Eastern Cape; the Elias Motsoaledi and Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipalities in Limpopo; and the Bojanala Platinum and Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipalities in the North West (Table 1).

Table 1: List of proposed municipalities

Province	Metro's	District Municipalities	Local Municipality
Free state	Mangaung Metropolitan	Fezile Dabi District	
Eastern Cape	Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan		Makana Local
Limpopo			Ba-Phalaborwa Elias Motsoaledi
North West		Bojanala Platinum District Ngaka Modiri Molema	

In selecting these municipalities, we needed to consider several factors that impact on the performance of municipalities. These factors include the location, size, socio-economic conditions and historical context of the

municipality. We also assess whether municipalities are accountable, can deliver services, and are dysfunctional and distressed. These factors, together with our preliminary review literature, guided the formulation of the criteria herein. It should be noted that the Open Society Foundation of South Africa, who funded the project, requested that the research team focus on the following four provinces: Eastern Cape, Free State, Limpopo and North West. While every effort was made to select the municipalities according to the listed criteria, the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the non-responsiveness of municipal managers and municipalities in general impacted on the selection process.

Criteria for selecting the municipalities:

- The three categories of municipalities in South Africa, namely metropolitan, district and local, played a key factor.
- Linked to the three municipal categories is the rural-urban divide to ensure that we captured geographic and spatial differences of the public officials.
- The various services offered by the municipalities further guided the selection process. Municipalities offer a range of services, and it was crucial that we assessed the skills and capacity of officials working with the different service offerings.
- The socio-demographic profile, including the levels of poverty of the selected municipalities, also guided the selection process
- The performance of the municipalities based on the AG 2018 report helped identify those municipalities that have performed well and those that have performed poorly.
- The list of 87 dysfunctional and distressed municipalities identified by the Minister of Cooperative and Governance, Dr. Zweli Mkhize, at the time the research process began. Most of these municipalities were in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State, North West and Limpopo.
- Province was another key factor, and municipalities were selected from the Eastern Cape, the Free State, North West and Limpopo. These provinces incidentally also included most of the dysfunctional and distressed municipalities identified by the Minister of Cooperative and Governance.

It is important to note that the HSRC selected the municipalities in consultation with OSF-SA and guidance from the Project Steering Committee (PSC). It should also be acknowledged that some substitutions were made during the course of the projects for a number of reasons that will be discussed in the sections to follow.

2.3 Project challenges, the selection of municipalities and fieldwork

By early March 2020, the research team had completed its fieldwork in the Mangaung Metropolitan and Fezile Dabi District Municipalities. At that stage, it had completed two focus groups each in these municipalities and a few face-face survey interviews. The research team decided on a staggered fieldwork rollout strategy and were therefore busy planning the implementation of the municipalities in the Eastern Cape and thereafter the Limpopo and North West municipalities. However, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on our fieldwork and the research team was forced to work in ways that would ensure the health and safety of communities, colleagues, friends and family. The research approach was therefore changed from face-to-face fieldwork to electronic or online work. At the time, the online option seemed to be the best workable solution, and the research team was hoping that the project would continue smoothly and with little interruption.

Unfortunately, the team soon realised that municipal officials were not responding to calls and emails as anticipated. The interaction with the local organisations within the selected municipalities, as well as with civil society organisations and key stakeholders also turned out to be very difficult. It was against this background that it was decided, in consultation with OSF-SA, to embark on case studies in the Eastern Cape Province (Nelson Mandela Bay and Makana) and at Elias Motsoaledi in Limpopo Province. In addition, the survey with public officials was changed from face-to-face to an online internet-based survey. The remaining key informant and municipal interviews were also conducted via digital platforms such Zoom, Teams and Skype or by telephone. Despite the adjustments and interventions, the research team continued to experience several other challenges. Below is a brief outline of some of these challenges:

1) The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on all sectors in a variety of ways. Public Sector officials were often not available because some of them contracted the Coronavirus or were in self-isolation. Public officials also had to take on additional COVID-19 responsibilities which left little time for other non-core functions.
2) The national lockdown forced many people to work from home, including public officials. This made reaching and accessing the municipalities extremely difficult and sometimes impossible. In some municipalities, offices had a worker-rotation system. This made it hard to have consistent and regular communication with the contact person within the municipality. For example, in Bojanala the contact person was only available during her rotation week. We learnt that working from home was difficult for many municipal officials because they lacked resources such as access to a computer, internet, mobile phone, mobile data, etc. This negatively impacted on their ability to do their work and to interact with other stakeholders and research organisations such as the HSRC. Working from home was further complicated by competing demands such as domestic responsibilities and assisting children with their education.
3) We also learnt that some municipal managers were simply overworked and did not want to commit to anything other than activities directly related to the day to day running of the municipality. The HSRC study requests were then relegated to a low priority.
4) Political instability at some of the municipalities made access also difficult. Party politics and personal career development were often more important than the service that officials had to provide to the communities. Linked to this was the high number of staff turnovers, particularly among senior management. For instance, the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality over the last two years had several acting municipal managers. This frequent change of senior officials within the municipality, where the research team had established relationships, caused setbacks to the progress of the study as the team had to reintroduce the study to the newly appointed official. This happened on several occasions.
5) The experience of contacting municipalities to arrange for interviews has shown that persistence often pays off, but unfortunately it also took much more time than anticipated or planned for. For instance, the research team liaised for several weeks with officials in the Collins Chabane municipality, which was initially selected for study. But this site had to be abandoned after approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipality. In other words, the Collins Chabane Municipality was substituted by the Ba-Phalaborwa.
6) Because of major access problems, the research team decided to work with organisations such as SALGA because it was felt that it would be difficult for municipalities to ignore requests if the research was supported by these role players. For example, SALGA Free State assisted the HSRC to reconnect with a new contact at Mangaung to improve the response rate of the online survey among public officials. Unfortunately, after numerous efforts and meetings very few public officials in Mangaung responded to the online survey.
7) The research team strongly believe that the challenges experienced regarding the access of municipalities were also linked to the sensitivity of poor performing municipalities to open themselves up for further criticism. When the HSRC therefore approached them, they often ignored calls or opted to disengage , hoping

that the research team would stop contacting them. In other words, they simply did not want to be in the spotlight or be in the public eye.

8) It was learned during the fieldwork period that many municipal officials did not see any direct benefits from participating in the study. Firstly, the online survey was not data free and when participants completed the survey by using their personal money it became an obstacle. Secondly, many online surveys were conducted since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was noticeable that some of the municipal managers and public officials felt the effects of survey fatigue. Thirdly, those who wanted to complete the survey often argued that they never get feedback or see the results when they complete surveys.

These are some of the challenges in implementing the fieldwork, and in particular the online survey as well as the online key informant in-depth interviews. Overall, the research team felt it was doing extremely well in completing the desktop and secondary research work, but the online engagement was severely impacted upon by various factors. Nevertheless, this section provides the challenges faced by the research team as well as some context for the rest of the report.

2.4 Research Ethics

2.4.1 Research ethics clearance application

Research ethics clearance was needed for the study. The Developmental, Capable and Ethical State (DCES) research division of the HSRC therefore secured research ethics clearance from the HSRC Research Ethics Committee before commencing the study. The ethics approval is an important requirement because the research detailed in this report involves human subjects, meaning that ethical protocols must be strictly adhered to ensure participants in the study do not experience undue harm. The ethics clearance received for the research project denotes that the study complies with the South African National Research Ethics Guidelines (2004), South African National Good Clinical Practice Guidelines (2006), and with the HSRC REC ethics requirements as contained in the HSRC REC Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures.[9] Research Ethics approval was first received on 19 July 2019 and again on 31 July 2020 for another year until 19 August 2021. It is important to note that all HSRC project staff also complied with the provisions of the Protection of Personal Information Act, 4 of 2013 (PoPIA), when collecting and handling personal information.

Additionally, in line with ethical guidelines, informed consent was requested from all participating individuals. In the present study, all online survey participants familiarised themselves with the Consent Section page of the survey instrument and selected the "I agree to participate" option. Those who refused to participate selected the "I don't agree to participate" option and their incomplete surveys were separated from the final dataset.

All key informant participants, as well as the focus group participants, also signed the consent forms before they proceeded respectively with the interviews and focus group discussions. The consent forms make provision for participants who have any complaints or ethical concerns to exercise their rights by contacting the HSRC REC

[9] **Available at: http://www.hsrc.ac.za/index.php?module=pagesetter&func=viewpub&tid=132& pid=167.**

Administrator or call the HSRC's toll-free ethics hotline (0800 212 123 or email research.ethics@hsrc.ac.za). In addition, participants were informed about the aim of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation, as well as their ability to withdraw from the study at any time.

2.4.2 Municipal Official Entry and gaining access to the municipalities

Research ethics clearance does not necessarily mean that researchers will have access to their study sites and research participants. To gain access to the selected municipalities or key stakeholders organisations to set up interviews is much more complex, and a detailed Municipal and Stakeholder Entry Strategy was therefore developed in conjunction with the OSF-SA. For example, the HSRC had to work closely with the sampled municipalities to inform the municipal manager and thereafter the municipal officials of the proposed study. This municipal engagement process involved several meetings and consultations with the municipal manager (or his/her delegated authority) and other key government departments. This process was extremely important and helped to create trust between the researchers and study participants. This trust was essential for the effective implementation of the research instruments. Despite all these efforts, the HSRC research team received mixed success in terms of the response rates. Most of the municipal officials did not respond to the online survey link and, as discussed in section 2.3 earlier, the research team needed to change the research approach from face-to-face data gathering to online data collection methods, and eventually changed it to a case study approach that involved mostly secondary desktop analysis.

However, the research team was more successful in gaining online access to the key stakeholder organisations to conduct the one-on-one interviews with senior staff members. To interview the senior representatives from the various stakeholder organisations, the research team needed to gain access to their email addresses, but at the same time ensure confidentiality. Once email contact had been established, an online interview was scheduled and conducted using mostly Zoom and Teams. We also conducted some of the interviews via telephone. The researchers therefore had to build on their vast survey experience to ensure an effective strategy and protocols to interview participants from these stakeholder organisations.

2.5 Data collection

As discussed in the previous Sections, the initial research approach consisted of a mixed-method design comprising of: 1) a literature review of key legislation and policies, previous studies and reports on capacity and skills constraints among public officials; 2) qualitative key informant interviews and focus groups; and 3) a quantitative face-to-face survey with public officials. This approach was followed in the Mangaung Metropolitan and Fezile Dabi District Municipalities. Two focus groups were completed in each of these municipalities and a number of face-face to survey interviews were conducted. However, the mixed-method design was revised when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. As discussed in section 2.3, the research team opted to conduct case studies at the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan and Makana District Municipalities in the Eastern Cape, the Elias Motsoaledi and Ba-Phalaborwa local municipalities in Limpopo, and the Bojanala Platinum and Ngaka Modiri Molema District municipalities in the North West.

2.5.1 Mixed-method design

2.5.1.1 Desktop review of key literature and studies

A literature review report was produced on key legislation and policies, previous studies and reports on capacity and skills constraints among public officials. The literature review was drawn upon to sharpen understanding of the capacity and skills constraints of municipal officials. In specific, the literature review was used to inform the theoretical and research approach adopted by the study as well as the construction of the research instruments.

2.5.1.2 Data collection in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality

Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were organised in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (MMM). The first one was conducted with senior and mid-level officials (Senior Focus Group) on Tuesday, 19 November 2019 from 10am to 12am, while the other focus group was conducted with junior-level officials (Junior Focus Group) on Wednesday, 20 November 2019 from 10am-12am. After a discussion with the contact person at MMM, it was agreed that participants in the Senior Focus Group would include level 3 to level 5 officials. On the hand, the Junior Focus Group included level 6 to level 10 officials. An average of 7 officials participated in each FGD, while 15 participants were initially invited for each focus group (show up rate of about 50%). After a memo was shared with all the officials of the MMM, invitations to the discussion were made to officials through the various Heads of Department (HoDs) who had the responsibility to identify/nominate participants in their respective Departments in consultation with the HSRC research team. The inclusion criteria in the selection of participants to both FGDs were the gender of the participant (to include as many female officials as possible); the race (to include as many white/coloured officials as possible); and the Department of origin (to include as many participants from the various existing Departments in the municipality as possible).

Besides the two focus groups, the team of three researchers from the HSRC visited the MMM in Bloemfontein to interact face-to-face with officials from the municipality and conducted a few in-depth interviews with municipal officials. The HSRC researchers initially planned to conduct in-depth interviews with the City Manager (CM) and a few other Senior Officials such as the HoDs, General Managers (GM) and Managers relative to skills and capacity assessment. Finally, a half-dozen (6) interviews were conducted with the senior officials in charge of Human Resource Management and Development, Waste Management, Municipal Workers Union and coordination of Operations in the Office of the City Manager.

Both the in-depth interviews and FGDs revolved around the challenges facing the municipality, the general functioning of the municipality, influence of other government departments and external organisation on the performance of the municipality, the organisational culture of the municipality, and leadership practices and whether officials think policies and procedures are aligned with the strategic planning processes of the municipality. Questions were asked about officials' engagement with communities.

2.5.1.3 Data collection in Fezile Dabi District Municipality

The fieldwork in the Fezile Dabi District Municipality started soon after the completion of the fieldwork in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. A team of two researchers visited Fezile Dabi between 2 and 4 December 2019 to conduct two focus groups and some in-depth interviews. The fieldwork started with a meeting with Heads of Departments (HoDs) upon arrival at the Fezile Dabi District Municipality. This welcoming meeting provided an

entry into the municipality, as well as a broad perspective of the institution. As indicated the previous sections, the fieldwork comprised of three main components:

Focus Group Discussions (FGD): Two FGDs with a total of 18 participants were conducted respectively with (1) entry-level staff and (2) with mid-level and senior-level staff. The focus groups served to gain a deeper understanding of the thought processes and experiences of Fezile Dabi municipal officials.

One-on-one in-depth interviews*:* The HSRC conducted four in-depth interviews with senior officials from the Fezile Dabi municipality to complement the findings of the focus groups and survey with public officials. The in-depth interviews included officials from the office of the Municipal Manager, the Environmental Health and Emergency Services, Corporate Services and from the Chief Financial Office. Unfortunately, the researchers were unable to secure an interview with an official from the Skills Development and Training office.

Public skills and capacity survey: this is the quantitative part of the study and consisted of an online survey administered to municipal officials at all levels. The research team, in conjunction with the Fezile Dabi District Municipality and its delegated authority, worked together to ensure the completion of the survey. Given constraints such as limited access to internet, apathy, time constraints and the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown, only 59 out of 176 Fezile Dabi municipal officials responded to the survey. This represents a response rate of 33.5%. Despite this, it should be emphasised that a sample of 59 officials is relatively small and that the survey findings from the survey must be interpreted in conjunction with the findings of the focus groups, in-depth interviews as well as the analysis of the literature on public skills and capacity. Given that only participants from the Fezile Dabi and Mangaung Metropolitan municipalities participated in the online survey, the research team decided to use the findings of the online survey cautiously.

However, the results of the online survey conducted in Fezile Dabi show that 49.2% of the sample were male, while 50.8% were female (Figure 1). In terms of job description, 49.2% were working in administration, while 15.3% were responsible for institutional development and 22% for policy and governance (Figure 2). About 13.6% said that they are not sure. In terms of salary, the survey showed that 52.5% were at the salary level 3 to 6, while 16.9% were at the level 1 to 2. Very few of the survey respondents were at the rank 12 to 17 (1,7%) (Figure 3).

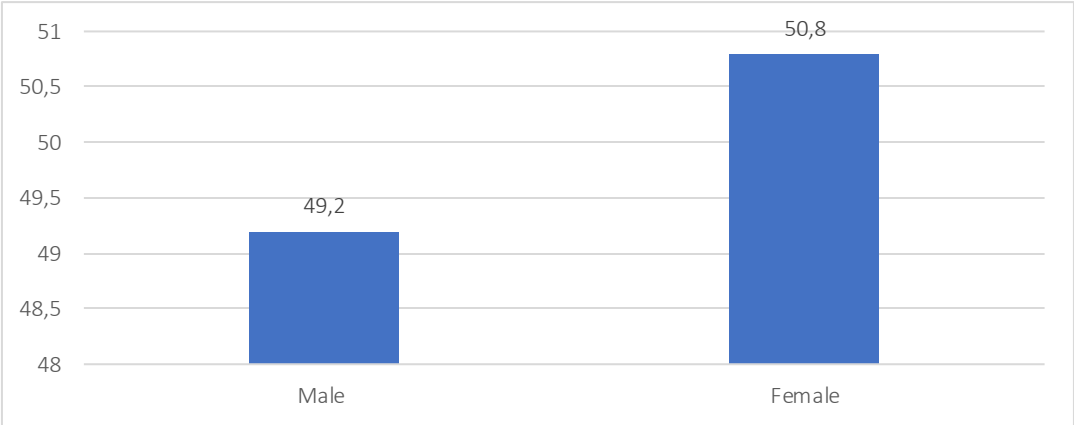

Figure 1: Gender of the respondent (Fezile Dabi, N=59)

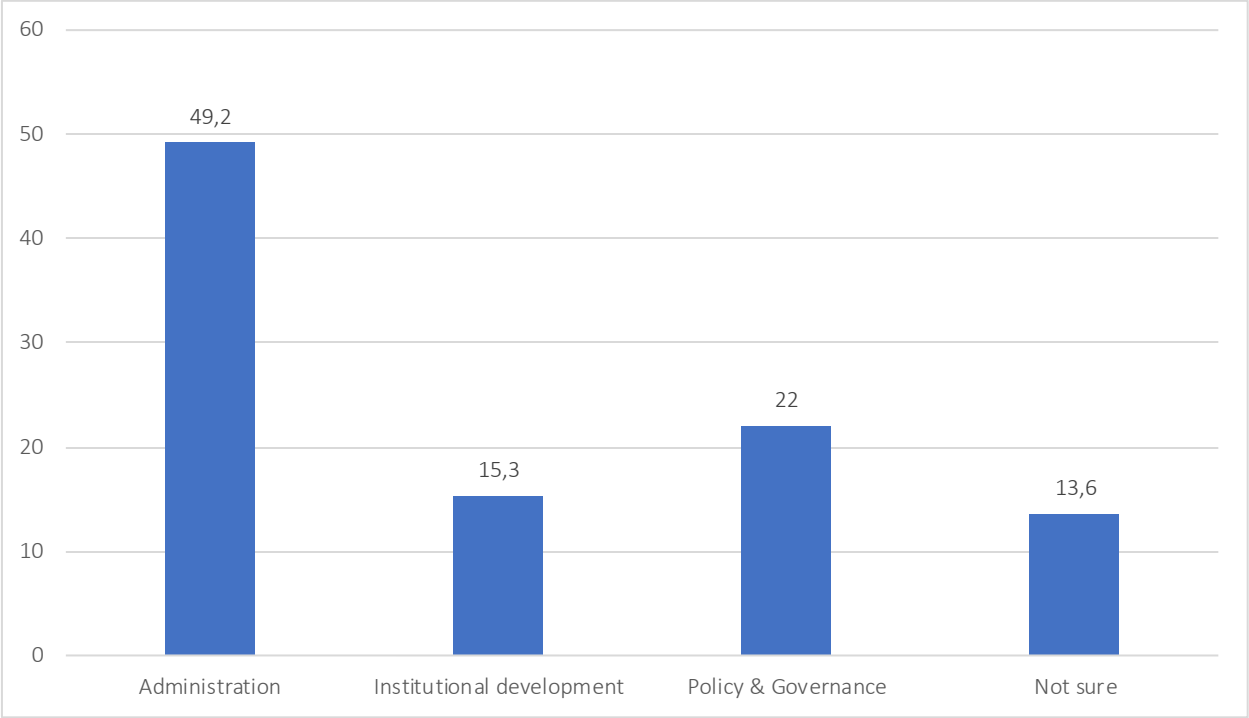

Figure 2: Job description of the respondent (Fezile Dabi, N=59)

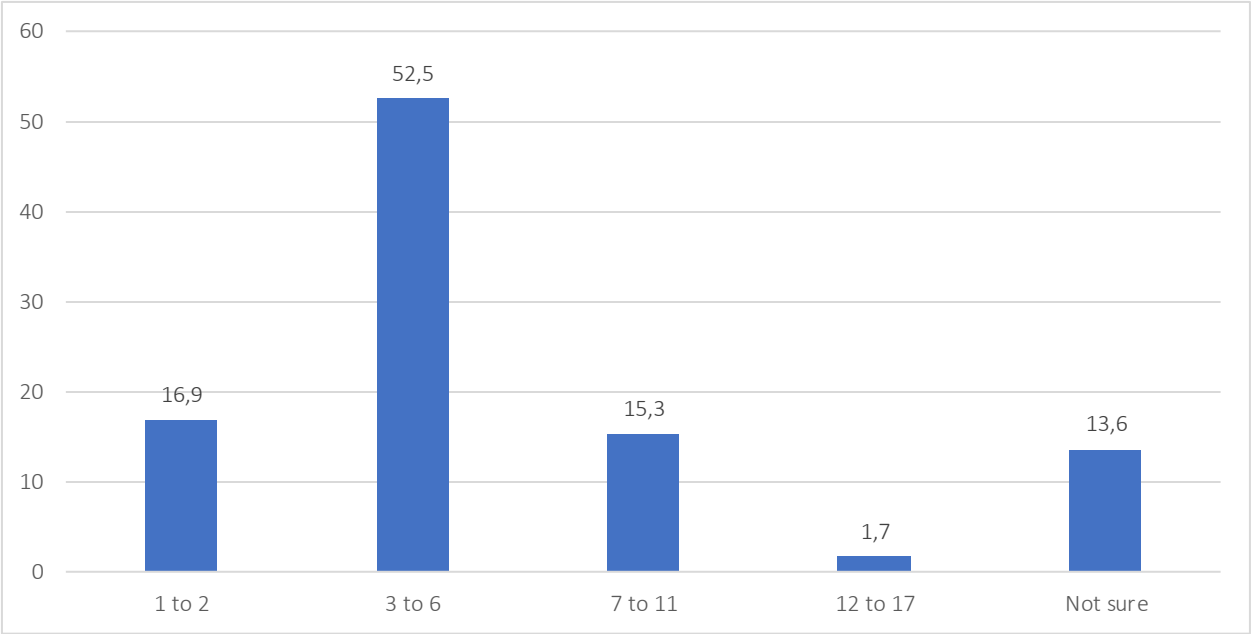

Figure 3: Salary level of the respondent (Fezile Dabi, N=59)

2.5.1.4 Data collection in the rest of the municipalities

As indicated previously, the HSRC research team changed its mixed-method research approach to a Case Study approach for the remaining target municipalities: 1) Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality, 2) Makana District Municipality, 3) Elias Motsoaledi, 4) Ba-Phalaborwa, 5) Bojanala Platinum District and 6) Ngaka Modiri

Molema municipality. A total of six Case Study Reports were produced on each of the listed municipalities. Generally, case studies are most suitable in social sciences research to analyse a phenomenon and gain greater perspective on how the phenomenon in question manifests itself in that particular locale or setting (Teegavarapu, Summers and Mocko, 2008). Qualitative case study methods enable researchers to study the particular social phenomenon through a variety of lenses, which allows for multiple perspectives to be understood and researched thoroughly in order to develop a deep understanding of the research topic in question and to provide suitable solutions (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Harrison et al (2017) highlight that conducting case study research is complex and requires careful planning and coordination.

