

# P O L I C Y   B R I E F

**DR KOMBI SAUSI**, PhD; Research Specialist, Human Sciences Research Council | **PROF MODIMOWABARWA KANYANE**, PhD; Executive Dean; Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law, University of Venda | **MR NYAWO GUMEDE**, MA; Programme Co-Ordinator; Public Management Programme, Sol Plaatje University | **MR NGQAPHELI MCHUNU**, MA; Senior Researcher, Human Sciences Research Council | **DR DEREK DAVIDS**, PhD, Director, Human Sciences Research Council | **DR THOBEKA ZONDI**, PhD; Researcher, Human Sciences Research Council | **DR GREGORY HOUSTON**, PhD; Chief Research Specialist, Human Sciences Research Council | **MISS NAMHLA NGQWALA**, MA; Researcher, Human Sciences Research Council | **PROF NARNIA BOHLER-MULLER**, LL.D; Divisional Executive, Human Sciences Research Council | **DR MICHAEL COSSER**, PhD; Consultant to Human Sciences Research Council | **FEBRUARY 2023**



## Implementation of the **District Development Model** in South Africa

### Overview

Poor service delivery has become a major challenge for the South African government, with the majority of municipalities failing to deliver basic services to their communities. A key reason for this is the tendency of government – at national, provincial and local levels – to operate in silos. The effects of this are felt most acutely in the local sphere of government. For example, different governance functions are not being integrated and key stakeholders are not being consulted about or included in decisions taken by politicians and government officials. Against this background, a new model of governance, the District Development Model (DDM), was introduced and adopted by the Cabinet on 21 August 2019 to improve cooperative governance and enhance service delivery.

Based on an extensive governance literature review in South Africa, a review of district development approaches in various countries in Africa and beyond, and a survey of and interviews with stakeholders involved in the implementation of the DDM in three pilot districts in South Africa: the Waterberg, Limpopo, eThekweni, KwaZulu-Natal, O.R. Tambo, and the Eastern Cape. This policy brief advocates for a thorough evaluation of the implementation of the model to date escalated to all 44 districts and eight metropolitan areas (52 spaces) in the country.

### Introduction

In his 2019 State of the Nation Address (SONA), President Cyril Ramaphosa identified the “pattern of operating in silos” as a challenge that had led to a “lack of coherence in planning and implementation [that] ha[d] made monitoring and oversight of government’s programme difficult”. In his 2020 SONA, the President called for the rolling out of a new integrated district-based approach to address service delivery challenges in the country. The DDM is a practical intergovernmental relations (IGR) mechanism that aims to ensure an integrated and single strategically focused “One Plan” and “One Budget” for each of the 44 districts and eight metropolitan geographical areas (52 spaces) in response to service delivery challenges.

The DDM is an operational model for improving cooperative governance to build a capable, ethical and developmental state (Priority 1 of the Medium-Term Strategic Framework 2019-2024 – DPME 2020). It embodies an approach in which the three spheres of government and state entities work in unison with one another and with non-state actors in an impact-oriented way and there is higher performance and accountability for coherent service delivery and developmental outcomes.

While the current governance system relies on each sphere of government aligning its plans with the other spheres, especially in terms of strategic infrastructure investment, a more efficient approach would be to have all three spheres of government working together on a joint strategic alignment platform. A manifestation of the current situation is the highly inefficient utilisation of funds and resources, and wastage for 27 years of democracy. The DDM provides a platform for the situation on the ground to be scientifically tested, to ensure that the model is integrated and that it facilitates the realisation of all local government objectives.

The next sections of the brief cover the methodology and the findings from the literature review and empirical research that inform the presentation of constructive conclusions and recommendations at the end.