The HSRC research team employed a common case study approach to investigate each of the six municipalities. This included careful analysis of the secondary data available on each of these municipalities to compile the reports. The researchers also completed a small number of in-depth interviews at each of these municipalities that further informed the findings of the respective case study reports. The present project report will therefore draw on each of the six case study reports as well as the few in-depth interviews that the research teams completed with municipal officials. The case study approach therefore mostly employed a qualitative desktop methodology that focused on a review of documents such as policies, legislation, annual reports, strategic plans, etc. to form an overall picture of the processes followed by each target municipality. The collected secondary qualitative data was analysed using Conventional Content Analysis. The idea behind the use of this content analysis of the secondary data was to identify the key themes emerging from the data and to be able to draw out the key issues relating to the key processes and systems as it relates to the skills and capacity constraints of municipal officials.

It is important to note that secondary data can be numeric or non-numeric or qualitative data (Pancheko and Samovilova, 2012:2). Qualitative secondary data include data retrieved second-hand from interviews, ethnographic accounts, photographs, documents, conversations and other. The list of sources of numeric or quantitative data that are suited to secondary analysis would include: population census, government surveys, administrative records and other regular or continuous surveys, websites and other sources. Prior work conducted by Haradhan (2018) states that desktop research draws predominantly on secondary sources of data, which is cost-effective, reliable and easy to undertake. It is important for secondary sources to be reliable and be of sound quality (Martins, Cunha and Serra, 2018). As stated in the work of Hox and Boeije (2005), secondary sources of data must be used with an understanding of the prior research that has been conducted in the area and keeping in mind the differing objectives that each study sought to accomplish. Upon utilising the different sources of data, the researchers were mindful of the importance of not just the reliability of the secondary sources of data but also the relevance of it in this research study.

2.5.2 One-on-one key informant interviews

With the aim of developing an understanding of the capacity realities and support requirements of municipal officials to inform training and capacity-building interventions through a skills and capacity assessment, one of the key methods used in the study was to conduct qualitative in-depth one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders. This technique was important to better understand the support requirements of municipalities, gathering insights on the nuances and the possibilities for improving skills, and overcoming capacity constraints. A total of 21 one-on-one qualitative interviews, some involving more than one person at a time, were conducted with key stakeholders in the public, private and civil society sectors (Table 2).

Table 2: List of key stakeholder participants

Isandla
NMB City Development Agency
Western Cape Economic Development Partnership
Social Justice Coalition (SJC)
South African Cities Network (SACN)
Centre for Small Towns Regeneration (CSTR)
Public Administration Leadership and Management National School of Government
SALGA
Trainer, coach and facilitator - Public and PVT Sector
School of Built Environment and Development Studies, UKZN
CoGTA, KZN
Local Economic Development, UKZN
DUT, UKZN
NMB, Senior Public Official
Afesis-Corplan
School of Public Management and Administration

The above list of key informants was constituted of academics, members of key stakeholder organisations on local government such as SALGA and CoGTA, municipal managers (MM) and members of civil society organisations (CSOs). Most of the key stakeholders were selected irrespective of their provincial location in order to have a broad overview of issues concerning skills and capacity from a national perspective. In the research process, practicalities required online and telephonic interviews, especially in the context of COVID-19 health and safety protocols. The online interviews were conducted using platforms such as Zoom, Teams, or Skype. Nevertheless, a few of the interviews were conducted face-to-face before the nationwide lockdown was implemented towards the end of March 2020. The key informant in-depth interview schedule was developed by the research team in consultation with the OSF-SA and approved by the HSRC's Research Ethics Committee (REC) (See Appendix A). The interview schedule was sent to identified respondents prior to the interview to enable them to prepare for the interview. We have learned from previous projects that this approach yields higher quality data.

2.6 Conclusion

The present report draws on the findings that emerged from the key informant interviews, triangulated with the findings from the case studies as well as the literature review of secondary sources to provide a more comprehensive and balanced picture of the skills and capacity constraints municipalities are experiencing. It should be noted that case study reports were produced for each of the eight target municipalities that respectively report more in detail the findings for each municipality.

Section 3: The need for skills and capacity improvement at municipal level

3.1 Introduction

Based on the argument that centralised states cannot effectively address local issues and improve local governance because they are not close enough to constituents (Grindle, 2007), decentralisation has been promoted worldwide as a creative model in delivering social and economic services to populations, and at the same time institutionalising democracy. It is worth noting that there are disadvantages associated with decentralisation of local government. Mokgopo (2017) illustrates that decentralisation can lead to the loss of already scarce financial resources from the central government and is not always guaranteed to be efficient in how it functions. Decentralisation also gives rise to structural and institutional challenges in its implementation which includes a disconnect between power and capacity, patrimonialism and clientelism which makes it difficult for state institutions to function well and implement the decentralisation agenda (Fridy and Myers, 2019). However, Faguet (1997), Bardhan (2002), Steytler (2005) and Robinson (2007) suggests that the decentralisation of local government has been favoured because it increases efficiency, guarantees autonomy, and brings services closer to the people. Local governments emanating from this model are likely to make a meaningful contribution to the delivery of key services and improve democratic principles (Cohen and Petersen, 1999), and improve accountability, responsiveness and service delivery in the public sector (Stanton, 2009). Similarly, Isujaf (2013) contends that improvements in accountability in a decentralised government is also likely to ensure an increase in the betterment of citizen's interests and in turn improve citizen's confidence in the institution of local government.

South Africa has also embarked in the process of restructuring the state governance in order to create a developmentally diversified nation. Kroukamp (2011) writes that the 1994 democratic breakthrough brought with it renewed hope for South Africans and local government was elevated from being a third-tier institution to being an equal sphere of government with constitutionally guaranteed autonomy. The transformation of local government in South Africa since 1994 has been characterised by the following remarkable changes: 'the system of local government has been de-racialised; municipal jurisdictions have been consolidated; a philosophy of developmental local government has been introduced; and the intergovernmental fiscal system has been overhauled to bring far more financial resources down to municipal level' (Atkinson, 2008: 53). Thus, 'local government has emerged from being an institution that was subservient, racist and illegitimate to an institution with democratically elected leadership, constitutional status and a developmental agenda' (De Visser, 2009: 7). As observed by Mashamaite and Lethoko (2018), the South African constitution provides local government with a mandate ensuring that there is a democratic and accountable government for local communities which must ensure that there are sustainable services provided to these communities. Thus, municipalities in South Africa have embarked on the extension of infrastructure and development offering great potential for the realisation of a better life for all citizens, facilitated by a new generation of developmentally-oriented municipalities (Madumo,

2015). However, service delivery in local governments is hampered by capacity constraints in critical areas of municipal governance and administration (De Visser 2009: 24).

The overall primary aim of the current research project is to conduct a skills and capacity assessment to unpack the capacity constraints and support requirements of municipalities. As indicated by Van der Waldt et al. (2018):

> *The general aim of such audits is to pinpoint potential gaps between the skills and knowledge the organisation requires to successfully operationalise its strategic objectives and the level of skills and knowledge it currently possesses. The result of a skills audit is usually a skills gap analysis which helps to obtain a comprehensive skills profile of an organisation. The ultimate intended outcome of skills audits in the local government sector is to develop a sector skills development plan aligned to the sector skills development strategy. Skills audits furthermore guide resource allocation to develop skills through appropriate training interventions. As such, skills audits validate official workplace skills plans (Van der Waldt et al., 2018: 1).*

This literature review is employed here to provide context to the Open Society Foundation Skills and Capacity Assessment study and to sharpen our understandings of capacity and skills constraints of municipal officials. A few broad themes (decentralisation, developmental local governance, ethical behaviour and leadership, public engagement) have been explored through a skills and capacity constraints lens.

A central objective of the project is to contribute to the development of training and capacity–building interventions to deal with skills gaps within local government. The skills should enhance effectiveness and efficiency, doing so in a way that supports the Batho Pele principles, people-centred government and the developmental role of the state.

The study could contribute to the implementation of the newly designed District Development Model (DDM) that aims to accelerate, align, and integrate service delivery under a single development plan per district or metro that is developed jointly by national, provincial, and local government as well as business, labour and the community in each district (COGTA, 2020). Through the DDM, various spheres of government will cooperate and undertake collaborative planning, budgeting and implementation processes converging developmental efforts at the district/metropolitan level.

It is also this quest for sustainable development and professionalism in public administration to ensure effective governance and efficient service delivery that has animated the recent drafting of a National Implementation Framework towards the Professionalisation of the Public Service. This important policy document is based on the observation of persistent serious challenges in many government departments with regards to skills, competence and professionalism (*Eyewitness News*, 2021). The framework aims to build a state that better serves citizens, that is insulated from undue political interference and where appointments are made on merit (National School of Governance, 2020).

However, it is important to consider definitions of capacity and skills and capacity constraints before we turn to the literature review.

3.2 Definitions of capacity and skills constraints

Capacity has been defined in several ways, and there appears to be no common definition acceptable to all. For instance, Hilderbrand and Grindle (1994: 10) define capacity as 'the ability to perform appropriate tasks effectively, efficiently and sustainably'. Loubser (1993: 23) argues that capacity consists of a number of elements, including specified objectives, i.e., vision, values, policies, strategies and interests; efforts, i.e., will, energy, concentration, work ethic and efficiency; capabilities, i.e., intelligence, skills, knowledge and mental sets; resources, i.e., human, natural, technological, cultural and financial resources; and work organisation, i.e., planning, designing, sequencing and mobilising. Morgan (1998) defines capacity as the 'organisational and technical abilities, relationships and values that enable countries, organisations, groups and individuals at any level of society to carry out functions and achieve their development objective over time'. Finally, according to Gargan (1981: 652), local government capacity is multi-dimensional, and includes expectations, i.e., 'perceptions and attitudes on "adequate" levels of public services, appropriate styles of political leadership, and accepted ways of conducting public affairs'; resources, i.e., 'money, knowledge, administrative skills, private sector associations, neighbourhood organisations, and political popularity', among other things; and problems, i.e. 'community issues that involve different preferences regarding the accomplishment of some objective'.

Capacity constraints can be defined as the lack of adequate and suitable human, scientific, technological, organisational, institutional and resource capabilities to deliver on the constitutional mandate of government (Soko, 2006; Development Network Africa, 2006). Capacity constraints might exist at three different dimensions, that is, at the system level, at the institutional level and at the individual level. In addition, these constraints could be evidenced in many different ways, such as, an absence of qualified people, an absence of people who are qualified and meet ancillary criteria, the quality of certification possessed by job incumbents, and deficiencies in attributes like experience and skills less likely to be certified like leadership (Development Network Africa, 2006).

Skills are one of the components of capacity, and skills constraints can be defined as the shortage of a particular set of attributes, qualifications and competencies in an individual, and can include so-called "soft skills", possession of appropriate educational qualifications, and the ability to produce a particular product or perform a particular service; and shortages in the number of individuals with a particular set of attributes, qualifications and competencies in particular departments in an institution, and can include skills shortages in departments such as supply chain; finance, ICT and human resource development.

3.3 Capacity realities in service delivery and training and capacity-building interventions

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. For Van der Waldt (2006: 142), 'local government is at the coalface of public service delivery'. Thornhill (2008) views the local government as the first point of contact between an individual and a government institution. The local sphere is often referred to as grass-roots government because of its direct association with communities at a local level (Ndevu & Muller, 2017). Reddy (2016) and Khambule and Mtapure (2018) also point out that local government is the sphere that is closest to the citizens. It is at this

level that citizens interact directly with government and experience the nature and quality of service provided (Reddy, 2020). However, the impetus that informs the drive for a developmental state that promotes growth and development hinges on the capacity of the local sphere of government to effectively discharge its responsibilities (Koma, 2010; Steiner, 2010). McGill (2010) argues that, generally, developing countries are faced with the enormous task of rebuilding capacity across all spheres of government with the local sphere being the most critical.

In the South African context, the mandate of local government as preserved in the Constitution requires that they work to improve the lives of all the citizens in their municipality (Nene, 2016). According to Ndou and Sebola (2016), the delivery of services requires enhanced capacity. Consequently, frameworks are adopted by government through organisational development as well as human resources to respond to this increase in demand for service delivery. Moreover, this must be achieved through the provision of basic services, development, and growth of the economy, recognising and harnessing the skills potential of people living in the municipality, job creation, and mobilising people to make their own contribution to improve their living conditions (Scheepers, 2015).

However, most municipalities experience capacity constraints/challenges. Within and across municipalities there are tremendous disparities, economically and politically and in terms of location (urban versus rural), performance and capacity (either human resource, financial and institutional) (Monkam, 2014). Despite the existence of numerous reports detailing the large spectrum of problems facing local government, three main systemic issues have been identified. These key problem areas are political appointments, lack of capacity, and lack of accountability (NDP 2014).

3.4 Providing basic services to the communities

Guided by the 1996 Constitution, local government is required to render basic services and to address existing backlogs accumulated during the apartheid era. In terms of Section 152 of the Constitution of South Africa of 1996, local government is a sphere of government that is tasked with the delivery of basic but essential services to communities for the maintenance of sustainable livelihoods (Draai & Oshoniyi, 2013). The provision of basic services includes the provision of water and sanitation services, electricity and refuse collection. The constitutional mandate for local government chiefly requires that services to local communities should be provided in a sustainable manner (Koma 2010). In the local sphere of government, the core elements of service delivery are accountability, participation, rule of law and transparency (Moyo, 2017). Those core elements are not always present. The challenges faced by municipalities mainly arise due to service delivery failures stemming from huge backlogs, inadequate revenue collection, corruption and fraud, poor financial management systems and the lack of highly skilled personnel. The need for good governance and technical capacity is essential to improving municipal functioning (Tshandu and Kariuki, 2010; Mbariza, 2013 and Reddy, 2016). Consequently, the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), Zweli Mkhize, developed a plan to remedy the problems, focusing on governance, financial management, infrastructure delivery and political infighting (Toxopeus Michelle, 2019). The back-to-basics plan focused on 87 municipalities that required urgent attention. The long-term objective is to develop major infrastructure and investment in municipal areas to improve economic growth and income revenue, and to root out maladministration.

The policy reforms that aims at addressing the anomalies of the past and enhancing municipal service delivery is yet to fully produce expected outcomes. There have been strong negative perceptions by members of the public about the nature of service delivery that many think is unsatisfactory. Although certain services have improved, the improvement has been minimal in several municipalities throughout the country where service delivery is perceived to be proceeding at a snail's pace, minimal and not adequately visible (Mphele, 2012). The South African local government sector is widely regarded as dysfunctional, with news headlines regularly detailing governance failures across rural and urban municipalities (Pieterse, 2020), increasingly resulting in service delivery protests. For almost two decades, citizens in numerous towns and cities across the country have become familiar with mass protests, marches, demonstrations, petitions, and violent confrontations related to poor service delivery by municipalities.

People in a democratic country have the right to voice their opinions regarding issues that concern them. The Constitution that upholds the right of citizens to receive quality public services also gives them the right to protest when they are dissatisfied with the services they receive (Mphele, 2012). Atkinson (2007) identifies three main causes for the mass protest: municipal ineffectiveness in service delivery, the poor responsiveness of municipalities to citizens' grievances, and the conspicuous consumption entailed by a culture of self-enrichment on the part of municipal councilors and staff. Thus, poor performance of public representatives as well as the dysfunctionality of local government administrative structures have been the main focal points of anger directing community protests over service delivery. In the same vein, Mphele justifies the protests over service delivery on the grounds that:

> *while millions still live under appalling conditions and do not enjoy the fruits of democracy, the chosen few reap the benefit of Black Economic Empowerment, which was supposed to do good to ordinary citizens who were previously disadvantaged, while others who are in power involve themselves in corruption and nepotism which manifests in the abuse of the tender system and the appointment of friends and relatives, respectively, which robs millions of citizens of their right to quality service delivery (Mphele, 2012: 224).*

However, as Atkinson (2007) hinted, the dissatisfaction of communities over service delivery, except in a few cases, is not translated into sanctions of the ruling executives, i.e., unseating the majority party during local elections. Thus, electoral behaviour is not based on service delivery and elections do not function as 'quality control mechanisms'. It appears as 'the pressure of the populace will have to be felt at the barricades, not at the ballot box' (Atkinson, 2007: 76), elections having other symbolic issues unrelated to actual service delivery.

There have been several government initiatives introduced to address service delivery challenges and the dysfunctionality of municipalities to date, and none of them have really borne any fruition in terms of responding to the local governance crisis (Reddy, 2016).

As highlighted in South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, an active citizenry is fundamental to the country's development trajectory, and should take place in a socially cohesive environment. However, the service delivery interface between South Africa's municipalities and citizens appears to be characterised by discontent and a lack of confidence. A sustainable solution that can restore and strengthen this interface is to use social innovation (SI) to develop the capacity of South African citizens to participate in municipal service delivery (Biljohn, 2019). The use of SI in service delivery is fundamental to enhancing citizens' participatory capacity, which in turn

could contribute towards strengthening the interface between citizens and municipalities and empowering citizens to influence the governance of municipal services. Beside the low development of the participatory capacity of South African citizens in municipal service delivery, it is also important to look at capacity performance, constraints and /or challenges to be able to address current challenges in municipalities (Department of CoGTA, 2016).

3.5 Capacity constraints in local government

Scheepers (2015) has identified nine challenges facing local government in South Africa, namely:

> *(1) constitutional independence versus capacity of some municipalities; (2) over-regulation of municipalities; (3) demarcation issues; (4) fiscal and financial position of municipalities; (5) separation of executive and legislative powers; (6) support to local government; (7) corruption; (8) skills and capacity of elected leadership; and (9) management and technical capacity (Scheepers, 2015: 230).*

Capacity constraints seem to be a major challenge facing local government in South Africa. A municipality is required to develop its human resource capacity to a level that enables it to perform its functions and exercise its powers effectively, efficiently, and economically. However, the reality is that local government is faced with a serious lack of human resources with the required capacity to administer the new municipalities and to render the wide range of services, particularly in formerly disadvantaged communities (Thornhill, 2008). It is clear from the Auditor General's reports over the last few years that, at the local government level, capacity deficiencies are largely due to the absence of technical skills and execution failures (AGSA, 2013; AGSA, 2018). Skills shortages are in key areas such as project management, procurement and contract management, as well as financial management. Vacancies existing in key management positions, as well as a lack of skill at the required level for management, were noted in particular (AGSA, 2013). Capacity constraints can be defined as the lack of adequate and suitable human, scientific, technological, organisational, institutional and resource capabilities to deliver on the constitutional mandate of government (Soko, 2006; Development Network Africa, 2006).

The lack of leadership, management and technical skills and knowledge within government as a whole, and local government in particular, is seriously affecting governance. There have been many initiatives and programmes to address these issues, with varying degrees of success (Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2015). Many municipalities still face many challenges in terms of their skills and capacity. Asha (2014) provides an illustration of capacity challenges in the Capricorn local municipality in Limpopo which includes issues of skills capacity, poor coordination, inadequate programmes to deal with capacity constraints, poor alignment and substandard monitoring and evaluation processes.

Capacity building initiatives have experienced shortcomings due to inadequate assessments of performance constraints leading to incomplete diagnosis resulting in interventions not addressing the root causes of problems. Initiatives undertaken to address capacity challenges have also experienced shortcomings; this is also highlighted in the work of Gqamane and Taylor (2013), who point out that these initiatives do not necessarily address the capacity challenges identified.

Despite undergoing the biggest transformation process in South African history, municipalities still have a long way to go before they can be sustainable and functional. The municipal transformation process itself has been a process beset by capacity constraints and performance failures. Many questions have been raised about the viability of such a large number of municipalities, the changing powers and functions of various municipalities, political leadership problems, the scarcity of skills, the lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities and the services delivery protests (Sheoraj, 2015). Skills challenges at municipalities are not new.

A large contributor to the dire state of municipal finance is consumer debt. Households account for the bulk of consumer debt owing to municipalities (71.2% of total debt), while government accounts for 5.5% (Toxopeus Michelle, 2019). According to National Treasury, these debts are realistically collectable and significantly influence the ability of local government to fulfil its functions and address the governance challenges that municipalities face. In addition, municipalities are unable to pay their creditors, like water boards, for the provision of water services. In February 2019, municipalities owed R13.1 billion to water boards and the Department for water services. Since 2013, there has been a high percentage of non-compliance with key legislation. Seventy three percent (73%) of municipalities were given material compliance findings against them on supply chain management (SCM) (Toxopeus Michelle, 2019). The lack of accountability and systemic governance issues within local government remain another serious concern.

The challenges around accountability remain largely unheeded, even after the 2016 local government elections. Little meaningful action is taken against officials for non-compliance with SCM procedures, fraudulent activity or improper conduct reported by the Auditor-General.

3.6 Low morale of public officials and performance

The described situation of service delivery in South Africa does not reflect on an efficient, effective and productive public service. Inefficiency in the public service might be caused by various factors, including the lack of financial resources or the recruitment of unqualified and unskilled staff. However, in efforts to achieve socio-economic and political objectives, human resource considerations are very often neglected. Employees can perform in their optimal capacity when all levels of administrators acknowledge the value of their knowledge, skills and abilities. A focus on the intrinsic and extrinsic needs of employees that might affect their performance and wellbeing reveals that meeting the needs regarding their working environment contributes to increasing, to some extent, their morale and productivity (Ferreira & Van Antwerpen, 2011).

Thus, the feeling by public officials that they are not well looked after regarding their physical, emotional and financial needs might result in low morale and poor performance. This might be the case in the South African public service after the refusal by Finance Minister Tito Mboweni, in February 2021, to award 1.2 million public servants inflation-busting salary increases over the next three years (Mahlaka, 2021). Mboweni said the government was phasing out the payment of performance bonuses, while it might "amend or abolish some allowances or benefits" (Mokone, 2021). The decision that was taken to alleviate the pressure on South Africa's deteriorating public finances has been the subject of court challenges by labour unions. The perception from the workers that their efforts are not incentivised might affect their morale and performance.

3.7 Human resource development

Human resource management's strategic and operational thrust is fundamental in addressing service delivery challenges (White Paper on Human Resource Management, 1997). A review of the literature on human capital management indicates that the synergy between employee capacitation and organisational success cannot be under-estimated, and knowledge of what one is mandated to do is considered as a currency for success. Thus, the quality performance of staff is determinant of the success, progression and sustainability of any organisation. Moreover, the culture of skills acquisition in any organisation edifies the level of service delivery (Moyo, 2017). Thus, any compromise on skills development is self-defeating.

Capacity from a human resources perspective can be measured through efficiency, which is a direct byproduct of productivity and skills; therefore, human resources capacity ought to bear that in mind (Kamara, Leonard and Haines, 2017). Generally, municipalities lack the technical knowledge, skill, and expertise necessary to perform core operational and financial functions (Municipal Demarcation Board, 2012). This shortfall includes planning, engineering, and project management, and is a major constraint to effective service delivery. In addition, municipalities are unable to fill vacant posts. Vacancy rates are an important component (Sheoraj, 2015). The failure to fill key personnel positions is a problem. There is also a clear lack of political will to ensure accountability.

There is a large number of vacancies in local government, especially in rural and district municipalities. This has been a challenge for a very long period. Of the 317 756 funded municipal posts that were available in 2017, 45 219 of those posts remained unoccupied, translating to a national vacancy rate in local government of 14.2% (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Posts are particularly difficult to fill in rural and district areas. Vacancies and instability in key positions within municipalities are amongst the reasons for the accountability failures in municipalities. In addition, inadequately skilled councilors have led to a lack of oversight by municipal councils; and this has an adverse effect on service delivery.

According to the Department of Public Service and Administration (2006), there is little or no link between training and performance. As a result, skills development within local government does not address the actual skills needs of employees. Training is often ineffectual and does not result in the desired productivity improvements. The approach to improving skills resources should focus on acquiring, retaining and using skills. Another factor that hinders skills development lies in the ability of departments to access skills of their own employees on a regular basis and to develop specific training programmes that would augment their technical competence.

The need for good governance and technical capacity is essential to improving municipal functioning. Despite numerous attempts to attract and retain skills in the public sector, municipalities continue to be hindered by the quality and quantity of public officials available to deliver basic services effectively and ensure the smooth operation of municipal administration (Financial and Fiscal Commission, 2012). This failure may be partially explained by the fact that most capacity-building initiatives have been based on 'one size fits all' or by the low transformation of the local sphere into a learning organisation, defined as an organisation capable of facilitating the learning of its workforce and harnessing knowledge capability and experience for the benefit of all its stakeholders (Tshishonga, 2019).

3.8 Conclusion

This Section summarised the existing literature on why it is important to assess the skills and capacity of municipal officials. It is argued that skills and capacity analysis is important because it will help to identify the gaps, weaknesses and shortcomings that exist as well as to construct a detailed profile of the skills sets of municipal public officials. The information gathered through such an assessment can help organisations and governments to develop sector skills development plans that are aligned with the sector's skills development strategy and guide resource allocation to develop skills through appropriate training interventions. It is envisaged that improved skills and capacity among municipal officials will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of local government that will further support the Batho Pele principles; people-centred government and the developmental role of the state. This skills and capacity evaluation is crucial in understanding the policies and legislation relevant to local government that the South African government has introduced to bring about improvement in local government, its capacity, governance, community engagement and leadership, among others. This policy and legislative framework is discussed in Section 4.

Section 4: Local Government and the Policy and Legal Framework

4.1 Introduction

The wellbeing of most South African families is negatively affected by high levels of unemployment, poverty and income inequality due to 'low levels of formal employment that exclude a large section of the population from actively taking part in the economy' (NPC, 2012: 354). Youth and middle-aged adults, in the age range of 18-59 years, who do not have skills relevant to work opportunities available in the economy, live without work for most of the time. Consequently, they become disproportionately exposed to shocks and stresses, such as those introduced by the COVID-19 and the national responses to the pandemic in the early part of 2020. However, if they are not chronically poor at other times they still suffer from acute, seasonal, and cyclical poverty (Stats SA, 2017).

According to Stats SA (2017), 26.6% of South Africans were unemployed during the fourth quarter of 2016. Although the proportion of people actively seeking work had decreased by 92 000 people, this could be attributed to discouraged job-seekers. Using the expanded definition of unemployment, which includes those who wanted to work but did not look for work, unemployment sits at 35.6%. The youth (aged 15 to 34) remain particularly vulnerable, with an unemployment rate of 39% which was 11% above the national average. Particularly vulnerable are those not in education, employment, or training.

Although the poverty rate decreased from 45% in 1993 to 38% in 2013, with social grants for the lower-bound poverty line (LBPL) of R647 per person per month playing a significant role in this drop (The Presidency, 2014a: 43), poverty levels began to increase again from 2011 with over half of all South Africans (30.4 million people) living in poverty when the upper-bound poverty line of R992 per person per month was used and over one-quarter of South Africans when employing the threshold of the lower-bound poverty line (LBPL) (Stats SA, 2017). Increases in poverty are largely attributed to declining economic growth, reduced employment (Stats SA, 2017), financial mismanagement and corruption at local (AGSA 2019) and national levels (AGSA 2019).

There is also a close connection between race and poverty. In 2015, 47% of the households headed by black Africans were poor (living below the LBPL) compared to 23% for those in households headed by coloureds, a little more than 1% for the population in households headed by an Indian South African, and less than 1% among those in households headed by white South Africans (World Bank, 2018: 13). In 2015, the poverty headcount among female-headed households was 51.2% compared to 31.4% among male-headed households (World Bank, 2018: 13). In the rural areas, 65.4% of people lived below the LBPL in 2015, down from 74.9% in 2006. In the urban areas, 25.2% of the population were poor, a drop from 34.3% in 2006. Approximately 34% of South Africans lived in the rural areas in 2016, with black Africans making up 98.7% of the rural population, white, 0.7% and coloureds and Indians, 0.6% (Arndt, Davies & Thurlow, 2018: 8).

While inequality by all definitions in South Africa has decreased since 1994, it remains exceptionally high. Using the Gini Coefficient as a measure of disparity, inequality rose from 0.64 to 0.67 between 1995 and 2008, indicating

that income inequality is worsening. According to Stats SA, in 2015, the Gini Coefficient was 0.68 (2017). Furthermore, in 2015, only 8.3% of the share of South Africa's income was being earned by the bottom 40% of the country and 10% of the population owned 90%-95% of the wealth. The Gini coefficient for wealth inequality in South Africa is very high at approximately 0.95, largely a consequence of structural injustices inherited from apartheid-era law and policy. The South African government must therefore give serious consideration to addressing unemployment, poverty and inequality.

It is within this context that the objectives for local government as outlined in the Constitution of South Africa (1996) should be considered. These are to: 1) Provide local communities with democratic and accountable government; 2) Ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner; 3) Promote social and economic development; 4) Promote a safe and healthy environment; and 5) Encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government. The South African government also adopted various other legislation and policies such as the 1997 White Paper on Local Government, the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998), the Local Government Municipal Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998), the Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000) and the Municipal Finance Management Act (No. 56 of 2003).

The overall aim of the White Paper and legislation is to bring about improvement in local government; its capacity, governance, and leadership, among others. However, local governments in South Africa have struggled to maximise people development, transformation, and the delivery of services. This section presents a summary of the key legislation and policies relevant to local government to provide the context for the evaluation of capacity and skills interventions that aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of municipal officials and the municipalities the work for to deliver quality services to its communities. SectionThis is followed by a review of the National Implementation Framework Towards the Professionalisation of the Public Service and the role that institutions such the National School of Governance (NSG), Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) play in enhancing the capacity of municipal officials.

4.2 Brief Legal Framework

4.2.1 Legal Framework

Like any other aspect crucial for the development and progressive encounters of the nation, the institution of local government is guided by various laws.

i) The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

Chapter Seven of the Constitution deals with Local Government and symbolizes the core principles that enlighten the basis for developmental local government in South Africa. Section 152 of the Constitution sets out the overall objectives of local government:

a) To provide democratic and accountable government for local communities;
b) To ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner;
c) To promote social and economic development;

d) To promote a safe and healthy environment; and
e) To encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matter of local government

Chapter 10 of the Constitution contains specific provisions pertaining to public administration. In this regard, a number of fundamental ethical or normative guidelines, which should be upheld by all political office-bearers and public officials in the provision of services to society, are found in Section 195(1) of the Constitution. This includes the following principles:

1. A high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.
2. Efficient, economic and effective use of resources must be promoted.
3. Public administration must be development oriented.
4. Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias.
5. People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy making.
6. Public administration must be accountable.
7. Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information.
8. Good human resources management and career development practices, to maximise human potential, must be cultivated.
9. Public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people, with employment and personnel management practices based on ability, objectivity, fairness and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation.

This section of the Constitution brings to the fore the values and principles that govern public officials (Cheminais at al., 1998, 75).

ii) The Municipal Structures Act, 1998

The Local Government Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (hereinafter referred to as the Structures Act) provides for the establishment of a new generation of municipalities and essentially lays the foundation for a new system of local government in South Africa. Ultimately the Municipal Structures Act expands the classifications of municipalities identified in the Constitution and it defines the different types of municipalities that can be established within each category.

The Municipal Structures Act also divides the powers and functions between the categories of municipalities and regulates matters connected with local government, its systems and structures. The Municipal Structures Act deals fairly extensively with the Municipal Council and provides for issues such as the election, removal from office of councillors, and the internal proceedings in and the dissolution of the Council.

iii) The Municipal Systems Act, 2000

The Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 ("the Systems Act") outlines the legal nature of a municipality and provides because municipal powers and functions are implemented and performed. In addition, the Systems Act provides the framework for local public administration. The Act also provides that municipal services must be equitable, accessible and be provided in a manner that is conducive to prudent, economic, efficient, and effective use of

available resources and improve in quality over time. The services must also be financially and environmentally sustainable, and reviewed regularly with a view to upgrading, extension and improvement.

iv) The Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003

The Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003 (MFMA) is intended to guarantee sound and sustainable financial management in municipalities and widens the budgetary process in municipalities by making community involvement compulsory. provides the framework within which municipalities compile budgets.

4.2.2 Skills Development Levies (SDL) Act, 1999

The Skills Development Levies (SDL) Act of 1999 provides for the funding of skills development in the country. The primary aim of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 is:

- To develop the skills of the South African workforce;
- To increase the levels of investment in education and training in the labour market and to improve return on that investment; and
- To encourage employers to use the workplace as an active learning environment, acquire new skills and provide new entrants to marketplace.

The Skills Development Levies Act provides ways to make training affordable by

- Implementing payment of skills levies
- Implementing payment of grants
- Requiring the appointment of Skills Development Facilitators (SDFs)
- Requiring Workplace Skills Plans (WSPs)
- Requiring Annual Training Reports (ATRs).

The Skills Development Act imposes a requirement on certain categories of employers to pay 1% of their payroll as a skills levy to the South African Revenue Service (SARS) for use to fund skills development activities in a specific sector.

4.2.3 Other relevant legislation and White Papers

Other relevant legislation and White Papers	**Purpose**
South African Qualification Authority Act No. 58 of 1995	Provides ways of ensuring that training in South Africa is of a high quality and is able to address skills shortages.
White Paper on Public Service Training and Education, 1997	Provides a policy framework to enable appropriate, adequate and accessible Public Service training and education which meets current and future requirements of public servants, the Public Service and the general public.
White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service, 1997	Provides a framework to facilitate the development of the human resource practices which support an effective and efficient Public Service.
Skill Development Act No. 97 of 1998	Provides an institutional framework to devise and implement national, sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the South Africa workforce.

4.2.4 National Skills Development Strategy, 2005

The 2005 National Skills Development Strategy was introduced with the objective of contributing towards sustainable development of skills growth and the development and equity of skills development institutions by aligning their work and resources to the skills needs for effective delivery of services.

4.2.5 The Public Sector Education and Training Authority

The Public Sector Education and Training Authority was registered with the Department of Labour in March 2000 in accordance with the Skills Development Act. Its objective is the development of a coordinated framework for ensuring the development of a coordinated framework for ensuring the provision of appropriate and adequate Public Service education and training which will be sufficient to meet the current and future needs of the Public Service.

4.2.6 Human Resource Policy

The Municipal Systems Act (Act No. 32 of 2000) gives municipalities the authority to develop and adopt policies, plans and strategies. These policies, plans and strategies are, however, subject to the Municipal Structures Act and other national legislation. All municipalities have a range of policies applicable to human resources based on the needs of the municipality. This includes staff retention policies or strategies, termination or exit management policies, employee wellness policies, as well as skills development policies. The successful implementation of such policies can contribute to employee satisfaction in the workplace, manage staff turnover and promote retention.

4.3 National Implementation Framework: Professionalisation of the Public Service

Both the service provider and service beneficiary are important components when it comes to the provision of high quality and effective services. For example, public officials working at municipalities play a crucial role in the delivery of services and they must make sure that the communities that they service are satisfied. The customer-centric approach positions the end users at the centre of the new development strategies and their satisfaction is critically important for the development of the municipality as well as the overall well-being of the people within the municipality. Municipal officials' values and principles governing the administration must therefore be of a high standard of professional ethics.

It is against this brief context that we discuss the National Implementation Framework (NIF) Towards the Professionalisation of the Public Service. In December 2020, the National School of Government (NSG) published a discussion document for public comment, viz. 'A National Implementation Framework towards the Professionalisation of the Public Service' (NIF) (NSG, 2020).

4.3.1 Capable and developmental state

The draft NIF records that various initiatives have been undertaken 'to ensure that the Public Service is pertinent for democracy and the envisaged developmental state'. The NDP states that in order to address the:

> *….challenges of poverty and inequality, the state needs to play a transformative and developmental role. This requires well-run and effectively coordinated state institutions with skilled public servants who are committed to the public good and capable of delivering consistently high-quality services, while prioritising the nation's developmental objectives. This will enable people from all sections of society to have confidence in the state, which in turn will reinforce the state's effectiveness (NPC, 2012: 409).*

It adds that a capable state 'has the capacity to formulate and implement policies that serve the national interest', while a developmental state ensures that 'those policies focus on overcoming the root causes of poverty and inequality, and building the state's [especially the public service's] capacity to fulfil this role' (NPC, 2012: 409-10).

As a capable state requires a capable public service, the objectives of the NIF are accordingly as follows:

1. To entrench 'a dynamic system of professionalisation in the Public Service'.
2. To strengthen and enable the 'legal and policy instruments to professionalise categories of occupations in the Public Service'.
3. To enhance and build 'partnerships and relationships with professional bodies'.
4. To ensure 'meritocracy in the recruitment and career management of public servants' in accordance with the NDP and the MTSF.
5. To initiate 'consequence management for material irregularities through the transgression mechanisms available to professional bodies and the Public Audit Amendment Act 5 of 2018' (NSG, 2020: 42).

The NIF begins by recognising that Section 10 of the Constitution states that 'one of the basic values and principles governing public administration requires that a high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained'. As the NIF envisages, 'consequence management' clearly constitutes one of the mechanisms applicable, but the starting point is the 'values and principles' that underpin 'professional ethics'. The applicable set of values and principles are detailed in s.195(1) of the Constitution (and have been mentioned above),[10] but bear repeating here in more detail.

a) 'A high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.

The importance, as well as challenges of promoting and practicing good ethics is recognised. Ethics and the exercise of ethical judgment are fundamentally understood as respecting the inherent dignity of others. Ethics deals with doing what is right either individually or as a group. 'It is a normative concept, and the exercise of ethical judgement is based on the shared values embedded in a society' (NSG, 2020).

The King IV Report (2016) description of ethics is highlighted. Specifically, two things are identified as significant in this description. Firstly, the social quality of ethics, which manifests in relation to a problem situation or person. Secondly, thinking and acting in an ethical manner requires treating others as one would like to be treated. Through this approach one subjects oneself to the cornerstone constitutional value of human dignity (NSG, 2020).

b) Efficient, economic and effective use of resources must be promoted.

Government departments are required to use taxpayers' money to deliver services within given prescripts and guidelines to ensure efficiency. This contributes to improved service delivery and well-being by providing quality education, better health services and improved access to services. An important caveat is to provide affordable services that are of an acceptable level and quality and takes into consideration the needs and priorities of citizens and the wider community. Equally important is the requirement to avoid the risk of public funds being diverted away from government priorities (NSG, 2020).

c) Public administration must be development-oriented.

The Government is obliged to create and implement the conditions in which substantive equality is realised, living up to the development orientation of public administration. In the public administration sphere, development orientation refers to capacitated and effective public administration institutions capable of implementing developmental programmes (NSG, 2020). This orientation is directly linked to the Constitution's aspirations of ensuring that all citizens benefit equally from its growth and development initiatives. The fundamental values in the Constitution are the essence of transformative constitutionalism and a capable developmental state. It is in this vein that the Government must commit itself to rapid socio-economic development by placing the alleviation of poverty, inequality and unemployment at the centre of its developmental agenda and within a human rights approach. Another important dimension of this development orientation is the mobilisation of all societal stakeholders behind the developmental agenda. This refers to partnerships with various stakeholders, inclusive of communities so that they exercise their agency (NSG, 2020).

[10] See above at p48

d) Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias.

Public services are to be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias. This is enabled by following the values of human dignity, equality and advancement of human rights. It entails avoiding any form of preferential treatment and discrimination and applying the standards of quality in service delivery processes (NSG, 2020).

e) People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making.

People's basic needs are entrenched in the Bill of Rights. They refer to government services that aim to provide a better life for all. Public participation is seen as an integral part of service delivery in the Public Service where public servants work with citizens to ensure that public voices are considered in service delivery processes. Citizens are active role players in determining which services are to be delivered and how. Therefore, planning processes should be genuinely participatory. The involvement of communities in Public Service programmes enables more adequate decision-making, ownership of local processes, thus improving credibility and legitimacy (NSG, 2020).

f) Public administration must be accountable.

Accountability here refers to "the obligation of public servants, or an institution, to account for its activities, provide information about decisions and actions, explain and justify decisions as well as exercising discretion, accepting responsibility for these activities, disclosing the results in a transparent manner, be answerable for their actions, and most importantly, that there are consequences when duties and commitments are not met." Similarly, it also refers to the optimal utilisation of financial, human, and physical resources (NSG, 2020). These principles are also contained in the Preamble to the Constitution and refer to both external accountability and internal accountability. Overall, public servants are expected to provide accessible quality services through a relationship with the public that is consultative and participative (NSG, 2020).

g) Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information.

This principle is grounded on the values of an open society where citizens are equally protected by law, in particular the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA, 2000). It speaks to the obligation of the State to provide access to any information held by the State or information that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights. In this vein, a Public Service which is really committed to transparency provides substantial information without having to be requested to do so. The Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (PAJA, 2000) further complements PAIA as it requires the provision of reasons for administrative actions for citizens requesting it (NSG, 2020).

h) Good human-resource management and career-development practices, to maximise human potential, must be cultivated.

According to this principle, 'the success of the public service depends on its capabilities to maintain a sound administration, deliver services to citizens and design and implement development programmes.' Relevant practices to pursue this include recruitment, career management, performance management and ongoing professional development (NSG, 2020). Three other elements, encapsulated in democratic values, are important: effectiveness of these practices; compliance with labour considerations and agreements; and an adequate institutional system which is enabling of public servants' needs and their work life. Enabling here refers to allowing public servants to serve and contribute meaningfully to the betterment of the lives of citizens (NSG, 2020).

i) ***Public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people, with employment and personnel management practices based on ability, objectivity, fairness, and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation.'***

The White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (WPTPS) of 1995 defines Affirmative Action as 'laws, programmes or activities designed to redress past imbalances and ameliorate the conditions of individuals and groups who have been disadvantaged on the grounds of race, colour, gender or disability in the workplace.' This is paramount to the transformation of the Public Service, which is a national priority (NSG, 2020). The application of this approach requires objectivity, fairness and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve a broader representation. An important word of caution in the appointment process is to ensure that the candidates' public value orientation, integrity and professionalism are not underplayed in the pursuit of nominal targets. Similarly, transformation efforts should aim at a public administration that is representative of the country's diversity and that it adequate to the specific context. Finally, this principle highlights the importance of adequately treating vulnerable groups and dealing with any form of discrimination (NSG, 2020).

4.3.2 Professionalisation of the public sector, including municipalities

The NIF states that despite adoption of the NDP, 'there is little or no clarity' as to exactly what professionalisation means and how it can be implemented (NSG, 2020: 43). However, Section 13 of the NDP states that 'the public service should attract highly skilled people and cultivate a sense of professional common purpose and a commitment to developmental goals' (NPC, 2012: 416). To achieve this, 'South Africa needs a *two-pronged* approach to building a more professional public service *from the top and the bottom'* (emphasis added). It must 'increase the pool of skilled people by ensuring that the public service and local government become careers of choice for graduates who wish to contribute to the development of the country and ensure that high-level staff are recruited based on their suitability for the job' (NPC, 2012: 416).

Thus, according to both the Constitution and the NDP, a professional public service is one 'where people are recruited and promoted based on merit and potential, rather than connections or political allegiance. This requires rigorous and transparent recruitment mechanisms. At the same time, however, as both s.195(1)(i) and the NDP recognise, the public service 'will not be effective if it is elitist and aloof'. Public servants therefore 'need to have an in-depth understanding of [all] the sections of society with which they work. A highly skilled public service should [therefore] also be representative of, and connected to, the communities it serves'.

Chapter 13 of the NDP recognises that the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) 'has highlighted as one of its 10 strategic priorities the need for "effective entry into the public service and human resource development standards…"'. This, says the NDP, 'will require a shift from [short-term] training initiatives to a long-term approach to recruiting people with relevant aptitude and developing their skills over the course of their careers' in the public service (NPC, 2012: 416). Chapter Section 13 sets out in some detail the key reforms and steps needed to build a professional and effective public service. In many respects, these are echoed in the NIF. For example, a proposed 'value chain' is set out in para 15.2 of the NIF and includes the following pillars, starting with building the public service 'from below' and including ongoing development:

1. Pre-entry, Recruitment and Selection
2. Induction and Onboarding
3. Planning and Performance Management
4. Continuing Learning and Professional Development

5. Career Progression and Career Incidents.

At the same time, the NIF acknowledges (NSG, 2020: par 15.3) that a capable and effective public service must also be built from within, including *from the top*. This is being done partly through the NSG's '*Nyukela programme* – a mandatory pre-entry vehicle to the Senior Management Service (SMS) [that] is being successfully rolled out and serves as part of the professionalisation of the SMS. This programme is also applicable to serving SMS members. Government has set minimum competency requirements for the SMS & MMS in national and provincial government.[11] The *DPSA Directive of 2011* provides for the existing SMS to be subjected to competency assessments for purposes of identifying skills / developmental gaps which can then be incorporated into personal development plans, [although] it may not be fully implemented and followed up'.

The NIF proposes several new initiatives in this pillar, many of which focus on leadership positions, including the following (NSG, 2020: 83-84) –

- Tightened pre-entry requirements informing meritocratic appointments, particularly at middle and senior management levels.
- Integrity tests, as part of the overall competency assessment.
- Involvement of the PSC [Public Service Commission] and external experts during interview processes of DDGs [Deputy Directors-General] and DGs [Directors-General, and, it is suggested, should include provincial HoDs] – i.e., insulation from political influence or interference. Thereafter, proposals of recommended candidates to be made to executive authorities for consideration and recommendation to Cabinet.
- Appointment of a Head of Public Service to manage the political-administrative interface and the career incidents of HoDs [which, it is suggested, should include DDGs and DGs].
- Activation of the revolving door policy when specialist or technical skills are required in the Public Service. The *Revolving Door Policy (2008)* provides for the temporary / short-term movement of SMS members 'between private sector, academia and the public sector to inculcate "fresh, current and inspirational learning and innovative ideas' (NSG, 2020: 85).[12]
- Defining a clear policy on succession planning in the Public Service, without creating opportunities for nepotism, [favouritism], etc.