## Methodology

Work done by Creswell, et al (2007:237-238) acknowledges that there are several qualitative research designs to choose from and factors include the type of study, resource availability and duration. To gain an in-depth multi-faceted understanding of a phenomenon, a case study approach is suitable for such an undertaking (Crowe, et al., 2011:2). As Yin (2009) points out, the case study method can explain, describe or explore events and answer the 'what?', 'how?' and 'why?' questions. A multiple-case study approach was therefore selected for this study. Such an approach enables researchers to explore the phenomenon in question and employ replication strategies across several study areas. The multiple case studies selected include the three piloted district municipalities of Waterberg district municipality in Limpopo, O.R Tambo district municipality in the Eastern Cape and eThekweni municipality in KwaZulu-Natal. The primary source of data collection for this study was one-on-one semi-structured key informant interviews. Semi-structured interviews require the interviewer to prepare key research questions to guide the interview but are also able to diverge from the list of questions in pursuit of a more detailed response on a particular area (Gill, et al., 2008: 291). An empirical analysis was thus undertaken, focusing on four key themes i) the relevance of the DDM, ii) the impact and sustainability of the model, iii) the effectiveness and efficiency of the model and iv) the replicability and ability of the model to provide value for money.

## Key findings

### The DDM within the South African system of governance

The DDM is located within the intergovernmental relations (IGR) system, which has a long history in South Africa dating back to the colonial institutional politico-administrative systems of Dutch and British colonial rule. The South Africa Act of 1910, which created the Union of

South Africa, established three spheres of government – central, provincial and local – with limited powers for lower tiers of government (Kahn, Madue & Kalema 2011). In the post-apartheid period, the principle of cooperative government legislated in the 1996 Constitution mandated the three spheres of government to work cooperatively and yet independently. Notwithstanding this prescript, the top-down approach to governance that is a feature of vertical IGR and the silo operation of the three spheres of government persists to this day. DDM, though intricately linked to horizontal IGR (relations between governmental authorities in the same sphere of government and at the same level), envisages policy formulation and planning that is simultaneously bottom-up and top-down, promoting local governments' independence, particularly in the delivery of services to the communities they serve.

The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) has identified a range of challenges the DDM is expected to resolve – from a lack of coherence in planning, budgeting and implementation to weak sector departmental involvement in integrated development planning processes, short-termism manifested in constant changes in priorities and programmes, poor utilisation of IGR mechanisms to enable joint work and integration, limited localisation of the National Development Plan (NDP) and Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), limited support for growth and development strategies and spatial development frameworks, and the lack of a performance management structure expressed in an intergovernmental plan. A key imperative is to shift from the alignment of plans to a joint planning approach (COGTA 2020).

The slow pace and lack of quality service delivery have fueled municipal protests – often characterised by high levels of violence, xenophobic attacks, looting and police brutality – across the country, particularly in informal settlements and metropolitan areas in the Western Cape, Kwazulu-Natal, and Gauteng (Bohler-Muller et al. 2016). The 25-year review (RSA 2019) identified serious systemic issues underlying service delivery: duplication of structures and functions between spheres and districts and local municipalities, misaligned or inappropriate devolution of functions, municipalities performing functions that are not their core competencies, unfunded or under-funded mandates (for example, library and primary health services), and the impact of amalgamations.

### International district development comparators

The first of four outcomes posited for the DDM by COGTA is a common vision tailored to the needs of each district. A review of the literature on the international experience of implementing similar models to the DDM shows that a fair amount of success has been achieved in placing the district at the epicentre of development. The whole-of-government approach to district development

pioneered in the UK in 1997 spread to other Anglophone and subsequently to non-Anglophone countries. In India, for example, district development planning came in the 1960s to be seen as an integral part of national development planning, and the concept of service centre planning became mainstream in the two decades that followed. Such planning was based on the socio-economic needs of a district, which were derived from information from the households, villages or towns of that district or region (Wanmali & Islam 1995). From a South African perspective, the Indian model would allow the district hubs proposed by COGTA to capacitate struggling municipalities in needed areas of expertise such as accounting and project management.