4.4 Alignment of training and capacity-building strategies and interventions with priority needs

The adoption of the developmental state as a model to address socioeconomic challenges requires local government to play a pivotal role in activating projects and programmes to benefit the people, especially the poor and indigent (Tshishonga, 2019). This entails an alignment of training and capacity-building strategies and interventions with actual priority needs. The discourse on the developmental state and developmental local

[11] And for MMs and other managers in municipalities.
[12] Para 15.7.2.

government has developed into a theoretical framework that underlies the developmental ambitions of both the South African state and the importance of the system of local government in achieving these ambitions (Scheepers, 2015). The South African local governance system, if judged according to the legislative and policy framework, can be described as 'world class' internationally; however, to complement that framework, there has to be the requisite human and financial resources committed to the municipal structures and ensuring that the system works (Reddy, 2016). It appears that the failure to include innovation in respect of the determination of institutional capacity is a challenge in aligning training and capacity-building strategies with priority needs. As Scheepers (2015) noted:

> *…public institutions, including municipalities in South Africa, are faced with a fast-changing environment that requires being able to quickly adapt to changes in the technological, social, economic, political and natural environments. The Municipal Institutional Capacity Model (MICM) attempts to fill this gap by presenting innovation as a key institutional capacity area, specifically linked to the sustainability of municipalities (Scheepers, 2015: 232).*

A solution for the alignment of training and capacity-building strategies and interventions with actual priority needs may come from the recently developed District Development Model (DDM). This can be seen as a partial response to the need raised by some studies to review legislation regarding the extent to which a local municipality should account to a district municipality, as well as to ensure clarity regarding the discharge in roles and responsibilities between a district and a local municipality (Magagula et al, 2019). In fact, the *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998*, stipulates that district municipalities are established to coordinate and support their local municipalities to enable them to deliver services to the communities that they serve. However, there is ambiguity regarding the roles of district and local municipalities within the sphere of local government.

The DDM was designed to fill the need for a new district-based coordination model as announced in the Presidency budget speech in 2019. The model aims at bringing about a shift in the way various entities have been operating and to institutionalise joint planning as the new method of operating. The DDM was approved as an operational model for improving Cooperative Governance with the aim of building a capable, ethical and developmental state, including improving and enhancing the state of local government. It embodies an approach by which the three spheres of government and state entities work collaboratively in an impact-oriented way, and where there is higher performance and accountability for coherent service delivery and development outcomes. This approach ensures that planning and spending across the three spheres of government is integrated and aligned, and that each of the 44 district / 8 metro plans is developed by considering the interests and input of communities. The DDM will be implemented through two interrelated processes to be followed by the whole of government. These processes are spatialisation and reprioritisation. Spatialisation refers to the process of translating development priorities and objectives into spatial locations (district and metropolitan areas) manifesting in physical impacts on people's lives and the places they live in. Reprioritisation is the process of reviewing and changing plans and budgets to realise the desired physical impacts (COGTA, 2020). The new model thus provides the potential for a coordination of capacity and skills development by taking a 'whole-of-government' approach.

For Tshishonga (2019), COGTA, SALGA and other local government stakeholders entrusted to play a meaningful and pivotal role in creating an independent and competent structure should strive to transform each local

government into a learning organisation. COGTA, SALGA, the Public Sector Education and Training Authority and the National School of Governance are key local government stakeholders that must play a significant and crucial role in supporting municipalities to become independent and competent structures able to transform local government to better service its communities. The next sections therefore briefly highlight the role of COGTA, SALGA and the National School of Governance.

4.4.1 National School of Governance

One of the key departments which assists in capacity building and training of public officials is the National School of Governance (NSG), which must play a significant role in overseeing the professional common purpose in addressing the systemic challenges of Public Service delivery through the training and development of public officials. The NSG replaced the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA). According to the NSG (2019), the NSG should integrate lessons and experiences from the past to develop and improve on current skills and empower the current generation of public servants; and determine a conduit for producing future public servants with a vastness of competitive opportunities and abilities to innovate. "The NDP confirms that the uneven performance at national, provincial and local government results from interplay between a complex set of factors including tensions in the political-administrative instability of the administrative leadership, skills deficits, the erosion of accountability and authority, poor organisational design, inappropriate staffing and low staff morale" (National Planning Commission, 2012). Therefore, the NSG is a call to build a capable and developmental state that will assist in correcting some of the inefficiencies in the public service.

4.4.2 Sector Education Training Authorities (SETA's)

Various SETA's have been created by the government to provide training and capacity building to employees in the public sector. The Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) provides an environment to facilitate the training and up-skilling of various employees and people involved in local government structures, as well as unemployed South Africans. This entails creating and implementing a variety of skills development interventions, such as the Sector Skills Plan (SSP) and learning programmes aimed at local government employees and others working within the sphere, such as traditional leaders and ward councillors. The Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA) oversees the provision of quality public service education and training that meets the current and future needs of all stakeholders that are in the business of government, namely government departments like DIRCO, Home Affairs, parliament, provincial legislatures, and developing transversal skills across other government departments, public entities and parastatals.

4.4.3 South African Local Government Association (SALGA)

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) is an autonomous association of all 257 South African municipalities, comprising of a national association with one national office and nine provincial offices. Membership of the association is voluntary. SALGA is a key entity in the local government sector which assists with capacity building and training at national, provincial, and local government levels. One of its key mandates is to build the capacity of municipalities as an institution as well as leadership and technical capacity of both councillors and officials.

4.4.4 Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA)

The purpose of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) is to improve cooperative governance across the three spheres of government, in partnership with institutions of traditional

leadership, to ensure that provinces and municipalities carry out their service delivery and development functions effectively.

4.5 Conclusion

It is evident from the number of laws, White Papers and resulting policies and structures that the South African government is committed to improving the public service at the national, provincial and local government levels. While developing good policies and an institutional framework for revitalizing the public administration, there are essential prerequisites for the formulation of a strategy to strengthen the capacity of human capital to revitalize the public administration. The National Implementation Framework (NIF) towards the professionalisation of the public service is a long-term process, requiring the adoption of a comprehension strategy that fosters the development of core capacities to provide leadership, to formulate sound public policies, to improve greater performance-orientation in service delivery and to enhance professionalisation in public management. Section 4 outlined the various local government laws, White Papers and resulting policies and structures, including the NIF, that emphasis the importance of building a professional and capable local government to address the developmental needs of the many people that continue to live in municipalities characterised by poor service delivery, among other things.

Section 5: Presentation of findings

5.1 Introduction

This Section presents the main findings of the empirical research conducted for the study, with a focus on the key capacity and skills constraints in local government. To this effect, the study does not assess the capacity of local government to fulfil its mandate, or of the number of qualified staff, but rather presents a deep qualitative analysis of the key capacity and skills constraints identified by public officials and key stakeholders in the local government sphere. While capacity assessments generally establish the extent to which municipalities can fulfil their mandate (Gargan, 1981: 652), and skills assessments generally establish the skills level of employees (Van der Waldt, 2020: 42), the focus of this Section extends beyond to instead focus on the factors and dynamics that impact on capacities and skills as seen by those at the coalface of local government. The findings in this Section thus illustrate the interconnections between various capacity and skills constraints that impact on the ability of local government and especially municipalities in South Africa to fulfil its mandate.

As indicated in Section 3, capacity consists of several elements that enable municipalities to perform the tasks required to fulfil their mandate effectively, efficiently and sustainably, including *resources*, i.e., financial, human, technological and cultural resources, leadership and administrative skills, private sector associations and community organisations, and trust; specified *objectives and expectations*, i.e., vision, values, policies, strategies, interests, perceptions of adequate levels of service delivery, appropriate styles of political leadership, and accepted ways of conducting municipal affairs; and *efforts, capabilities and problems*, i.e., will, energy, concentration, work ethic, efficiency, intelligence, skills, knowledge, mental sets and community issues. Skills are one of the components of capacity, and consists of attributes, qualifications and competencies in an individual. A capacity and skills constraint would thus be an inadequacy in any area identified above.

Section 3 also draws attention to the key capacity and skills constraints of local government identified in the relevant literature. Several have been identified, including inadequate financial resources, inadequate revenue collection, inadequate human resource capacity, inadequate leadership, governance and technical capacity, poor financial management systems, the lack of highly skilled personnel in areas such as project, procurement, contract and financial management, inadequate skills development, and inadequate community engagement, among others.

The findings in this Section are drawn from the qualitative research: Key Informant interviews with municipal officials and key stakeholders; and focus group discussions (FGDs) with municipal officials. Participants were asked to reflect on the key capacity and skills constraints of local government. The key constraints identified include inadequate economic and human resources, inadequately skilled leadership, inadequate institutional environment and culture, inadequate infrastructure and work tools, and inadequate skills development, among others (see Figure 4)

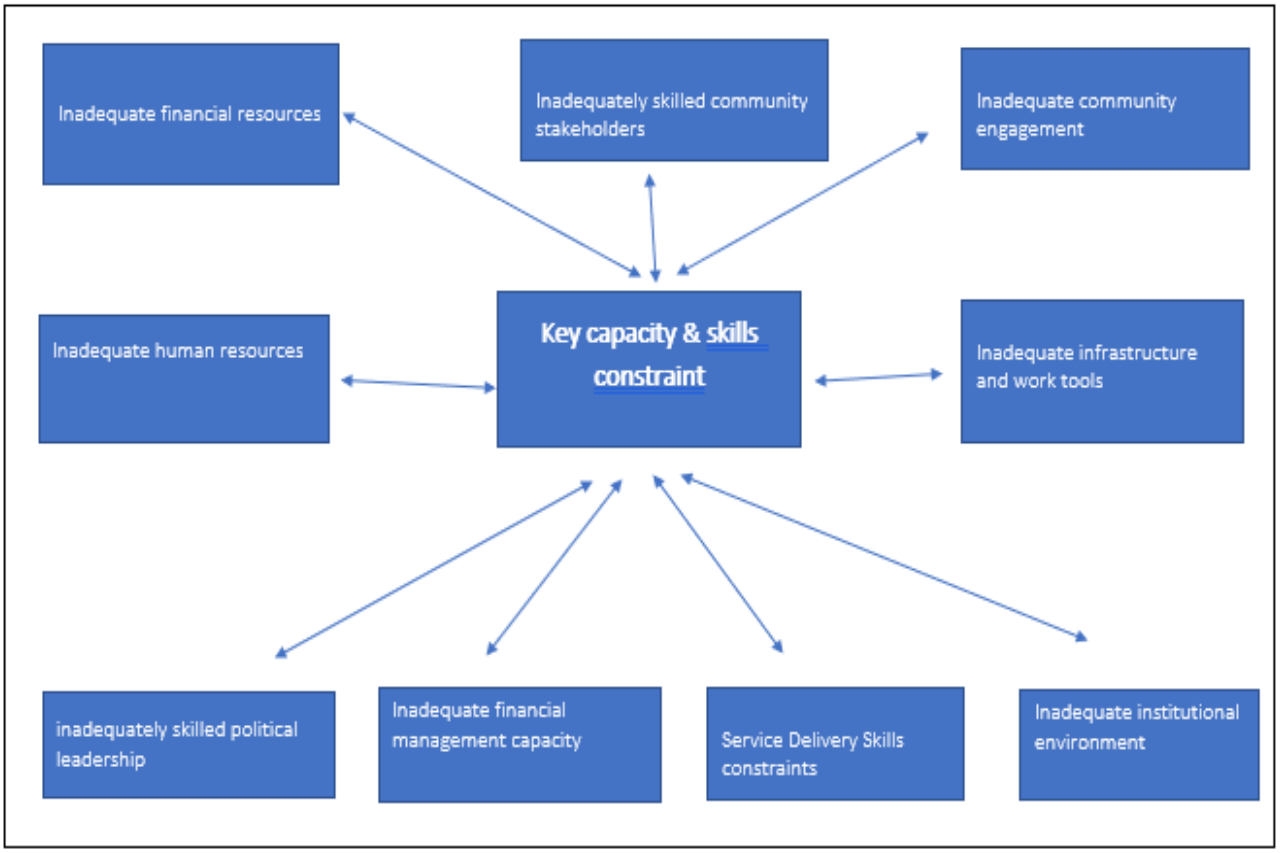

Figure 4: Key capacity and skills constraints

5.2 Inadequate financial resources

The empirical research conducted for the study supports the findings in the literature and illustrates that one of the main capacity constraints of local government in South Africa is inadequate financial resources. This tends to impact on every other aspect of local government, including human resource capacity, leadership capacity, financial administration capacity, and many others, ultimately impacting the ability to deliver basic services, the core mandate of local government. A participant in a focus group discussion (FGD) with officials from a municipal metro felt that *"as a result of the declining revenues, declining conditional grant, I think we are squeezed to a larger degree to be able to deliver the services that we are required to do".* Another participant in this FGD added that *"service delivery is deteriorating across the municipality, whether it's the provision of water, repairs on roofs and maintenance, refuse removal. I mean the evidence is there. When we just look outside, we see the town is dirty. We are not doing okay as the municipality, and I think my colleague has also alluded to some of what we can call the causes to that."* Several participants in a second FGD held with officials from this metro expressed similar sentiments. An external stakeholder interviewed for the study noted:

> *Currently, more than a third of municipalities are financially in dire straits, which by the way includes some of the biggest cities. So it isn't just the small ones. So, that points to financial challenges, and the local resource base which of course in many municipalities is very poor. In cities [it is] easy to still generate local revenue. In other cities … the base is very low. But also municipalities tend to have very limited capacity to actually collect revenue. … So, to follow up and get the money in, and secondly the numbers aren't always correct. So there can be a complete mismatch between the budget expectations, and the actual income from local revenue. So, yeah, on the resources, the financial resources and things are not looking good. And, of course, in the current economic environment … they [are] depressed at the moment. That is not going to change anytime soon. There's clearly a correlation.*

This participant draws attention to several capacity constraints, including the capacity to collect revenue and to budget effectively because the challenges with revenue collection raise uncertainty about actual revenue collected. This sentiment was echoed in an interview with a senior official in a rural district municipality as follows:

> *At the moment … we've got challenges in terms of collecting revenue, and which is affecting the functionality of the municipality in a way that it affects also our service delivery. Because if we are not collecting, we are affected by not giving quality service delivery to our communities. And it's affecting our communities as well. So, due to lack of funds it leads to ourselves not [being] able to better our communities; to enable us to give quality services to our people. We're based in a rural municipality. So, we've got only three communities that play a major role in the contribution of revenues. So, … other communities are probably not paying but we still provide services to them. For example, we still provide Magale with water. We still provide other surrounding areas with water. And at the end there's no payment that is coming to Phalaborwa. And it's affecting us.*

Another interviewee saw the consequences of communities failing to pay for services as having the following impact on service delivery:

Because of financial constraints we are not doing well. It takes two to tango. We are expecting them [communities] to also contribute to the municipality by paying for the services that are rendered to them, and there are expecting us as a municipality to render services to them. So, because the two hands are not washing each other it therefore affects the expectation of rendering services.

For some municipalities, the problem is created by other government institutions, as illustrated by the following words of one municipal official that was interviewed:

We have our Provincial and National government department who are not paying for services. They owe the municipality millions. Which means if they were paying the municipality, we were going to be able to get out of the unfunded budget. So, they are not paying. … We as the municipality are paying for services we get from the Provincial and National government. Sometimes we are paying for things we are not supposed to be paying for because we do not have information that a particular department can render the service free to the municipality.

This sentiment was echoed in the following terms in an interview with an official from another municipality:

Major impact is of those departments that are not paying for their services; who are not paying for water and electricity. There are departments who are owing the municipality. So, if government is owing government, then it causes problems. We usually don't receive regular payments for services provided to them, and in that manner our support system from them also suffers. So, we cannot be financially viable if we provide services and yet those services are not paid for. So those are the major challenges – it is the Department of Education, Health; all those departments are owing the municipality and not paying regularly. They consume a lot of water and electricity and if they do not pay then the municipality cannot move forward.

A participant in an FGD held with officials from a metro agreed, pointing out that *"the Debt book of the municipality keeps on growing every year. Then you ask yourself what are the challenges? Why can't we collect the money for the services that we provided as the municipality?"* The challenge most urban municipalities face, according to a participant in another FGD with officials from this metro, is that *"most of the residents … are not paying … [for] the services,"* while another participant said that *"they are also not paying tariffs. They are just paying rent, and that is also creating a huge backlog with the tariff collection."*

The economic situation of rural municipalities is more dire, as indicated by the following statement by a public official who was interviewed:

Economically our municipality is very poor looking at the income base. We only receive income from the town Groblersdal and there's a smaller town called Rosanakal and the township of Motetema. But the most contributing area is Groblersdal and Rosanakal to the income of the municipality. The vast area, especially in the rural villages, there is no income received from those villages. We just render services for free, the basic services. Of which I think it's one of the things that keeps our municipality down when coming to income or revenue collection, because it is impacting on the service delivery also.

Another participant drew attention to how service delivery failure in turn impacted on the ability to expand the economic base of the municipality.

> *If we can't be able to service our roads, it will affect our tourism. If we can't provide those services of water and electricity, it's affecting our municipality still. So, we are not able to attract people to come to our town so that we can be able to inject into our economic development. So that is the challenge of what we're having as an external problem.*

According to an external stakeholder that was interviewed, the poor economic environment that most municipalities operate in, and rural-based ones, *"obviously affects the ability of municipalities to raise revenue and, therefore, invest in local development".*

Municipalities often find themselves in a situation where they have unfunded budgets. It was noted by one municipal official interviewed that:

> *We got unfunded budgets. And when you have unfunded budgets, you cannot do anything new as an institution. We should look back on what caused the unfunded budget and how do we get out of that mess quickly. So, if we were to be assisted by the treasury in the province or nationally, they [should] be doing that as quickly as possible because the systems are there. And [the] plans are there. But the municipality cannot function to its maximum because of the unfunded budget. So, if we are not assisted quickly on that matter, we will remain a municipality that cannot deliver services.*

Large metros face similar challenges, as indicated by the sentiments expressed by an official who participated in a focus group discussion: *"I think we're really constrained … because we will trust the budget. But if the budget is not funded, then there's nothing you can do."*

A challenge faced by district municipalities is that, according to the manager of one such municipality in the Western Cape, *"we don't generate our own funding. We receive a grant from national and that grant has been increased in the last 5 or 7 years anything between two to three percent in real terms…so actually we are decreasing our income because of the increase in expenditure"*. By contrast:

> *We haven't seen in the local government sector any staff increases below CPI, if I may call it that, in how many years. So, it's not only the general increase that you're seeing in terms of salary but the benefits, like pension and medical aid and so forth. They're also increasing, by way of an example. So, that is a challenge to us. It has been something that's been under discussion for 15 years and there's no resolution in sight for how we deal with district municipalities.*

A municipal official who works in a service delivery unit draws attention to the impact of limited resources on the capacity of the municipality to carry out its mandate in the following words *"Our budget is very much limited. I would love to see a lot of things changing. A lot of development. But they were limited with a budget. Keeping out projects due to limitations of budget. … The budget is a stumbling block."* An example of the economic vulnerability of district municipalities and their staff is illustrated by the following that was stated by a municipal manager in an interview:

…we're the agent for the provincial government to do … gravel roads in the district. And we receive a grant of about R110 million per annum then to do that function on behalf of them. But that is not a solid or confirmed agreement because it's an annual sort of renewal of the memorandum of understanding…it could change. So, that might influence the income, but also the staff because we have probably close to a hundred people working in that particular division. But in terms of stability and security for those employees working there….

It is clear that municipal officials and key stakeholders have lagged inadequate economic resources as a critical challenge, most notably around revenue collection and its impact on service delivery. Municipal officials must interact with communities and encourage them to pay their bills because the lack funds impact on a range of activities within the municipality such as staff training and upgrading of facilities.

5.3 Inadequate human resources

The empirical findings also support the findings in the literature that another major capacity constraint is inadequate human resources, which again leads to other capacity constraints, including inadequate leadership, financial administration capacity, inadequate skills, and many others, and ultimately the ability of municipalities to deliver basic services. Municipalities face several challenges regarding human resources. Included here are high vacancy rates, high staff turnover, incompetent staff, and appointments in acting positions. For example, municipal officials in the Fezile Dabi District Municipality indicated that their municipality lacked several staff in key managerial and leadership positions and that most staff in these positions are acting, often only on short-term contracts. An external stakeholder pointed out in an interview that:

if municipalities don't have the [financial] resources they also don't have the resources to attract and retain competent staff. So there is a direct link between the two. So those municipalities that are financially in trouble tend to be the ones that also have very weak capacity and lots of vacancies, significant turnover. Some of the core positions like chief financial officer or even municipal managers are not being filled or being, you know, given acting positions. So, there's also that organisational instability.

The link between inadequate financial resources and the inability of municipalities to deal with staff shortages is clearly illustrated in the following quotation from an interview with a senior district muicipal official:

So, we are providing environmental health services…with 28 staff. And that's based on a ratio of 1 to every 15,000 people in the district. And the norm from the World Health Organisation is 1 to every 10,000. So, we are 24 persons understaffed. And only to appoint those persons, I require an additional R60 million, only for employee costs. The moment I add other overhead costs, it becomes a nightmare; R20 million, plus-minus, per annum, which I don't have.

Another participant from another municipality added in an interview that:

We currently have acting senior managers in all of our departments. It is only me and the municipal manager who are not acting. If you have so many acting managers' then you experience drama

which is orchestrated elsewhere. The current situation is challenging due to an incomplete structure which need to be occupied by qualified officials in relevant departments. So currently we are not doing well because it ends up being a one-man political party show.

An official from a metroplitan municipality stated in a FGD that the biggest constraint the municipality faced was *"the shortage of staff. Shortage of staff, meaning you can't employ people with no money…".*

The municipal official survey administered in the Fezile Dabi District Municipality also showed that the municipality lacked several staff in key managerial and leadership positions, and that most staff in these positions are acting on short-term contracts. As the survey shows, a larger proportion of respondents felt that vacancies impact the most (74,6%) on the performance of the municipality. This is followed by the impact of acting positions (64,4%), dismissals (54,2%) and lastly retirement (39%) (Figure 5).

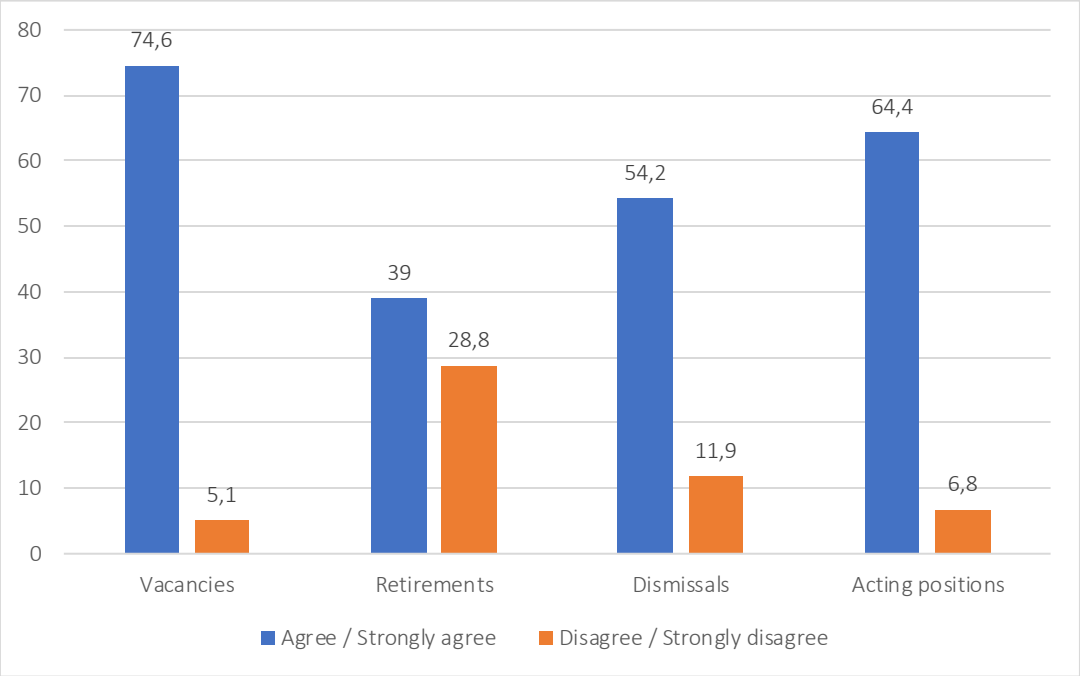

Figure 5: Factors impacting on the performance of Fezile Dabi District Municipality (N=59)

This situation is not ideal for Fezile Dabi's performance and shows a high level of unmitigated risks. A middle level municipal official from this municipality that participated in a focus group discussion indicated that:

There is a challenge with acting positions and replacing leadership positions (…) Currently in our municipality these positions are vacant, and we are the people who are working here. We don't want to apply for that. Because, one, we talked about the issue of them being on contract. It's very risky getting appointed in that position…. Chances are if you get appointed now, you'll serve for a period of three years [linked to the political term of office] and then after that, you are not sure whether you are coming or going (Middle level official, Focus Group).

According to an interviewee working in another municipality: *"The challenges that we have in the offices is capacity and shortages of staff. Some critical positions are problematic because of rotating positions."* Human resource

scarcity has a direct impact on individuals, as indicated by the following two quotations drawn from one participant in the interviews:

> *The challenges that we are faced with are lack of basic human resources. I'm responsible for monitoring and evaluation. The challenge that I have is that I'm the only custodian in that office. I work alone and there is no succession and there is no review mechanisms in place. When I do my work, I do my work alone and complete and done and dusted. And the majority of my work, because it is strategic in nature, happens to be externally and internally audited. But there is no opportunity for my work to be reviewed by another person*.

> *The issue of being loners in our own work is an issue (…) and like I said there's no proper succession planning. (…) If I were to leave the institution tomorrow, it means things will die. I'm responsible for monitoring and evaluation which is the anchor of the institution because all your reports flow into monitoring and evaluation. All your plans flow into monitoring and evaluation, and if you leave, there's nobody to take over.' (…) Because people don't just leave because of greener pastures. People die. People get disabled.*

Another senior municipal official from Fezile Dabi that participated in the senior level focus group said:

> *A challenge is failure to fill critical positions that requires leadership (…). To date, our institution is still in a vacuum in terms of two critical senior managers. The one for local economic development which is where you want to start development from, and secondly, your Chief Financial Officer. You cannot operate without the CFO. For me a CFO is a very critical position that must be filled for the purpose of making decisions and for purposes of leadership (Senior level official, Focus Group)*.

The above findings from the Fezile Dabi District Municipality show that a lack of human resources not only impact on the institutional environment of the municipality but also hamper the municipality performance. Coupled with this is the high staff turnover in some municipalities. The Makana municipality, for instance, was crippled by the regular appointment of new acting municipal managers. Since 2014, six CFOs and ten municipal managers have been appointed in permanent and acting positions (Viedge & Hancocks, 2019).

Municipal officials in the Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality reasoned that the service delivery constraints experienced by the municipality are due to reasons very similar to those that most other local municipalities experience. They include challenges such as financial instability and high rate of staff vacancies, which varied from a low of 35.79% in 2014/15 to a high of 45.25% in 2018/19. Staff numbers have been stagnant over the last 6 years with no significant growth reported despite significant population growth. Vacant positions have consistently played a role in Ba-Phalaborwa's poor audit outcomes and challenges with providing adequate services to residents. The long history of poor audit outcomes at the municipality eventually culminated in investigations into maladministration in 2021.

Rural-based municipalities face a particular challenge attracting staff. As one participant stipulated in an interview that the municipality he works for:

> *…it is affected by people who go to green pastures, which we cannot control. And, as a result, that affects the operation of the department.…. Because of the geographical area (mostly rural) of the*

municipality and the salaries most of the staff resign to [got to] Gauteng for better packages and working conditions.

This was echoed by another interviewee as follows:

In your management positions you do not have those people who are that qualified; one reason being the municipality is a grade 3 municipality. No one wants to work for a grade 3 municipality. You only go there when you are desperately looking for work. … To get qualified and experienced people the municipality must upgrade the municipality grade from 3 to 4. For now, a particular percentage [of the staff] is not qualified.

The consequences, according to an external stakeholder, is that, for *"the smaller municipalities is, because they don't have the capacity and resources to attract and retain people, you often get inexperienced people who do not have a supportive institutional environment in which they can grow and develop."* However, even relatively well-resourced district municipalities in the rural areas face a somewhat similar challenge, as indicated by the following observation made by a senior official in a district municipality in the Western Cape:

…being a district municipality, you know, having offices in Paarl, Worcester, Ceres, Robertson, and we compete with the likes of the City of Cape Town…. They offer…much higher salaries than we have. So, we tend to lose especially our occupational health and safety officers…we have seen, over the years, the turnover in that position. So, ya, basically being a district and having rural as well as being situated here in Stellenbosch and in Paarl, …that is quite a challenge to us.

Human resources capacity is also affected by excessive regulation which draws municipal staff away from other more important tasks. An external stakeholder stipulated in an interview that: "*I guess number one is most likely a very over-regulated environment, which puts a lot of pressure on public officials to basically satisfy kind of procedural requirements and reporting requirements and so on."* Similarly, a public official also noted in an interview that:

Generally, the biggest problem that people who work in municipalities are facing, number one for me, it is efficiency of the system. It is my view that the legislation that are put for municipalities make it the most regulated institution. So those legislations become a bottle neck for officials to deliver services.

A participant in a FGD with officials in a rural district municipality put the problem as follows: *"We all work towards attainment of clean audits and then we compromise service delivery."* In reflecting on the regulatory framework that guides the work of public officials, participants who were interviewed highlighted the following in their reflections:

I don't think anyone can over comply, because compliance culture, or the compliance environment, the regulation environment is such that, you know, [that] it's near impossible to keep up…. So, you can get what they call the clean audit. And you can score well on four aspects of what the audit covers, which are: did you spend the money as you said you would, you follow up process and procedures, all of that. That doesn't mean that you're actually fixing the taps, or building the

toilets, or whatever. So, compliance can become very procedural and the substantive issues, kind of, you know, fall by the wayside.

I think they need to be simplified. It's very complex. There's too much legislation that is controlling how municipalities should do things. Um, there's just so many things, I mean, from your MSAs to your MSMNs. There's just so much, much to a point that it's easy for someone not to do anything because it's like it becomes a legislative issue.... (...) Well, yeah, it's just so much that they're expected to do that actually takes away from doing what they are supposed to do, which is service delivery.

A municipal official in the Western Cape was able to identify exactly where the inadequacies in human resources existed in the district municipality:

In some areas we are very well resourced, and in certain areas we are not that well-resourced...So within our finance departments, we are very well-resourced. In our HR department, very well-resourced. In our administration, very well-resourced. But the minute we move to service delivery departments, there is certain gaps in the system where additional capacity will actually assist with further achievement of results and turnaround times. ... So those will be in the form of our fire services, our water services, our road-service teams, building of roads, repairing of roads, grading of roads, you know, dirt road.

5.4 Inadequately skilled administrative leadership

Another key constraint public officials and external stakeholders flagged was the absence of visionary leadership in municipalities, most notably around ethical and accountable leadership. Such leadership is vital for several reasons, including the impact it has on the management of financial and human resources, the strategic direction of a municipality, the institutional environment and culture, staff morale, relationships with stakeholders, and so much more. However, one participant in the study highlighted the following in an interview:

So, I think there are definitely challenges around leadership, notwithstanding some good examples. But, I think that is a very underdeveloped sense of public leadership, which means, you know, leadership that is accountable, leadership that is ethical, leadership that is engaged and democratic, all those kind of attributes and principles. And then, particularly in the political sphere but even at a higher kind of senior management level, I think, relatively weak capacities to engage in partnership building, collaboration. Coalition politics is obviously the one end of it in the political sphere. But, in the...kind of...administration that will be about, you know, assembling partnerships in the interests of a common goal, particularly the public good. So, being able to leverage private sector, community groups, and so forth.

Public officials that were interviewed observed that many senior officials do not leverage resources through partnership building and collaboration:

...municipalities ... don't look outwards. I mean, if you're a municipality, you've got all organisations in your town. You have all these .... people, all [these] economies.... But municipalities don't look at them like that. ... They have never got out of a municipality as a place.

And so all those resources out there…. You find in my municipality here in the Eastern Cape, there is a university. It is a university town. But the municipal officials in those positions have never been to the university or do nothing in terms of partnerships. That is a resource right there. Right? Where you're sitting in a municipality, you don't even have the profile of your town. Your whole development strategy does not include the university that is 100 meters away from your office. So, resources are there. Whether we find them, I don't think so. Do we use them? I do not think so.

For a senior public official interviewed in the study, there is a need to have leadership that can foster collaboration. "*Municipalities, but specially metros, can't perform without good intergovernmental relations and partnerships with other institutions, not only provincial and national, but local. The lack of effective relationships with parastatals, for instance, has caused delays of decades in major infrastructural projects."* As he went on to explain, in terms of internal collaborations, there is very little happening by way of working together or even cooperation between officials. "*Collaboration is actually punished by the system, with stories of departments punished for transferring resources to other departments".* The internal default is silos, and competitive and non-collaborative approaches. *"It usually needs third party intervention for collaboration. Coordination is different to cooperation, so people hold coordinating meetings, which are called in through power. But people often see it as a waste of time."* There is very little coordination between departments in terms of information and resource sharing, lacking systems that coordinate and direct information relevant to various departments. Weaknesses in leadership affect the capacity of senior managers to develop and sustain partnerships, which seriously affects the performance of municipalities in a highly complex yet under-resourced sphere of government.

As a Municipal Manager that participated in an interview warns, this is a huge gap and challenge for all municipalities, but especially impacting the metros where *"cooperative and partnerships leadership is seriously lacking".* In his experience, this relates to how people see their role and capabilities, and this is negatively affected by the narrow approach that managers often have: 'I am an engineer'. As he further elaborates:

[I]n the majority of cases, managers are not skilled for leadership at all. Even leaders in strategic portfolios often don't see [the] links between departments [that are essential to their ability] to fulfil their own mandates. A housing person does not appreciate the link with land use management, etc. They run departments as silos. Managers of departments often refuse target-setting when they are not directly responsible for collaborating with other departments that are involved by default. They can't see the need for planning together, in partnerships, to actually deliver a proper house. This requires leadership. It's not about having managers of a Human Settlements department performing as builders of houses but leading and managing the processes and partnerships needed.

A municipal manager in a well-resourced district municipality described the leadership practices among departmental heads in his municipality in an interview as follows:

It really comes down to the person themselves. How likely are you to embrace the organisational culture, change management within your own department or section and towards the broader goal of the municipality? So, that I cannot teach you…it needs to be within your inner self, and you need to be able to express that with what you're doing. Within any organisation, and ours, it's always nice to do the positive things…you know. We've achieved our targets and we were able to

resolve this issue and we were able to spend our budget, etc. But the not-so-nice things, such as disciplining subordinates and taking harsh decisions, that has always been escalated. And I'm saying, 'no, you are appointed to deal with the good and the bad. As I am accountable, you are responsible for your department, and you are responsible for the decisions taken there'. So, trying to create this as a manager, as a leader – we sometimes need to take the awkward decisions. So, I've taken a few awkward decisions, which has not been light, and as we push through more controls within our environment, and closing the cash taps, it does pose a lot of questions. And I'm saying, 'no, you do not have an open check book just to do things'. It needs to be controlled and it needs to be for the right things. And when you fail, we move forward. But when you the second time fail; you will be held accountable.

This municipal manager added that:

So, when I started here…so I was telling my colleagues, 'I will not tell you that I have an open-door policy. We will have the open door. But if I'm not here in office, I will not be able to speak to you. But what I will do is when you engage with me, I will listen to you and support your progress'. And I think that created some sort of comfort, that I'm more approachable. I do not take on the bureaucratic means of telling you what you're doing. It's engaging, and it's trying to see what's going to be best, not for yourself but for the organisation.

A participant in a focus group discussion with officials from a large metro saw the failure of the municipality's leadership in its failure to apply *"our policies consistently. … The challenges that we are experiencing at the level of Management is the absence of consistency. Because we would say now: 'Sorry Sir, you cannot do so. But so and so can do it.' Why? if it's not applicable to certain employees, it should be consistently applied. And the Managers [have] … lost their managerial positions because of our inability to apply policies consistently. And I think that's the biggest weakness for this institution."* Another participant in this FGD agreed, adding that: *"We are having a leadership crisis as Mangaung. And I think it starts with at the top. If you don't get it right at the top, unfortunately it will cascade down and then this thing will collapse."* One participant added:

Some of the deficiencies…is that our [managers]…lack soft skills. You know, you cannot be a manager without soft skills. Soft skills. They'll tell you that if my colleague here has done something good, just a pat on the shoulder. It doesn't take money or anything. Then he'll feel acknowledged. Then he now begins to perform more. At least my employer or my boss has recognized that: 'hey, I've done a good [job]…'. But, I think in this institution we are very much lacking in that regard. People are not being acknowledged for the good work that they do. Hence my colleague was talking about the morale that is very low. Whether you perform or you don't perform, the same, you know. There are no incentives. There are no programmes that will encourage employees to perform to the best of their ability. So, it's like people, they just say: 'No, I'll do what is expected of me.'

A public official who participated in the study felt that *"the other challenge is that people are not qualified for the positions they hold, in senior positions. This results to them not matching their work."* In this regard, many scholars have drawn attention to the prevalence of cadre deployment as a factor behind the appointment of incompetent politically-connected people to senior positions in municipalities. In consequence, many public officials in local

government lack the skills to perform the work for whch they are employed. One participant in a focus group in a large metro stated the problem in the following terms:

> *I think generally one would say there is a lot of political interference and manipulation in all of these processes because you would find that people are being shifted from their responsibilities and you bring in people who have no requisite skills in some of those areas. Because there could be … some politicians who would have an intention to tap into the budget.*

A civil society stakeholder who works closely with municipalities stated the following in an interview:

> *I see people being promoted above their capacity. And that may be because of a political appointment. … It may be, you know, because of affirmative action considerations, etc. But, often is that … they've been a Deputy Director in another department. And now they're going for a Director position. So, in a way, on paper, and probably in the interview they show up fairly well. But there's something about when they get into the job, that the ability to say this is me, I've got this job, I have this responsibility, and I can make these decisions, and take this responsibility, that is somehow compromised.*

A participant in focus group discussion in a large metropolitan municipality saw a particular consequence of cadre deployment as follows:

> *….you appoint this person. He's clueless, or she's clueless; … does not have experience in this thing. But because of the political mandate, you put that person there. That person will also fail to manage the people below him or her. The people below him or her will do as they wish because they know that we don't have a manager here.*

A participant in another FGD with officials from the same metro pointed out that the problem was also created by politically-connected individuals working in the municipality who used their connections to get better-paying jobs they are not qualified to do. She stated:

> *I can say at times it is … political interference. I am here. … I am good with this particular job. But because of my personal interest and the people that I actually befriended here in the institution, political, I then applied for something that I am actually not skilled for. For which I actually don't have any qualification to do. … You [are] choosing something with a better package. … Maybe because of a political problem that you have you move your job.*

A municipal manager in the Western Cape pointed out how the municipality dealt with political interference in the appointment of senior officials in the district municipality as follows:

> *But the way that elected officials are appointed – and it's all parties – influences the quality of appointments of your senior managers. And it's a reality. So, in our case, we're very strict that you can appoint a municipal manager. And the politicians also have a consultation with the municipal manager [when] the senior managers are appointed….. But below that, we do not allow any interference. That is my responsibility. You need to set it straight because you will get a nudge or on the side you will get a note or something that, '[X] applied for this position. See what you could do'. … And we don't entertain those. That's the way that you are easily compromised because you*

never know when you are being taped. When you are being recorded. And that comes up. So, we follow a very open process; transparent. The unions are involved in our recruitment process. … They sit on the committees as observers, and they would indicate if they're not in agreement.

A senior official in a rural district municipality that was interviewed for the study noted some of the leadership constraints found in her municipality and the recent changes that might bring improvement:

In terms of leadership in the municipalities, it's little bit problematic because we find that most of the leadership, the day they come, they are not a fully skilled in terms of coming and performing their job. And it's affecting the whole municipality. But recently now I'm seeing things changing because we've got an AG that monitors all the appointments of senior managers in terms of aligning with the advert with skills of applicants. We are improving, and the overall performance of the municipality is improving as a result. We've been receiving audit disclaimers, I think, for almost seven to six years previously. And from two years back … we've been getting a qualified opinion, which I believe for now as municipality we are doing very well, though there are some challenges. … And I would say their performance in terms of the senior managers and the people that we hire is improving.

Key themes associated with inadequately skilled administrative leadership flagged by interviewees were deficits in visionary leadership, most notably around questions of collaboration, accountability, and engaged leaders (Figure 6).

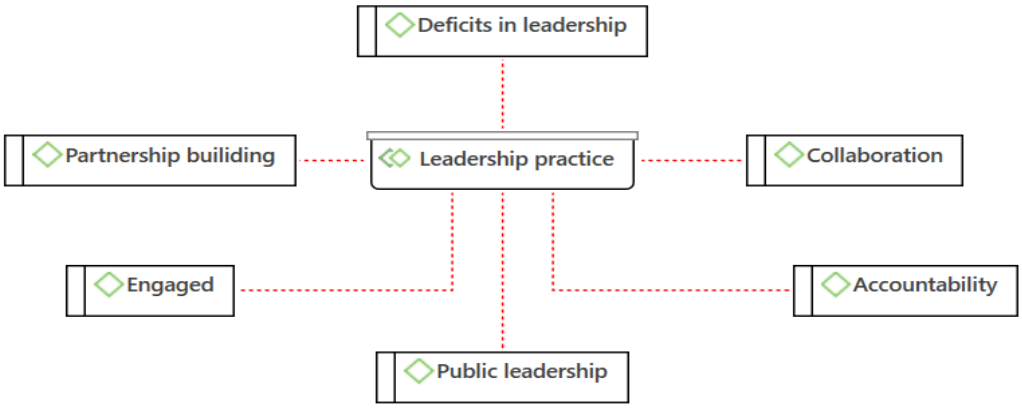

Figure 6: Inadequately skilled administrative leadership

5.5 Inadequately skilled political leadership

Inadequately skilled councilors have led to a lack of oversight by municipal councils; and this has an adverse effect on service delivery. The role of political representatives is to ensure policy alignment and oversight over the municipal administration. There is a need for visionary leadership from the politicians, but this should not interfere with the work of the municipal officials. Participants in the study indicated that there is a tendency among the elected political party representatives to act as though municipal officials work for them and should account to them without due processes. This negatively impacts on the relationship between municipal officials and political representatives.

The issue of councilors' capacity and skills was highlighted by one interviewee from a civil society organisation as problematic:

> *Both officials and local politicians are given planning and monitoring responsibilities, without the support and capacity to do that. For instance, councilors are expected to provide budget input, but they are poorly capacitated to do so. Usually, they only receive a week's training on [the] complex functioning of a municipality. There is too much responsibility and expectation, but with little capacity, setting them up for failure.*

Municipal officials interviewed in the study felt that elected officials have a misunderstanding of their role in the municipalities. In addition to the lack of understanding among councilors of their specific roles, they are often unaware of what they are prohibited from doing or what they are not supposed to do. For instance, an external stakeholder described in his interview an incident in which a municipal councilor wanted to sit on the board of one of the municipality's development boards. The councilor was not aware that the law prohibited this: "*A public service representative cannot sit on the board.*" Perhaps a more serious challenge that arises from the lack of understanding of roles is the blurring of lines between the roles and responsibilities of political representatives and senior administrators. This leads to political interference in administrative tasks.

Added to this is the councilors' lack of understanding of how local government administrations work, and, in some instances, lack of interest in gaining understanding. A participant in a FGD with officials from a district municipality added that:

> *The problem is politicians are not taken through what we normally do as administrators. Where we look into what we want to achieve. How long it will take us. What it needs to take us [to do what we want to achieve]. With them it's more about themselves. After every five years, they must make sure that they have achieved what they want to achieve. Not for the betterment of the communities they serve.*

This often leads to situations where councilors make promises on the delivery of services to communities without a proper understanding of the constraints municipalities face in delivering these services. Another participant in this FGD drew attention to the challenge municipal administrators face with the periodic turnover of elected representatives every five years. *"Now comes a new person. You must teach this person how you do things. By the time he understands and masters it, he must go."*

An interviewee saw one reason for municipal councilors failing to perform effective oversight occurring in situations where *"the municipal manager is politically senior to the councillors [in the political party they belong to] who are … in the municipality to provide oversight."* What is key, however, is to engage how an inadequately skilled political leadership has a direct impact on the institutional culture and the abiity of councilors and senior officials (leadership) to perform their functions.

5.6 Inadequate financial management capacity

Several incidences described in the case study reports point to one of the major capacity constraints of local government in South Africa, i.e., the capacity for sound financial management. This is illustrated by the allegation in a forensic report that top officials in the Makana municipality were involved in financial maladministration and corruption. In addition, the Makana CFO had to contend with:

> overspend on operating expenses of R73.3m for 2018 (or 16.9% — above the National Treasury's deep-water line of 15%, indicating poor and impaired operating controls). […]. He is also clamping down on overtime and incorrect budgeting around the capital budget, which resulted in unacceptably low spend on basic services and large infrastructure projects, such as roads and water infrastructure (Viedge & Hancocks, 2019).

An interviewee who works in the service sector made the following observation about financial maladministration in the municipality she works in:

> *There is a … state project. But 17-20% are for professional fees and can be R3 million for a specific project. I think that we must eliminate this thing of having consultants. We have engineers here full time, a design and drafting engineer who are employed full time. If we have 5 projects where we pay R3 million each for professional fees [and instead use the municipal engineers], then we can save a lot if they do the work.*

5.7 Service delivery skills constraints

The literature review has revealed that there is concern about the lack of skills among a sigificant proportion of officials in the public service. With large numbers of officials at municipalities lacking the required qualifications or technical competencies there are several consequences, including inadequately skilled leadership, inadequate financial management, inadequate consequence management, inadequate community engagement, inadequate skills development, and so on, and therefore negative consequences for the capacity of municipalities to deliver services. The senior HR officer at a rural district municipality drew attention to a significant skills constraint municipalities face in the country:

> *And the major problem that our colleagues are facing is a lack of adequate able skills to perform their duties. As well as a lack of better knowledge on how to perform their duties and the end it's*

affecting the service delivery of Phalaborwa. As you know that the municipality is about service delivery, and at the end it is leading to poor service delivery.

A district municipal official identified a skills deficit in the district municipality in the Western Cape as being particularly high in the service delivery sectors of the municipality, i.e., fire services, water services and road-service teams. He added that:

It does take some time to train those persons in their particular field. So, we bring them in as EPWP [expanded public works programme], or [inaudible] workers. And we then go with them on the job training and give them guidance and assistance on that. And the challenge is, many of those are short-term jobs. So, it's not long-term. It's not permanent. Its short-term. It's for a year period. And sometimes, through our interventions, some of them get other opportunities, where they move on to the private sector…Which is great. But it then leaves a gap with us to start again.