Based also on the needs of communities at the district level, the planning process for the Ugandan Jinja District Five-Year District Development Plan (2015/16-2019/20) had, however, to operate within a framework established by the National Planning Authority. The District Development Plan emerged simultaneously, then, from a top-down and a bottom-up participatory process that included the views of political, civic and development stakeholders. The process took place at five levels of planning – the village, the parish, the lower local government, the municipal council, and the district – and allowed for the inclusion of the priorities of the distinct levels (Jinja District Local Government 2015).

The decentralised district development approach adopted in Ghana (Owusu 2004: 167) sought to draw into local planning the views and aspirations of the people within their areas of jurisdiction to ensure effective development at the local level, incorporating some of the main requirements for effective district development planning: clearly defined roles for key role players; adequate administrative and human resource capacity; a strong capacity for development planning; adequate funding and financial controls; the involvement of communities in local governance; equitable access to resources and inclusive decision-making; and clearly defined relationships among key stakeholders.

Sri Lanka offers another example of bottom-up development planning based on local needs, having begun a process of decentralisation in the 1950s through the establishment of five new districts to make local administrative structures more effective (Yusoff, Sarjoon and Hassan 2016). The marginalisation of certain groups of people through decades of civil war and ethnic conflict made a compelling case for introducing new districts in Sri Lanka to boost regional and national economic development – allowing marginalised sectors of society to be included in development planning and outcomes. Prioritising the marginalised has implications for the inclusion of marginalised groups in local planning processes in South Africa.

A vision supported by well-researched long-term implementation plans is the second outcome COGTA

envisages from the DDM. The literature on district development planning in Ethiopia highlights the need for well-researched, credible and technically sound long-term implementation plans to develop the vision and priorities required in development planning. The South African DDM concept emanates from the strategy of Agricultural Development-Led Industrialisation (ADLI) in Ethiopia, where industrialisation was found to flow from the increased demand for industrial outputs among farmers (Adelman and Vogel 1991: 5-6). There are lessons here for South Africa's approach to rural-based district development.

The third outcome to flow from the implementation of the DDM is multi-year, long-term objectives, targets, and resource commitments extending beyond electoral cycles. The Ghanaian Biakoye District Assembly (2010) District Medium Term Development Plan serves as an example of a multi-year long-term plan, though it does not extend beyond electoral cycles. The three-year plan, developed by the District Planning Coordinating Committee for the period 2010 to 2013, had predictable objectives, targets and resource commitments from which COGTA could learn.

The main benefit of the new DDM, according to COGTA, is that it ensures an accountability framework and responsibilities for tracking and reporting on implementation and actions within the government to stakeholders and the broader public. While national, provincial and local spheres of government have several mechanisms to ensure that M&E processes are followed (the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation policy framework [The Presidency 2008] and various pieces of legislation), the key challenge lies in the lack of implementation – a challenge the DDM in itself may not be able to address.

### **Empirical analysis: The findings of the three case studies**

Analysis of the findings of the case studies was conducted in terms of four themes: 1) the relevance of the DDM; 2) its impact and sustainability; 3) the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the model, and 4) the replicability and value for money of the DDM.

In general, key informant understanding of the DDM was found to be patchy and its implementation implications largely unknown: since the pilot districts were at the stage of finalising their District Development Plans at the time of the fieldwork, the primary research had limited usefulness in providing definitive evidence of the DDM's efficacy. Most respondents, then, focused not on actual implementation but on the foundation which the model had laid for future success. Evidence of this was found in the aspirational wording (italicised in the examples below) of a number of responses. In terms of relevance, the DDM had:

- *Provided a platform for stakeholder engagement* to smooth the coordination of service delivery (SALGA); and
- *Promoted stability and coordination*, which attracted international funders (Waterberg).

In terms of DDM implementation effectiveness and efficiency:

- *Several of imbizos* were held to discuss the implementation of the model (Limpopo LGSETA); and
- The DDM had *inculcated active citizenship and engendered confidence* in government (Waterberg).

In terms of the replicability and value for money of the DDM, it was claimed that:

- The DDM had *positioned* the government to improve service delivery programmes by creating a more coordinated model (SALGA, Limpopo); and
- Replicability depended on stakeholders like LGSETA *buying into the model and concomitantly on stakeholders' financial investment and willingness to make it work* (Limpopo LGSETA).

In addition to the challenge of guarding against a narrow focus, respondents identified other potential challenges in the implementation of the model: cabinet ministers appointed as district champions lacking on-the-ground knowledge of the district; risk of political interference, the ruling party pushing through its political agenda; non-governmental actor, lack of trust in municipal officials; and the huge task of educating community members about the DDM.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Whereas One Plan One Budget is not backed by “new money”, it is clear DDM requires sufficient resource capacity including financial and human capital to function optimally in all 52 spaces. It is too soon to judge if the DDM will succeed or not, but it is imperative to allow bottom-up and top-down approaches to interface with each other for it to succeed, unlike the current arrangement, which is a recipe for failure in comparison with the selected countries studied, especially on the African continent.

The overarching recommendation arising from the study is that a complete evaluation should be conducted once the DDM has been fully implemented in a district municipality for a minimum period of five years. In addition, the study identified a set of 30 specific recommendations, which are grouped below into 14 categories.

1. *Implementation*: Draw on the reviews of local governance and of international experience of district development model implementation and on the empirical findings of the study underpinning this policy brief in formulating implementation strategies for the DDM.

2. *Legislation*: Create an enabling environment for the implementation of the DDM by legislating the DDM, passing and implementing municipal by-laws, and reducing bureaucracy.
3. *Stakeholder involvement*: Involve all relevant agencies and stakeholders in decision-making, fostering democratic participation in district development by civil society and community stakeholders.
4. *Access to information*: Practise greater transparency by promoting access to information.
5. *Teamwork*: Foster teamwork and team spirit during the implementation of the DDM.
6. *Planning*: Improve cooperative governance, involving all three spheres of government, treating the DDM as a national programme of action, and harmonising all programmes across the three spheres of government and across all departments to create One Plan and One Budget that are institutionalised, overseen by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency, and adopts an all-of-government approach accompanied by the formulation of implementation strategies.
7. *Skills development*: Draft and implement a Training and Development Plan for officials and political office bearers and increase the number of Learnerships offered to the community in each district.
8. *Triple challenge*: Focus on sustainable development and the eradication of the triple challenge of poverty, inequality, and unemployment in each district, preventing underdevelopment in the 52 spaces.
9. *Finance and business*: Institutionalise the role of development finance institutions in development projects, focusing on local economic development and business investment opportunities.
10. *Service delivery*: Ensure that the direct beneficiaries of the DDM are, through transparent service delivery, not government officials but the people in the district.
11. *Monitoring & evaluation (M&E)*: Establish a mechanism for regular M&E of DDM implementation.
12. *Professionalisation*: Depoliticise the DDM, exercising meritocracy, not politics, in the appointment of officials and departmentalising and depersonalising DDM implementation.
13. *Accountability*: Develop an accountability mechanism for DDM implementation, ensuring that the DDM has measurable outcomes, deliverables, and performance contracts for officials.
14. *Women's empowerment*: Promote women's empowerment in the appointment process, in the way women at all levels of government are treated, and in local economic development in all 52 spaces.
15. *Scaling up*: Replicate the pilot projects in all districts and metros in the country with the DPME in the

Presidency implementing oversight mechanisms to ensure that the DDM achieves its objectives when the national rollout takes place.

DDM champions at national, provincial and local levels should (re)configure and prioritise these recommendations as a proposed next step in the implementation process, followed by rigorous evaluations after five years of implementation to inform the future of the DDM.

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