However, this municipal manager did add: *"I will say 90% [of our staff] … are equipped and well-skilled. Those odd cases is when a person is temporarily employed or is an EPWP person or is an intern graduate.… But generally, safe space; 90%."*

One of the key skills that most municipalities lack is in ICT. A municipal manager noted that:

So, what we have with the municipality is a lack of ICT skills. So, your developer and your infrastructure specialist is working in the private sector. So, we cannot afford them – they come at a huge cost. But, municipalities are then asked to provide all of these smart services and newest technology to get the services to the people and communication. But there's a gap there. And I want to further strengthen what I'm mentioning to you. We are now being asked … to move to the fourth industrial revolution – it requires ICT and all of the bells and whistles that goes along with it. But in terms of our third industrial revolution, we …. haven't transitioned in terms of proper infrastructure for ICT to work. So, we automated in the third industrial revolution, which was great in terms of our process lines, process plans, etc. But you now move on to the 4th IR, with artificial intelligence. Yet our rural communities don't have connectivity infrastructure. That will create a gap in us moving forward. So, for ICT to be seen not only as, 'is your computer on and working?', [but] what is the user experience? How can we do it differently? What type of programmes can we roll out? … When you talk 4th IR, lets support implementation through infrastructure roll out. … The other area also is to have more focus on re-skilling and re-training municipal officials to become programme developers. Let me give you a bit of context. Only the person working in fire services at the municipality can best write a programme that will deal with all eventualities.

A senior official in another district municipality in the Western Cape added that:

…the most challenging one is in the engineering field…We're battling to find people and also to ensure compliance in terms of your under-represented designated group, which is your blacks, [inaudible], Indians, and then your women. You know, we always in this field we advertise nationally. With the last round when we made an offer to an African male, he went back to his company, and they countered our offer. Then, in the local government, … if a position is in T16,

you can only negotiate in that T16 salary band, you know. So, we're really struggling in terms of the engineering space.

Another official in this municipality identified another skilled position that was difficult to fill:

…maybe also what you could call a scarce skill or where we always struggle is also when it comes to health and safety officers. Also, because of the good salaries in the private sector, it's not as [big] a struggle as with the engineers, but it is also a very big challenge when it comes to health and safety officers.

A participant in a FGD with officials from a metropolitan municipality described the skills constraints in her municipality as follows:

…certain people … get into the municipality to perform certain jobs that are maybe a bit away from what they are actually qualified for. … Now you find that … we end up having [a] lack of skills … on that level which now needs attention. Now we need to go outside and get consultants to do that the jobs for us, which is costly to the municipality. … So, it's a bit of a problem because there are a lot of our so-called technical people, engineers or engineering people, [who] are stuck doing administrative jobs. … And you see that … our leadership should see these things and say: 'No, we should be able to channel skills or use the people that we have who have certain skills to do the right jobs instead of them pushing administrative jobs for the rest of their lives'.

Another participant in this FGD agreed, adding that: *"I think we've got about two or three Chartered Accountants. … come the end of the financial year, the compilation of the Annual Financial Statements, that simple job is outsourced to an outside company. … We hired a qualified Chartered Accountant, a person who should be knowing how to compile the Financial Statements. You've got this Chief Financial Officer on top of them. But the job gets done by outside people."* According to this participant, "*we've got fairly qualified people in terms of …, the qualifications to do the job. But whether we use our qualifications to optimal or to the better use, that one I'm not sure."* In consequence, according to another participant in this focus group, *"our colleagues are not gaining the requisite experience on the kind of the training that they have".* One participant in another FGD with officials from this metro agreed, stating that "*they lack skills development. … Like I am doing what is irrelevant to what I have studied"*. Many participants in this FGD held the view expressed by one of them that *"you are hired for the job with the proper qualifications that were advertised. But then, once you're inside it's a different story."*

A participant in a FGD with officials in a rural district municipality drew attention to a challenge that most municipalities face, and that is attracting people with the appropriate skills for certain categories of work because salary scales are prescribed. According to this participant, the *"maximum that they can pay is not attractive. Someone without work will apply for that. But a year or two into the position and you realise that, at the level that you are at, your junior actually earns more than you because of the regulations."*

5.8 Inadequate institutional environment

The findings demonstrate the politicised nature of the institutional environment, which is often shaped by the dynamics of the political-administrative interface, and its impact on the ability of municipalities to deliver services. Participants in the interviews noted the following institutional environment in municipalities:

> *Firstly, let me indicate that the municipalities are operating in a political environment. Especially during this period of transition, whereby politicians and public officials see each other regularly, and therefore may influence each other daily. So, one of the major challenges is that our environment is very much politicised in municipalities.*

> *Our culture, I think, is very much impacting on the performance of the municipality. I think it goes back to a politicised environment whereby everyone feels as if he is deployed whether he's performing or not performing. You'll find a senior being unable to call him [a junior staff member] to order because he will report him to the political [party] leader to say he's intimidating or torturing them. … So, yeah, there's strong political influence.*

Such a politicised institutional environment affected lines of authority, according to a participant in a FGD conducted with officials from a metro. He described the situation as follows: *"I mean, you end up getting instructions from your subordinates because they are affiliated to a certain party. Maybe if you do that then they go and report you. Like now, as I speak, I just received an instruction from an employee that I need to be somewhere. Do you see what I'm saying?"* An official from another municipality agreed, describing the impact of a politicised institutional environment as follows:

> *When I look at it is not a very good culture. Most of the people here come from ANC branches. They bring what they do in the branches to work. As the chairperson of the branch, a manager cannot tell me anything because he would get me at the branch meeting. We have polluted the municipality by politics. Now people are no longer implementing policies. So, they safeguard they jobs. Politics makes everyone do what they want to do. So, the culture is not good. People do not come early to work, and the tasks are done in a very slow pace.*

An interviewee described the situation in his department at the municipality as follows:

> *We have a lot of deficiencies when it comes to ethical standards. They are either not there or are made not to be there. Because people will be driven to conspiracy theories which are not functional or tested in the organisation. … It is affected by this rotational system. And what makes it worse is contractual senior managers who know that they will be gone after 3 or 5 years; and what next? So, it becomes easy for good values with ethics not to be followed…. If permanently employed they will know that if they commit fraud, then they will be fired and not easily get employment. But they move between municipalities, and nothing is done. This culture is not stable, and is governed by who comes in and who goes out.*

A participant in an FGD with officials from large metro stated that:

I think with me it's about the culture. The culture of ill-discipline, the culture of letting things that are wrong to go through. If that culture can change, people can be held accountable. Discipline can be instilled at all levels. It's my view that this municipality may change to the better.

According to another participant in this focus group *"the way things are at the present moment … the staff morale is at its lowest as a result of the challenges that we have as the city"*. To this effect, public officials note several dynamics that shape the institutional environment which impact on their capacity and skills to fulfil their mandates and duties (Figure 8).

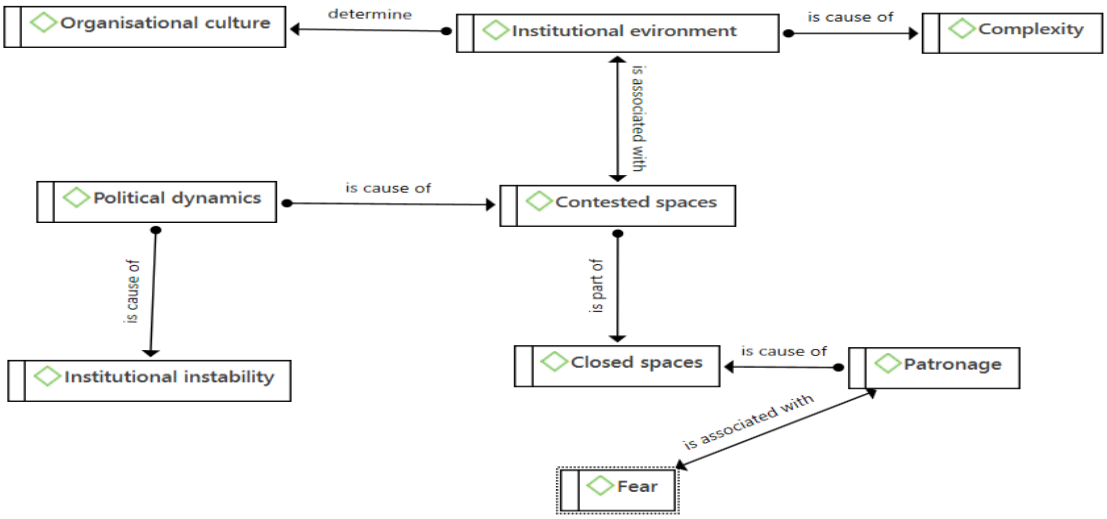

Figure 7: Thematic Network Analysis: Inadequate institutional environment and organsational culture

Inadequate consequence management

The Auditor-General notes that most municipalities in the country have suffered a decline in adequate consequence management for poor performance and transgressions (Auditor General, 2018). As indicated in the findings, these are a consequence of an inadequate institutional environment and culture, and inadequately skilled leadership, and lead to low morale, high staff turnover and low-quality service, among other things, and, consequently, the ability of municipalities to deliver services.

One participant in a focus group with officials in a large metro blamed a lot of the problems the municipality faced on *"the lack of consequence management because we don't have consequence management. And when people have taken wrong decisions, nobody is taken to task. … Nobody is going to ask us to account for our failures and our inefficiencies."* A participant in a focus group discussion with officials from a rural district municipality characterised the absence of consequence management in the municipality as follows: *"You just work to finish the job, not for the intended purpose. So, you find out at the end because you know that the fact that because I'm not going to account. I just do whatever I had to do without any repercussions that will come through later on."*

However, a senior official at a district municipality in the Western Cape felt that:

The only … ongoing challenge that we're still struggling with is the smooth alignment between your organisational objectives down to your individual performance. So, that's the reason we embarked on a phasing in approach. When I started out here, we had individual performance assessments. But then it became a compliance exercise, you know. People just wanted to get it off from their desk and did not necessarily do it with the full commitment or the full process that is expected…. So, this time around, we went through a phasing in approach. You know, we first started with the first line that you report directly to the head of the departments. Secondly, we phased in up to T13. And then the next two years from T12 to T6. And thereafter from T6 to the lower levels. … Like I said, we're in the phasing in approach of performance management. So, we do not have any rewards yet linked to it. We first want to go through the whole phasing in process, and then maybe later on assess whether we can couple any rewards to that.

5.9 Inadequate infrastructure and work tools

The literature review indicates that one of the constraints municipalities face in South Africa is the lack of adequate and suitable technological resources (Soko, 2006; Development Network Africa, 2006). The findings in this study provide a direct link between inadequate infrastructure and work tools and the ability to deliver services. They also illustrate the benefits of the use of technology by municipalities. For instance, a district municipal manager in a well-resourced municipality stated the following about the infrastructure which indicates the requirements in this regard:

One of the areas that we're currently dealing with is in terms of our ICT environment. So, when I started to work here, we were working on ADSL lines and that was 4mb line. We are currently … running at 96mb. So, there's a vast improvement in terms of the connectivity and the ability to go onto the network. What we've also done is, where we in the past had fragmented infrastructure, we've consolidated that now to a centralised point. Every office or every town operated as an island, but that island was not integrated into the bigger scheme, so that has been sorted out now. And obviously It comes with fear and resistance [reference to an earlier comment about challenges to change and progress at an interpersonal level].... We've also now, in terms of wanting to automate our things, we've moved away from…hand-written registers for if you are at work. So, we've deployed electronic devices that you can clock now [clock in] on site, irrespective if you're in the office or on the road… And we've started with many other models, obviously taking the lead from the MSCOA [municipal standard chart of accounts] regulations around financial appraisal.

A senior official in an impoverished rural district municipality felt that her municipality had been able to provide its employees with all the work tools they required:

I think as a municipality, in terms of the resources that you provide us, are really adequate and good because when we appoint a person, we do a feasibility study in terms of giving the person a laptop to work on and be connected to the printer as well providing access to a telephone. Which are the things that for me it's enough resources. They provide us all [with] an office. … Those who are in the field workers, for an example, our traffic, they've got all the resources. They've got cars.

They've got their uniforms. I think we are good in terms of providing resources in the municipality. … All their tools being provided for.

However, these rather positive development in one municipality is not echoed in the findings in the qualitative research with officials and stakeholders linked to other municipalities. For instance, all participants in a focus group with officials of a large metro were unanimous in their view that their municipality lacked critical infrastructure and work tools. One participant stated:

> *We don't have machinery. … Yes, there are computers. People have computers. They have laptops and so on. But when you go to the hard core of our service delivery, you'll find that we don't have the trucks. We don't have the yellow fleet to …do the work that we're supposed to be doing.*

Another participant in this focus group agreed, adding that *"we are having massive problems with … the connectivity. …Can't even help the community who comes in. … We just tell them to come back here. Or take down [their] details. And we'll end up having a list of hundreds."* To this, another participant added that *"in our engineering department we have problems in terms of equipment that will be necessary for us to do the job efficiently. … I don't know why, but maybe because of the budget constraints."*

A municipal official from the same municipality who participated in another focus group and was head of the Waste Management unit opined that: "*It's very difficult. For instance, I've spent three years without a vehicle to assist my trucks to go around. … My guys have four trucks, and in essence they need to have 15 trucks. … And I have 57 employees. I need to have at least 106. Then I struggled to have internet for them to … do [their] work."* This was corroborated by another participant in the FGD, who stated that: *"The equipment, most of the machinery is broken. We cannot repair that because of what? Because of finances. So, in total the municipality is in trouble, and it is a problem because of that. So, most of the services are not carried out. So, we are lacking on service delivery."* According to participants in this FGD, the municipality was unable to provide water and sanitation services, in particular, to the communities it served because of the lack of equipment and vehicles.

A participant in a second FGD with officials from the same metro stated that:

> *My job actually is to go and engage the public and raise awareness on issues. … I spent I think the last four months without a PC. I could not send emails. I had to go to a colleague to send and receive emails. Secondly, there is no internet. Thirdly I need to contact the public, make arrangements, or whatever and whatsoever. I've submitted, I don't know how many motivations for that. Still to today I don't have a phone. So, with regards to the institutions supporting us with all the necessary tools that we need to carry out our job and business, they are actually not. Yes, they are trying. But I believe they are not. It took us roughly a year … just to get a camera. I need to take evidence as I do my job. … We had to use one camera, and there were like six of us. If we had an appointment at the same time, it was a disaster. We had to use cellphones to actually take pictures.*

5.10 Inadequate community engagement

The study has revealed the inadequacy of community engagement at the local government level, despite the Constitutional requirement that processes must be put in place to ensure that citizens are active role players in determining which services are to be delivered and how. However, there are several examples in the qualitative findings of municipalities reporting that they are effectively engaging with the communities through relevant structures such as ward committee meetings and Interated Development Planning processes (Figure 8).

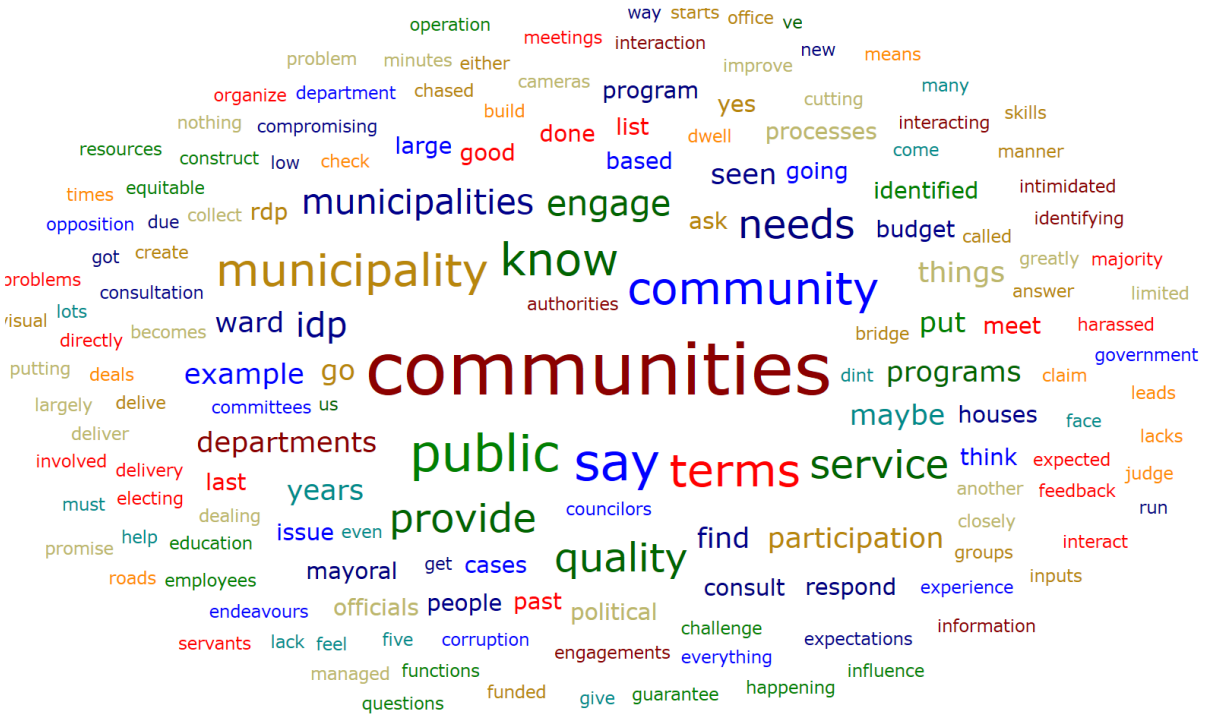

Figure 8: Word cloud: Common words on community engagement

Source: Constructed by the HSRC research team, 2022

One official from a municipality who was interviewed found that:

> *There's quite a lot of mayoral programmes that engage with communities. … I will say, they do engage with communities. I'm not sure if whatever they collect from communities they then take it to put it in the IDP, and then it becomes an influence [in a] SDBIP [Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan]. And then we check the feedback as to last one which we managed to do 90% of performance of what communities requested. … I've seen it. … So … maybe I'll say there is a very good interaction with communities at large.*

There are also examples of where the municipalities report that they are engaging with the communities through the relevant structures such as ward committee meetings. However, several interviewees and participants in focus group discussions claimed that the municipalities are merely putting up a show and that the meetings are of no

significance because nothing substantially is emerging from these community engagements. The following sentiments were expressed by one of the participants:

> *Many municipalities would claim that they are doing what is expected of them. They say they are convening ward committees; they are convening the public hearings on the IDPs and the budgets; they are putting their annual report out on the website. Okay, so they will kind of say we go through the motions…. So, the reality is that in most instances those are not particularly meaningful. It's informing communities of certain decisions and outcomes rather than really giving them an opportunity to engage, to influence, to ask critical questions and so on. So, yeah, so I think you know community engagement is not particularly high in terms of being really meaningful, which was what, you know, the legislation intended at the time.*

This view was corroborated by a senior municipal in a large metro in an interview as follows:

> *…from where I'm sitting, we're doing malicious compliance. We [are] doing it. But we are not doing it to actually make sure that we engage our communities meaningfully. … You would find that some of these participations happens during working hours, and you've got working people not even there. Obviously, what you do, you would engage with people mostly who are in an unfortunate position because they're unemployed. So, from where I'm sitting, we doing it for the sake of doing it. … And we never give feedback until we come back the next time we want to consult with them. … even with the recent public participation processes, people were telling us that you guys are here to take photos and you are gone. You'll be back next year and then you come and take photos with us. … I even spoke to some of my colleagues to say we are taking our people for a ride because we are not telling them the truth – that we are unable to … build a road or do any of the things we said we going to do because there's no money.*

A municipal manager drew attention to the difference between what many municipal officials do, as described above, and what is really required in community engagements:

> *…and it's a question of, are you going to do something differently and be asked lots of questions as to why you've done it? Or are you going to stick to the legislative prescripts and just stick to that. And the easiest option for government officials is, legislation is asking me to do this. I've got a notice of intent to do a public meeting. This is the value. I've communicated it, and the time – there was only so much people. So, I've done my part. Whereas, in terms of our discussion, it's how do we bring the complaints and suggestions that we do get during the year as part of our public participation systems. So, the input being provided on pruning of trees throughout the area – let's make that as an input for the organisation to consider when we do our planning. And that is sort of a shift in methodology. But I do think, from a local municipality perspective – those working on the ground – it's going to be quite time-consuming and sometimes time doesn't allow us to do all these interventions*.

Another top senior municipal official at Fezile Dabi therefore highlighted the importance of capacitating those officials in charge of community engagement with requisite skills.

So, you should be able to articulate and have good communication skills for you to be able to put the message across to draw the people. But most importantly, I think, as a community or a public participation person you must be somebody who is compassionate, who is passionate about people, and seeing people. So, I think basically, those are the skills. And then you must have good writing skills, because you must be able to communicate the needs that you collected from the community into a report that can be processed by our politicians and by managers (...) be in a position to write a proper report, state all the effects and, and give a clear picture of what is needed in our communities.

A municipal manager in a relatively well-resourced district municipality notes another challenge in the municipality's engagements with the community:

So, we've got a team, two departments dealing with public … participation based on a formal IDP budgetary process as well as our community services [unit] on engaging with broader citizens. The information provided in the feedback following the meeting is also being provided. But I've told the colleagues that we now need to change the strategies and the methodologies, in that if it's a public meeting the person who shouts out the loudest will be heard and there will be action for their demand. What we need to do is control the environment and make sure that everyone has equal opportunity to submit their things. … So, I think that is something that we need to work more on. The second thing is, the public participation process is prescriptive in terms of gathering and getting people to submit their information and their input, there is now a drive to get more of a block system. So, within a ward, there's a block of households and they know best what's happening in their street. And it's to gather round them so that they can give us some guidance. And that's still a bit of work in progress. It's going to require some rethinking and responding to it, but I think that will give us…better results from a particular block or street or a complex.

The municipal manager in another district municipality stated that:

I think the community participation model is still not there or successfully being engaging with the communities, because of the expectations and perceptions of communities, rightly or wrongly. Let me just say that. But when we go do community participation, community meetings…we do what we would call focus groups; when you target particular industries, particular sectors. And then we also do [have] … meetings with influencers, if I may call it that. Which is a select group … to get their insight. … But I think the smaller focus group is a much better sort of way of getting qualitative input, rather than the quantity.

However, a senior official in a rural district municipality in a northern province described the community engagements of her municipality as follows:

We have this programme called [the] public participation, and we've got the department as well that deals with that in the municipality. We have programmes in terms of going to all the surrounding communities and doing public participation in each and [on] everything that is happening in the municipality. For an example, when we do the IDP, we consult with our communities. We go through our traditional authorities and engage with the communities in terms of the needs that they have. And then we write it down. We come to that municipality, we

engage with departments that are involved, and we put them into their IDP. We put them in terms of the budget of what we can provide. … And each and every year we go to the to the communities, we educate them about the services that we offer in the municipality; the things that we are going to do for them as the municipalities, approved in the IDP. And we use the radio to engage people. We also engage with people through our Facebooks and through our stakeholders' engagements. We do have those kinds of platforms. … We have 19 wards in our municipality, and the public participation … must be done in each ward each and every year. We conduct the public participation through the public participation managers office. … When we prepare for the budget and when the budget is approved, we communicate with our communities.

A participant in a FGD with officials from a rural district municipality felt that the municipality was performing well with community engagement, but conducted engagements with the same people all the time. She put it as follows: *"I'm part of every community engagement, whether it's outreach programme, whether it's consultation with regard to budget and to the IDP. From where I'm sitting, I'll say we're not doing very bad. We're doing very, very good. But, …. throughout the years, whenever you go for IDP, it's the same audience. Whether it's the budget, it's the same audience. So, we need to develop ways to how then we reach other people that we are not able to reach in terms of your public consultation."*

Community engagement exercises are thus often undertaken to comply with regulations and procedures, and as such, become more of a procedural engagement to meet the regulatory requirements than an actual exercise to involve communities in municipal matters (Figure 9).

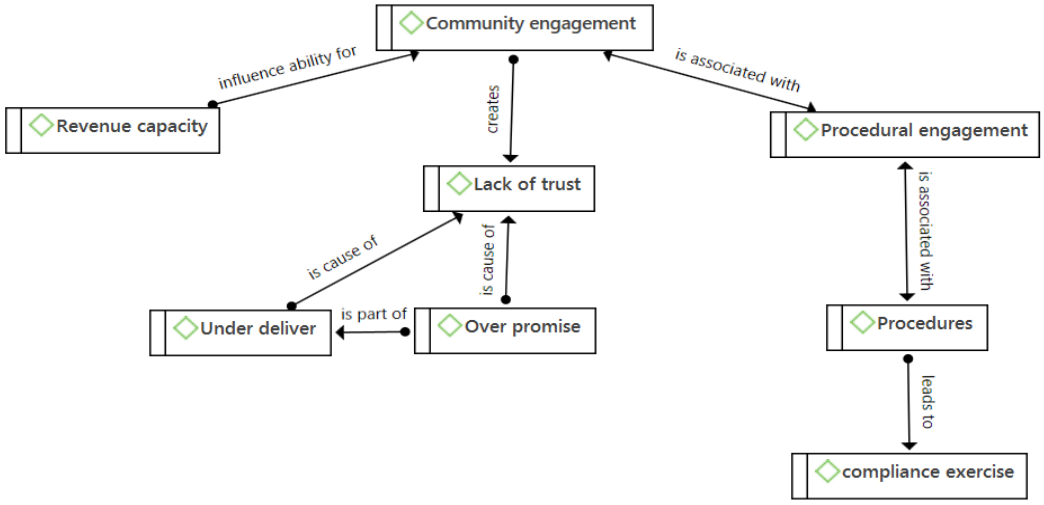

Figure 9: Thematic Network Analysis: Inadequate community engagement, openness and transparency

5.11 Inadequate skills development

Capacity and skills constraints are undermined by the weak implementation of skills plans and capacity building interventions. The shared perception is that capacity development is not well implemented or prioritised. "*It is very focus[ed] on ticking boxes to go up the ladder, for the sake of going up in ranks, for personal achievement and*

benefits, rather than to have more public impact, a value-driven approach." The following quote from a participant expresses well the sentiment of the dire state of skills development at the local governemnt level:

> *We do have qualified personnel. The only thing that we don't do is take them onboard and teach them exactly what they are supposed to do. We only teach them … to comply with what we are interested in. But we don't want to uplift them. …. The challenge is that if you are led by an employee who is less qualified, and you are highly qualified, then you become a problem to that official. … They end up concentrating on you as a threat. That is why some people come up with policies that demotivate people from studying continuously, such as that you can only study until a degree level. It informs you that someone doesn't want others to move beyond a degree level. Yet those are the benefits of employees. A happy employee will provide a happy service. We do have qualified ones, but they are not given enough chance to move up. To learn more for the betterment of the institution.*

A participant in a FGD with officials from a metro averred, describing her own experience as follows:

> *You want to take leave because you are writing exams. And you're told that you can't take leave. You're writing exams and trying to improve yourself and you have to force that I … am going to write, or I have to attend this block week because they will disqualify me if I don't. I mean, what kind of an organisation am I in if I want to develop myself, and obviously for the benefit of the institution? Because the knowledge I am gathering there, I am going to apply here. But it is a struggle. Someone doesn't make it conducive for me to want to better myself.*

The municipal official survey (N=59; response rate of 33.5%) conducted in Fezile Dabi District Municipality in the Free State indicate that a large proportion of the respondents believe that the municipality is effective or very effective in dealing with the human resource development strategy (56%) (Figure 10). Similarly, a large proportion also believe that the municipality is very effective or effective in terms of its employee management performance (54,3%). In contrast, the survey respondents felt that the municipality is ineffective or very ineffective in dealing with the bursary schemes for staff (39%). Some of the survey respondents also indicated that the municipality is ineffective or very ineffective in dealing with staff coaching (30,5%) as well as using staff development facilitators (30,5%).

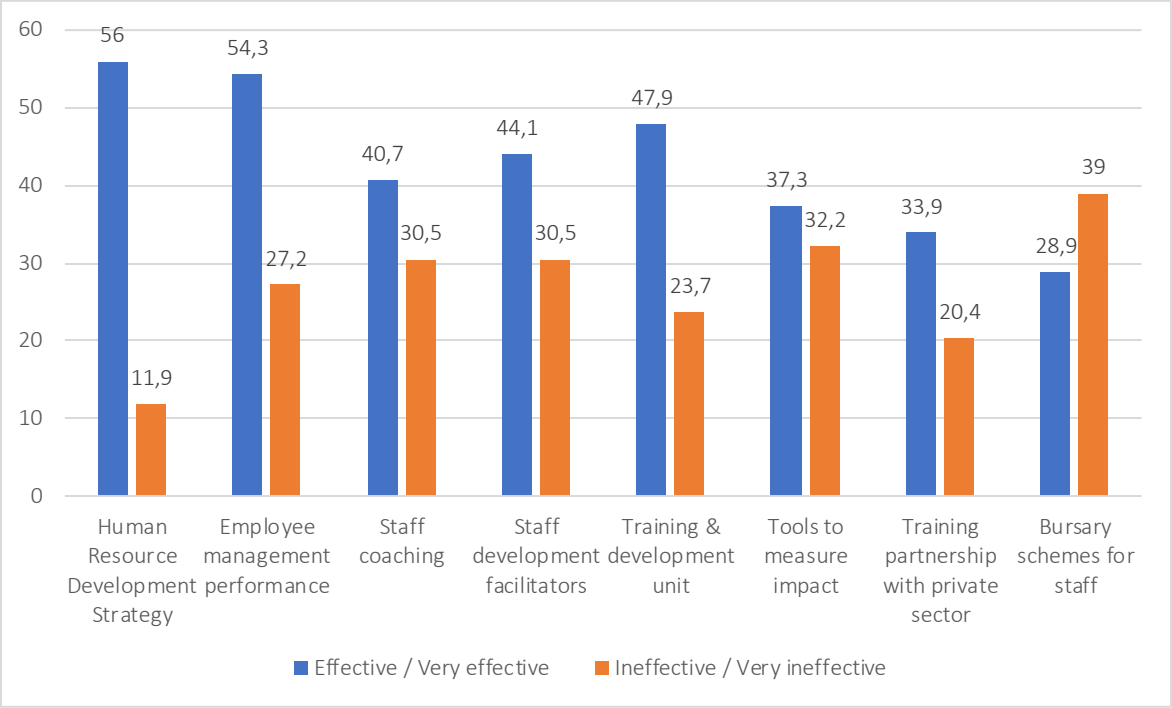

Figure 10: Effectiveness of human resources strategy in Fezile Dabi District Municipality (N=59)

However, participants in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality indicated that budget constraints seem to be one of the major challenges for their Human Resources Department (HRD). As a municipal official of the HRD indicated in an interview, even if there are some external contributions for skill development in municipalities, *"the bulk of the money for training should come from the municipality because it is its legal duty to develop and train its employees"*. However, the management looks more at the budget and not on the benefit for having the personnel trained. A junior public official who was interviewed felt that:

> *They (Management) will tend to look at the cost implication related to your travelling, your accommodation and everything instead of the skills development that you're going to acquire there. I think that is also a huge problem when it comes to skills development. People tend to look at the budget instead of developing the need (FGD with junior-level officials MMM, Bloemfontein, 20.11.2019).*

A senior skills development official in a district municipality in the Western Cape pointed out in an interview, however, that:

> *in terms of one our organisational values, the commitment to the development of our people … we do have an approved employee study-aid policy through which employees can apply. Until this point in time, we only assist until first term degree. We are in the process of amending it to also make provision for post-graduate studies. They apply annually. What we're going to embark on soon is the skills gap analysis. … And through that, we're planning to establish where there are still gaps and how we can assist…to address those gaps where they are still lacking. … Hence, we have that study policy to assist employees to raise their shortcomings that they might have.*

A municipal employee in a service unit in a local municipality did not see any challenges with the skills development programme in his municipality. He stated in an interview: *"With our union the vision and mission is to see that workers lives improve. So, in terms of training, training is critical."*

A senior HR official at a rural district who was interviewed was very positive about skills development in her municipality:

> *We have skills development [units] in the municipalities who [are] specifically dealing with the empowerment of the employees in terms of bursaries they give them. They can choose any university in South Africa that is registered that they can … enroll [at] and empower themselves. … And it is available to everyone who is willing to … learn. And what I like most in terms of those bursaries … [is that] they are right according to the specific work that you are doing. For an example, I'm at HR and … I can't take a bursary to go and do civil engineering. I believe it's giving me an empowerment in terms of performing my job very well, and [I am] able to become a better person in terms of my duties. So, in terms of the development of the employees in general, it's in place and it's working because there are people that are really showing some interest in terms of applying for those bursaries, getting those bursaries, [and] getting their degrees. Some even go further and get their honours.*

However, participants in a focus group with officials in a large metro were unanimous in their view that the municipality had not engaged in effectively developing and implementing skills development plans. According to one participant:

> *We have our HRD which would draw up the Skills Development Plan. But those trainings are not taking place because I don't know the last time we had those in-house, or people attended some of those. … I would simply say it's non-existence. According to me so there's not much effort that has been put to really make sure that we enhance and continue to develop our internal staff to their capabilities; that if there are gaps that have been identified, how do we then make sure that we close those gaps?*

Another participant in this FGD agreed: *"And perhaps maybe to add. If there's any programmes in terms of development of staff, it's either it's been poorly managed or coordinated. I remember at one stage there used to be a request that was issued by our HRD that we should forward the list of our training needs. But that process, it would end there. You'd provide the needs, but nothing would happen."* According to this participant, *"we used to receive skills development levies. So, there would be some money that has been allocated for the development of staff. But you ask yourself, that money, where has it been used?"* The impression of the participants in another FGD with more junior staff members of the metro was that skills development was only for senior staff in their municipality.

The manager of the HR department in a rural district municipality pointed out in a focus group with officials from the municipality that the problem was the lack of funds in the case of the municipality he worked in. He says that *"our employees are not properly developed"* and that *"we don't have funds"*. Another participant in this FGD added that the lack of funds gave rise to *"a struggle. It is a struggle that you cannot take people to training. Then somebody has been here for five or to ten years and has not been trained."*

5.12 Conclusion

None of the municipalities included in this study could claim to have no capacity or skills constraints. The significance of a particular constraint differs from municipality to municipality, and in a particular municipality from official to official. All face the constraints imposed by inadequate financial resources, while several have a multiplicity of constraints. The findings also illustrate the interconnections between one or more constraints and others, with some, like inadequate financial resources, having significant impact on virtually all capacity and skill levels. Taken together, the findings suggest that identifying and providing solutions to the capacity and skills constraints are key to enhancing the ability of local government structures in the country to fulfil their mandate.

Section 6: Discussion and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

Municipalities form an important integral part of government because they are the closest to the people. However, it is also a complex structure which requires not only skills and capacity but also the involvement and cooperation of community members, the interplay of the national and provincial spheres of government as well as other local government stakeholders such as community and civil society organisations to successfully achieve its developmental mandate. In other words, municipal officials must strive to maintain functional intergovernmental arrangements, be proactive in terms of community engagement and establish productive public and private partnerships. Unfortunately, the findings from our assessment across all eight municipalities studied show that municipalities are not well-coordinated and that they mostly operate in silo's. A mid-level municipal official in a focus group for example said:

> *"Municipality A will have their own system although the government's framework is the same you know? We are all operating in terms of the Municipal Structures Act of 1998. We all operate in terms of your Municipal Systems Act of 2000. We're all expected to make use of the Municipal Finance Management Act of 2003 and other related regulations and so on. But however, in terms of application, we all develop our own generic systems. I mean our own individual systems. That's the other challenge which I think as local government practitioners we get confronted with. But however, when you get audited, the auditors are auditing us from a generic point of view".*

Besides the lack of intergovernmental coordination, insufficient collaboration with civil society, business, and communities; municipalities are confronted with major environmental and contextual challenges such as infrastructure weaknesses, high unemployment rates, rapid urbanization, as well as environmental factors such as climate change and migration from rural areas and other countries. More recently, the challenges also relate to the COVID-19 pandemic. Compare the following quote from a focus group discussion by a junior official:

> '*In our country in the past people used to stay in rural areas. But through urbanisation people have moved from those areas to come to the cities. And then when they come to the cities, that has put pressure on the existing infrastructure; On your dam capacity, on your integrated risk management capacity, your power station's capacity and that in itself has led to the performance of municipalities deteriorating.'*

The literature review also showed that numerous studies found that municipalities have performed poorly over the last few years. Scheepers (2015), for example identified nine challenges that impact on the performance of local government in South Africa, namely: (1) constitutional independence versus capacity of some municipalities; (2) over-regulation of municipalities; (3) demarcation issues; (4) fiscal and financial position of municipalities; (5) separation of executive and legislative powers; (6) support to local government; (7) corruption; (8) skills and capacity of elected leadership; and (9) management and technical capacity.

While there are many contributing factors to the poor performance of municipalities, a large body of research revealed that the capacity and skills levels at municipalities are major factors that should be taken into

consideration. For example, McGill (2010) asserts that, generally, developing countries are faced with the enormous task of rebuilding capacity across all spheres of government with the local sphere being the most critical. South African municipalities are further characterized by tremendous disparities, economically and politically and in terms of location (urban versus rural), performance and capacity (either human resource, financial and institutional) (Monkam, 2014). Despite these weaknesses, municipalities are mandated to improve the lives of all the citizens in their municipality (Nene, 2016). However, the delivery of services requires enhanced capacity (Ndou and Sebola, 2016). Consequently, frameworks are adopted by government through organisational development as well as human resources to respond to this increase in demand for service delivery. Moreover, this must be achieved through the provision of basic services, development, and growth of the economy, recognising and harnessing the skills potential of people living in the municipality, job creation, and mobilising people to make their own contribution to improve their living conditions (Scheepers, 2015).

It is against this background that we examined the skills and capacity of the eight target municipalities to better understand the capacity realities and support requirements of municipal officials to inform training and capacity-building interventions that will ultimately lead to improvement of the performance of municipalities. The findings in this Section are drawn from the qualitative research that included key informant interviews and key stakeholders as well as the focus group discussions with municipal officials. We also used data from the online survey conducted in Fezile Dabi District Municipality. Participants were asked to reflect on the key capacity and skills constraints of municipalities. The key constraints identified include inadequate financial and human resources, skilled administrative and political leadership, financial management capacity, service delivery skills constraints, institutional environment and culture, infrastructure and work tools, community engagement, and skills development (see Figure 4).

6.2 Improving financial resources

The empirical research conducted for the study supports the findings in the literature and illustrates that one of the main capacity constraints of local government in South Africa is inadequate financial resources. Lack of financial resources influence almost every other aspect of local government. Municipalities struggle to collect revenue. Consequently, they do not have sufficient funds for service provision. The payment for services is a two-way process. If municipalities are not delivering services, the communities will be reluctant to pay. On the hand, municipal officials complained that some government departments do not pay municipalities for their services. As a result, municipalities debt continuously grow and it places unnecessary pressure on the municipalities to collect the revenue and provide uninterrupted services.

Recommendations:

- Business models on revenue collections must be explored and adapted to suite the environment in which the municipality is located. Strategies must be put in place for better revenue collection solutions. Revenue collection efforts must make sure that service beneficiaries pay the entire bill and not just their rent but neglect to pay their taxes. Revenue collection strategies must be better targeted and be aware that rural municipalities compared to urban ones find it more difficult to collect revenue from their communities.
- Municipalities must make sure they deliver excellent services to receive payments from communities.

- Financial systems should therefore be improved to ensure better revenue collection from government departments.

Overall, officials in the study felt that lack of revenue contributes to service delivery failure which in turn have a negative impact on the economic development and investment potential of the municipality.

6.3 Improving human resources

Most municipalities in the study were characterised by high vacancy rates and staff turnover, incompetent staff, and several appointments in acting positions. Municipal officials also pointed out that there is a lack of staff in key managerial and leadership positions and that staff often act in these positions or are on short-term contracts. The municipal officials indicated that municipalities that struggle with finances are also the ones that find it difficult to attract and appoint people with the skills needed for improved service delivery. This shortage of staff with the required skills has a major impact on the performance as well as the institutional environment of the municipality.

Recommendations:

- Human resource departments must therefore put in place well developed recruitment strategies to source the necessary skills because failing to appoint people with the proper skills and qualifications can lead to poor audit outcomes as well as financial instability among others. More capacity is therefore needed to deal with regulatory requirements.
- Contract positions must be converted to permanent positions since this negatively influence the recruitment process.
- Proper succession planning is needed to ensure that staff at the lower levels benefit from the institutional knowledge, skills and expertise of staff at the higher levels as well as from those staff that has been working for several years at the municipalities.
- Special targeted interventions are needed to keep and attract skills in municipalities in rural areas. Human Resource Departments must make sure that the institutional environment and working conditions of especially rural municipalities is improved.
- The unevenness of capacity and skills resources between municipal departments must be addressed. For example, municipal officials felt that the finance and human resources are better resourced than the service departments.

6.4 Improving skilled administrative leadership

A major concern raised by the study participants was the absence of good ethical and accountable leadership because it is crucial for the strategic direction of the municipality, the institutional environment and culture, staff morale, relationships with stakeholders, and many other aspects of the function of the municipality.

Recommendations:

- Municipal officials felt that the following leadership qualities must be considered when appointing leaders: 1) leadership that is accountable, 2) leadership that is ethical, 3) leadership that is engaged and democratic, 4)

leadership that is able to build partnership, and 5) leadership that is able to collaborate with people and organations at various levels.

- The appointment of leaders with good intergovernmental relations and partnerships with other institutions, at all spheres of government is important because lack of effective leadership has caused delays in infrastructural projects.
- Municipal leaders should be encouraged to improve coordination between departments in terms of information and resource sharing to foster a team culture and a collective integrated approach to service delivery.
- Participants in the study felt that leaders must see it as a priority to become more people centred because officials are ultimately providing a service to communities. This community centred approach must be embraced, and municipal leaders must be responsible for creating and maintaining this type of organisational culture.
- Link to the community centred approach is the issue of politically motivated appointments at municipal leadership positions. Some study participants felt that political appointments often do not have the necessary skills and qualifications and this result in poor service delivery. It is therefore important that municipal officials be appointed on merit with the necessary skills and qualifications to prevent this growing skills gap.

6.5 Improving the political leadership and administrative interface

The findings from our study indicated that the political and adminstrative interface dominates the debate in the South Africa local government sphere. Most of the municipal officials and stakeholders that participated in the study revealed that the relationship between the political leadership and the administrative leadership has a negative impact on the performance of the municipal officials and municipality at large.

Respondents in this study reported that political party affiliation impact on the decisions of public officials. We found across all municipalities that the political and administrative interface was a key challenge in terms of the performance of the municipalities including the administration and human resources management. A major concern was that political party leaders often imposed political party policies to run the municipalities, as well as public activities and projects.

The loyalty to political parties therefore had a negative impact on the planning capacity of the municipality because critical posts were often filled with municipal officials with political connections. As a result, the political and administrative interferance became a situation of power brokery, which impacted negatively on service delivery and institutional functioning. In our review of Ba-Phalaborwa municipality as well as Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality, municipal officials warned that political interference destabilised the administration of the municipalities and prevented innovative management but even worse caused service delivery failures. For example, it was found that between 2009 and 2012 the number / frequency of service delivery protests had doubled in Nelson Mandela Bay (Duncan, 2014).

Municipal officials interviewed in the study felt that elected officials have a misunderstanding of their role in the municipalities. This role confusion created a very unpleasant working environment between municipal officials and political representatives but also impacted on the performance of the municipality. Another major concern was the trust deficit between political representatives and municipal administrators. The political representatives

often made promises to the communities before proper consultation with the municipal officials and this hampered the ability of municipalities to deliver services to their communities.

Recommendations:

Municipal officials generally agreed in the present study that the relationship between the political and administrative leaders' impact on the performance of the municipality as well as the municipal officials. It is therefore recommended that this relationship between the administrative and political interface must be improved if municipalities want to deliver efficient and effective services to their communities. The following specific suggestions are highlighted below:

- The interest of communities must be made a priority while political party activities and agendas must not prevent performance and especially service delivery to communities.
- Politicians must not be involved in the day-to-day operational activities of the municipalities, but rather focus on the strategic policy direction and monitoring. In other words, the political leader must concentrate on policy alignment, oversight on legislative processes.
- Strong ethical and visionary leadership are thus required from politicians free from political interference in terms of the work of the municipal leadership and officials.
- Protocols must therefore be respected to prevent role confusion because it impacts on performance as well as the municipal working environment. This is crucial because it can destabilize the effective functioning of the municipality.
- A more transparent and objective appointment system is thus needed to prevent role-confusion. It is therefore recommended that:
    - Political party affiliation and nepotism should not influence appointments of officials in municipalities.
    - Political parties should allow the Municipal administration and HR department to recruit competent and skilled workers based on the outcome of the recruitment policies and processes.

6.6 Improving financial management capacity

According to the study participants, sound financial management was a major challenge at almost all the target municipalities. For instance, municipal officials interviewed felt that it is a waste of human resources to work overtime or use outsourcing when it is not necessary. In other words, the leadership and the managers (Section 56 and section 57 managers) need monitoring mechanisms to ensure that municipal officials reduce unnecessary overtime. On the other hand, municipal officials indicated that the institution has the culture of bringing in external consultants while the requisite skills for the task exist internally. This practice is even more worrying because some municipalities have budget constraints. Some municipal officials also shared that their municipality has been unable to pay service providers on time and consequently they feel that there are risks that the municipality might be unable to pay their own salaries. Overall, municipal officials reasoned that the budget constraints not only impact on training and capacity building interventions, but it has a negative influence on staff morale and the general institutional environment.

Recommendations:

- Above the municipal officials requested the implementation of monitoring mechanisms to ensure that municipal officials work productively and do not unnecessary work overtime. There is therefore a need for better financial oversight from municipal managers and senior officials.
- In addition, municipal officials that participated in the study indicated that the implementation of adequate training must take place to ensure finance staff have the minimum competencies and skills to perform their jobs.
- While study participants indicated that there is a lack of financial skills and expertise, training initiatives must ensure that interventions and monitoring mechanisms must not overburden municipal officials with a rigid and restrictive financial regulatory environment.
- To improve compliance, municipalities must consider ensuring that there is capacity in municipalities to engage in oversight as a continuous process and not a once-off event because of misconduct or transgressions. In other words, municipalities must be given the capacity to conduct oversight regularly according to a regulatory framework that is well communicated to all municipal officials.
- The study also found that there is a disconnect between the budgeting and planning processes, which negatively impacted municipal officials' ability to meet compliance requirements. Training is therefore needed in the budget process.
- It is therefore essential that the management of the finances of municipalities at all levels be improved because financial instability and coupled with high staff vacancies in finance positions impact on the performance of the municipality.

6.7 Improving municipal service delivery

It is well documented that the South African government have made great strides in providing basic services, but challenges in some areas remain and this study showed that service delivery failure is link to a range of factors including poor governance, institutional as well as financial weaknesses such as the poor revenue collection. It is therefore important that the municipalities improve their performance in all areas such as financial management, consequence management, community engagement and skills development to prevent negative consequences for the capacity of municipalities to deliver services.

Some of the overall objectives of Local Government is to 1) provide democratic and accountable government for local communities; 2) ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner; 3) promote social and economic development and 4) to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matter of local government. To achieve these objectives participants in the study strongly ***recommended*** the following:

- The overall improvement of the skills of municipal officials as well as better knowledge on how to perform their duties.
- Officials on short-term contracts must be given full-time employment because they are often forced to leave after a great deal of training time is invested to capacitate them to deliver services. Consequently, when they leave this gap in skills contribute to service delivery failure.

- Study participants indicated ICT is one of the key skills that most municipalities lack. ICT skills are particularly lacking in the engineering field and to a lesser extent among health and safety officers. It is recommended that municipalities pay these staff competitive salaries to retain their skills but also do work to recruit these skills. In addition, municipalities must be allowed to negotiate outside of the prescribed salary band if they want to attract or retain scarce skills.
- Appointments in key strategic positions is not always possible because municipalities must comply in terms under-represented designated groups. It was therefore suggested by study participants that municipalities must in some instances get exemption to appoint people even if they do not come from the designated groups to ensure optimal service delivery.
- Another participant indicated that the skills constraints are also experienced when officials are appointed in jobs where they lack the necessary qualifications. For instance, you will find qualified engineers in administrative positions. This mismatch of skills must be addressed because it further contributes to poor service delivery.
- There is also a need to adopt Local Government Service Standards (LGSS) developed by the HRSC commissioned by SALGA across the municipalities and such LGSS should be used as service delivery auditing tool.

6.8 Improving the institutional environment

In section 3.5 we highlighted that the public sector workers' (including municipal officials) morale are extremely low and that their overall performance is very poor. This negative institutional environment is caused by several factors such as lack of resources, infrastructure, recruitment of unqualified and unskilled staff, high vacancy rates, and lack of incentives as well as political instability. This unhealthy institutional environment must be addressed if municipalities want to provide effective and efficient services to their respective communities. In this section we therefore make recommendations to improve the overall institutional environment of municipalities' keeping in mind that all the contributing factors to the negative institutional environment is interrelated and interconnected and that a comprehensive approach is needed for an improved institutional environment.

Recommendations:

Impact of poor leadership on the institutional environment and organisational culture

- Leadership is directly link to the institutional environment and culture of the municipality. The participants in the study argued that poor leadership resulted in fostering antagonistic institutional culture, which impacted directly on the ability of senior officials to perform their oversight functions. It is therefore suggested that the performance and actions of municipal leaders be monitor on a regular basis.
- According to the municipal officials in the study political appointments in leadership position create frustration among staff but also division between the administrative and political functions of the municipality. Consequently, many officials highlighted the need to strengthen the team-work ethos and tackling the individualistic and factional culture within municipalities.
- The municipal officials believe that strong strategic leadership is needed to prevent a culture of ill-discipline, a culture of letting things that are wrong to go through. In other words, consequence management is essential to ensure officials are accountable for their actions and specifically for doing wrong.

Influence of poor financial mangement on the institutional environment and organisational culture

- Municipal officials indicated that the institution has the culture of contracting external consultants, despite having the requisite skills internally for the work. This practice should be limited because study participants felt that most municipalities have budget constraints and are unable to pay service providers on time and, consequently they feel that there are risks that the municipality might be unable to pay their own salaries. It is therefore recommended that municipalities focus on using its own staff.
- The municipal officials also reasoned that the budget constraints make it difficult to implement training and capacity building interventions. The study participants felt that the lack of training negatively influence the staff morale as well as the general institutional environment.

Impact of an unsupportive and rigid regulatory environment on the institutional environment and organisational culture of municipalities

- Most study participants indicated that the rigid regulatory framework impacts negatively on creative thinking and problem-solving as well as an antagonist organisational culture unconducive to visionary and creative thinking, planning and problem-solving. Furthermore, the over-regulation of municipalities leads to institutional inertia whereby municipalities cannot be agile in their institutional responses to emerging development needs. It therefore recommended that the regulatory environment must be reviewed to establish areas where it can be streamlined to encourage creative thinking and a culture problem-solving.
- According to the study participants the rigid regulatory framework also prompted many public officials to be more conservative and cautious to avoid unfavourable audit results. However, this over careful approach stifled municipal officials' ability to be innovative. It therefore recommended that municipalities must do more to create a supportive institutional environment in which staff can grow and develop.
- Further contributing factors to the lack of skills and capacity is the individualistic culture and the absence of functional succession plans and systems at municipal level. The municipal officials recommended that to retain institutional knowledge beyond individuals, succession planning, and skills and capacity training is urgently needed.

Inadequate consequence management

The lack of consequence management in municipalities are a major concern and can be attributed to an inadequate institutional environment and culture, and inadequately skilled leadership. If consequence management are not sufficiently implemented it will lead to low morale, high staff turnover and low-quality service, among other things, and, consequently, the ability of municipalities to deliver services. A municipal official that participated in the study indicated that it is important that consequence management is objectively and consistently being implemented to ensure that wrongdoing is corrected and that staff account for their failures and inefficiencies.

6.9 Improving infrastructure and work tools

Our literature review showed that good governance and technical capacity is essential to improving municipal functioning. Although the South African government has done a great deal to remedy the problems, focusing on governance, financial management, infrastructure delivery and political infighting, municipalities continue to struggle to deliver effective and efficient services. Our study found that some municipal officials were very positive

about the infrastructure resources and work tools within their municipality, while others felt it should be improved.

Recommendations:

- Overall, it is recommended that infrastructure and work tools be regularly assessed and upgraded to ensure that municipal officials' ability to deliver services to their communities are not negatively influenced. The present study showed that municipal officials were more positive about their work environment and their performance in municipalities where ICT infrastructure was upgraded. The officials felt that the improved ICT infrastructure improved the communications among staff within the municipality, with other government departments as well as with their communities.
- Besides ICT infrastructural improvements, it is recommended that municipalities also automate their operations. A municipal official indicated that their operations are hugely improved now that they use automated clock-in registers, which allow workers (staff) to clock-in on site.
- It is recommended that in-service training be conducted to upskill staff to use new ICT tools and resources. If training is not implemented together with the provision of new tools municipal officials will struggle to optimally use the new digital resources.
- It is also recommended that municipalities share knowledge and experience about ICT training and skills development because it will be of great value and help municipal officials to adjust to changes in technology.
- Those municipal officials that were more negative about their resources and work tools strongly felt that municipalities must do more to improve internet connectivity problems and maintenance of equipment and machinery. Another municipal official and head of Waste Management felt that he needs a vehicle to do inspection, while other officials indicated that the lack of mobile phones prevent them from doing their job adequately.
- There is a need to make capacity and skills development an ongoing process and accessible to all municipal officials. The current technological advancement training should also be tailored toward adaptation to the 4th industrial revolution.

6.10 Improving community engagement

Overall, municipal officials suggested that community engagement could be improved as well as skills interventions tools to facilitate community engagement. The biggest drawback is that most municipal officials regard community engagement as a mere compliance exercise and are less concerned about the well-being of the community they serve. Effective community engagement is further hampered by political representatives who fail to keep to their community commitments. Community members are therefore often distrustful and dissatisfied with the leadership of municipalities.

Recommendations:

- To improve community engagement, it is essential that municipal leadership put strategies in place to build trust between the municipal officials and communities as well as all relevant community stakeholders. In addition, municipal leadership must ensure that communities value the interaction with municipal officials and do not consider the engagement as a tick box exercise.
- The municipal officials also felt that a lack of strategic planning and good leadership negatively influence cooperation and integration among the various municipal duties and structures around community

engagement functions. Besides the various departments, alignment is also needed among the different spheres of government to ensure that there are sufficient resources and human capacity available for community engagement.

- Unfortunately, over-regulation and political interference often detract municipal officials from focusing on community engagements. As result the Integrated Development Plans of the municipalities often do not address the needs of the community members.
- For example, the municipal officials from Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality, despite being familiar with their Public Participation Unit (PPU), felt that the municipality experienced several challenges when engaging with communities on a variety of matters. These officials reported that the current model of reaching out to communities falls far short since many of the most capable community members such as teachers, businesspeople and police officers do not attend community meetings to provide inputs into IDP processes. It was also said that the public lacks information and understanding, which leads to them to require or request things that the municipality is not mandated to provide, such RDP housing. One municipal official suggested that communities require proper education on the functions and responsibilities municipalities and specifically the role of community engagement.
- The Covid-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on the activities of the PPU, which had to come up with creative and new ways of engaging with communities when face-to-face meetings were no longer an option. A variety of platforms such as the internet, Facebook, radio broadcasts, WhatsApp, Zoom and Microsoft Teams meetings had to be used to provide residents with information. This was considered also problematic since only a limited number of residents have access to technology which enables them to obtain information or provide inputs into municipal planning activities.
- Lessons can also be learned from Makana Local Municipality in terms of community engagement and the promotion of the active citizenry. In January 2020, the Makhanda High Court ruled on the Unemployed People's Movement's (UPM's) case and ordered the dissolution of Municipal Council of Makana as it has failed in its constitutional duty to deliver basic services. It also ordered the appointment of an administrator until the new council is elected. The provincial government has taken the High Court's decision on appeal to the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA). If the Province's appeal is unsuccessful, this Hight Court decision has potential to create a precedent in the country, as several community organisations could resort to the courts to challenge poor municipal service delivery, maladministration and corruption. The success of this case proved to communities that community protest is not the only channel to have their voice heard. The court process even though protracted but it can offer durable solutions to compel municipalities to delivery service according to their mandate.
- It is also important to note that there is a need for community education and engagement to understand the mandate each sphere of the government.
- Regular capacity building initiatives for municipal workers such as community engagement workshops for officials working directly with communities and senior level official is needed.
- Stakeholders involved in capacity building initiatives need to organize their programs for greater impact and to link it more accurately to the national democratic transition.

6.11 Improving the capacity and skills of municipal officials

The views of the study participants with regards to capacity and skills development varied from it is well done to poorly done. For instance, some municiapl officails indicated that they have access to bursaries to further their qualifcations in their expert area. The municipal officails from Fezile Dabi District Municipality was also positive in terms of the implementation of the human resource development strategy and its employee management

performance. However, the same officials that participated in the online survey were less satisfied with how the municipality is dealing with the bursary schemes for staff, staff coaching and the use of staff development facilitators. Municipal officials at Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality were also more critical about their human resource development strategy and felt that budget limitations seem to hamper the municipality's ability to improve the skills of its municipal officials. Several other municipal officials also indicated that their municipalities did not effectively engage them in terms of developing and implementing skills development plans.

It is within this context that we highlight suggestion from the study to improve the capacity and skills plans of municipalities.

- There is general agreement that the implementation of skills plans, and capacity building interventions must be improved because it undermines the development of municipal officials and the overall performance of municipalities. Better coordination and management are needed from HR departments once requests for training and training needs are formulated.
- The allocation of funds for training and staff development must be made a priority and municipal managers must be less focused on the training cost implication related travelling and accommodation, but more on the actual skills sets that the officials will acquire.
- Municipal official capacity development programmes need to empower officials with skills that help them value their work and put people first.
- Diligent and professional performance must be key to enhancing skills and capacity of public servants.
- There is a need for skills alignment in each department and clear guidelines guiding skills and capacity development.
- Sufficient time needs to be provided for training as well monitoring and evaluation of skills learned. Municipal training providers therefore need to develop training courses that add value to the public servant skills.
- Training should not be done as a tick box of work skills achieved but rather as a platform to transfer skills. For instance, one day training will not be sufficient for attendees to learn and practice the skills that is being thought.
- There is a need to have processes in place to monitor the quality of the training that is being provided and ensure that the skills are aligned with attendees' work.

6.12 Conclusion

Local government continues to play a critical role in the rendering of essential services to residents. Services ranging from water and electricity to housing are critical for the wellbeing of residents, and district and local municipalities have the huge responsibility of ensuring that these services are readily available. Skills and capacity are critical particularly for municipal employees to ensure that these services are rendered efficiently whilst maintaining quality standards. Municipalities continue to face significant challenges that have been highlighted. However, efforts relating to financial support, capacity and skills development and competitive recruitment practises will ensure that the municipality is able to attract the best talent available in the market. Furthermore, better coordination, management and implementation of capacity and skills development plans will help to resolve some challenges which can only improve the functionality of municipalities.

Section 7: Conclusion and way forward

The transformation of local government in South Africa since 1994 has been characterised by significant changes. These include infusing a philosophy of developmental local government and an overhauled fiscal system to bring more financial resources to municipalities (Atkinson, 2008: 53). However, within and across municipalities there are tremendous disparities and major obstacles such as lack of capacity and lack of accountability (NDP 2014). In particular, as this study highlighted through the experiences of various officials, municipalities are affected by a serious lack of human resources with the required administrative capacities to render a wide range of services, particularly in formerly disadvantaged communities (Thornhill, 2008). As the Auditor General (AG) stated in 2018 most municipalities experience high vacancy and turnover rate for key positions, lack of appropriate competencies by key officials; inadequate consequence management for poor performance and transgressions; and decline in the response rate on improving internal controls (Auditor General, 2018). Furthermore, we fear, as has been depicted in this study that the impact of COVID-19 pandemic has further aggravated the situation.

This study therefore examined the skills and capacity constraints of the eight target municipalities. The assessment is based mostly on qualitative research that included the key informant interviews with municipal officials and key stakeholders as well as the focus group discussions with municipal officials. Overall, the skills and capacity assessment implemented here provide us with a better understanding of the capacity constraints and support requirements of municipal officials and shed some light on potential training and capacity-building interventions. Through the experiences of various municipal officials, we highlighted some challenges and concerns but also entry points to improve the capability of municipalities to deliver services to residents and respond to localized social and economic challenges.

The study examined the availability of tools and capacities to enable and support ethical behaviour, and good leadership, as an important end of its own, but also to prevent corruption and maladministration from happening. Key to visionary leadership are questions of creative and strategic thinking, most notably around collaboration and partnership building. In this regard the study findings, specially through the interviews with key stakeholders highlighted a sentiment that the regulatory framework impacts on the ability of senior managers to be creative in their problem-solving approaches to facilitate strategic planning, as well as to have the necessary softer skills for stakeholder engagement and partnership building. The municipal officials note several dynamics that shape the institutional environment which impact on their capacity and skills to fulfil their mandates and duties. In unpacking the complexity that shapes the institutional environment and its effect on leadership and strategic planning, participants constructed complexity in terms of a rigid regulatory framework that impacts negatively on creative thinking and problem-solving as well as an antagonist organisational culture unconducive to visionary and creative thinking, planning and problem-solving. The over-regulation of municipalities leads to institutional inertia whereby municipalities cannot be agile in their institutional responses to emerging development needs. Due to the nature of the regulatory framework, many public officials highlighted that they tend to avoid risk as they may get unfavourable audit results. This in turn stifles creativity and leads to deficits in leadership and visionary thinking and strategic planning.

In addition, the study assessed the ability of officials to effectively manage the political and administrative interface to perform well and enhance accountability. Here, the study findings suggested that given the need for

ethical and accountable leadership, a further in-depth analysis of the political-administrative interface and its impact on the performance of public officials is critical. This is especially important given that municipalities remain administrative entities subjected to both internal and external political dynamics that impact on municipal officials and their performance. Consequently, our key findings point to some of the ways as to how the political-administrative interface impact on the ability of the public officials to conduct their duties. In relation to this matter, a key associated element of the political and administrative interface is the broader institutional environment and culture within municipalities, which is often dysfunctional and fragmented.

Overall, the study proved to be timely and relevant. While the scope was limited in terms of number of municipalities, many of the key challenges around skills and capacity constraints discussed seem to be shared by many other municipalities. Therefore, the insights gained should be useful for developing further knowledge in this field. While there are several paths that could be followed to advance this work, our core findings suggest a couple of areas for future research.

Firstly, as highlighted in South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, an active citizenry is fundamental to the country's development trajectory. Since the service delivery interface between South Africa's municipalities and citizens appears to be characterised by discontent and a lack of confidence in the capacity of South African citizens to participate in municipal service delivery (see Biljohn, 2019), needs to be enhanced. This enhancement needs to be aligned and fully supported with appropriate community engagement capacity within municipalities. Therefore, future studies should pay significant attention to this interphase and to find the best ways to enhance the skills of officials and capacity of municipalities to work closely with citizens to fulfil developmental goals, specifically improve service delivery and quality of life.

Secondly, discussions with study participants highlighted that training and capacity-building strategies and interventions could potentially be aligned and implemented through the District Development Model (DDM). This highlighted the need to invest research efforts to start understanding this approach better and how it could serve as vehicle to improve capacity and skills development efforts. The model aims at bringing about a shift in the way various entities have been operating and to institutionalise joint planning as the new method of operating. It was approved as an operational model for improving Cooperative Governance with the aim of building a Capable, Ethical Developmental State, including improving and enhancing the state of Local Government. It embodies an approach by which the three spheres of government and state entities work collaboratively in an impact-oriented way, and where there is higher performance and accountability for coherent service delivery and development outcomes. Therefore, the shapes, challenges and opportunities of this joint planning will need to be thoroughly unpacked. Although there is ambiguity regarding the roles of district and local municipalities within the sphere of local government, given that district municipalities were established to coordinate and support their local municipalities to enable them to better deliver services to the communities that they serve, special research efforts are needed to empirically understand District Municipalities and their relationships with other municipalities and citizens. These assessments will assist to better understand new and existing knowledge on skills and capacity of municipal officials and how to further improve it in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Lastly, and beyond the specific lessons and recommendations highlighted, we propose further and deeper analysis in the form of more comprehensive and regular skills assessment studies that are done with the participation of public officials, academics, and relevant stakeholders to co-design the assessments and strategies. As discussed here, municipalities should strive towards becoming learning organisations, capable of facilitating the learning of

its workforce and harnessing knowledge capability and experience for the benefit of all its stakeholders (Tshishonga, 2019). This will be a key ingredient for improving governance and service delivery across the country. Overall, municipalities should be seen as performance-based organisations informed by articulated Local Government Service standards. Where there are failures, consequence management must kick in and where there is success, there must be genuine performance rewards to recognise efforts made by the performing municipalities. Peer learning mechanisms must be created for the 257 municipalities to learn from each other.

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Appendix A

PUBLIC OFFICIALS' SKILLS AND CAPACITY ASSESSMENT
Open Society Foundation South Africa (OSF-SA) and HSRC Study

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Public Officials

Introduction

Instructions:

- Introduce the purpose of the research
- Explain the purpose for the focus group discussion
- Explain the research guidelines such as anonymity and confidentiality
- Clearly define the expected length of the FG discussion

Discussion ground rules:

Explain group rules, these include

- Listening to each other
- Not breaking another person's word
- Raising your hand to speak
- Indicating your "number" before you speak (this is an identifier for audio record purposes)
- Respecting and maintaining the confidentiality of the focus group discussion

Structure of the Questions of the Focus Group Discussion

The intention of the questions below is to elicit detailed feedback from you as a public official that speaks to the objectives of this study. This will be a semi-structured discussion. The use of probing questions such as "please explain further", "what else can you tell us?", "can you elaborate on that", "do you have any examples to share?", "what else can be done?" etc. will be useful.

Thank you for agreeing to participate and for completing the consent form.

Questions

Question	Follow up / probes
Capacity and skills of public officials	
1. What are, in your view and experience, the major challenges facing public officials working at municipalities across South Africa?	Can you also share your view on the influence of poverty, unemployment, corruption, and the continuing effects of racism on the capacity constraints of municipalities?
2. What do you think of the general functioning and performance of this municipality?	● How do you think most of your colleagues (other officials) perceive the performance of the municipality? ● Do you think the municipality has enough resources (human, financial and technical) to perform well? ● Do you think municipal officials have adequate skills to deal with their duties?
3. What contextual factors impact on the performance of this municipality?	What are the external technological, social, economic, geographic, cultural and natural factors that affect the performance of the municipality?
4. How are other government departments or external organisations affecting the performance of the municipality?	● Have you experienced or heard of interference from: ○ Political leaders? ○ Other government departments
5. What can you tell us about the organisational culture of the municipality?	● What are the main organisational values of your municipality? ● What are the ethical standards of the organisation?
6. How important are your personal needs and values in terms of performing your job?	● How do you think your work contributes to your personal well-being? ● Do you feel that having job security has an influence on your performance? ● Do you feel that the municipality cares about your well-being as a person and worker?

	• Do you feel staff gets acknowledged for their contribution to reach the departments' targets?
7. What do you think about the availability of the necessary resources to perform your job?	• Please list the key resources you need to perform your duties well (financial, human and technical). • Is there adequate supply of up-to-date materials and equipment to do your job – please explain with day-to-day examples? • Is equipment (i.e. phone lines, computers, internet, etc.) usually operational? • Is technical support usually available? • Is your workplace comfortable? Describe what makes a working-place comfortable in your experience and how does it make a difference?
8. How will you describe current leadership practices and challenges in the municipality?	• Do you think managers are skilled to perform leadership duties? Explain strengths and weaknesses. • What do you think needs to change for better leadership practices? • What could be done to encourage good leadership?
9. Do you think staff receive enough clarity on their role and responsibilities before commencing with their duties and support to perform them?	• Do you think staff know their job description and where they fit into the organogram? • How and who provides guidance in relation to your specific roles and responsibilities? How often are these discussed? • Do staff understand their tasks in relation to the overall performance of the municipality? • Do staff get information on the roles of other departments and ways of collaborating?

10. Do you think that most staff are qualified to do their job?	● Do you think the level of education and training of most officials in your department is adequate for the job they are doing? ● What are the skills lacking the most?
11. What are your perceptions of skills development strategies in your municipality?	● Please explain how training and development of employees happens in your department / the municipality? ● How is the skills plan for your department developed? ● How do you interact with other public officials to improve the skills and capacity of this municipality to engage with the community at large?
12. What do you think about the alignment of policies and procedures to the strategic planning processes of the municipality?	● What do you think about the strategic planning processes of the municipality? ● What policies or mechanisms are in place to: - control corruption? - encourage transparency and openness?
13. What is your responsibility towards improving community engagement within this municipality?	● In your experience, how are municipalities engaging with communities (mechanisms, tools) and how effective are these? ● Can you highlight the main challenges that municipalities encounter when they interact with communities? ● Can you identify the main opportunities to improve engagement in communities?
14. Anything else you want to mention or suggest to improve capacity and skills in this municipality.	● Different types of training? Supporting different skills? Creating incentives? Partnerships?
IF YOU HAVE ANY RELEVANT DOCUMENTS PLEASE SHARE WITH US	

Thank you