

An analysis of the effectiveness of the Local Government Turn-around Strategy (LGTAS)

The case of the Fezile Dabi District Municipality, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Since 1994, development policy and practice in South Africa have evolved significantly within the local government sphere. The reduction of poverty, inequality and unemployment, as well as improved service delivery, remain some of the key focus areas for policy development and intervention in South Africa. This article examines the policy initiatives undertaken by government regarding the Local Government Turn-around Strategy (LGTAS) initiative, including past and current policies relevant to the LGTAS such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR), the Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA), the New Growth Path (NGP) and the National Development Plan (NDP). The LGTAS is a response by government to restore local government's ability to fulfil its developmental mandate as contained in the Constitution (1996). Although it can be argued that the strategy has good intentions and is well formulated, it is the implementation of the strategy that remains a challenge. The extent of success achieved through the implementation of the LGTAS, using the Fezile Dabi District Municipality (FDDM) as a case study, is investigated.

The analysis includes interviews with relevant officials from FDDM, who are involved in the process, as well as an analysis of LGTAS reports of the Free State provincial administration regarding the FDDM. Results from the analysis indicate that only limited success has been achieved through the implementation of the LGTAS. This article provides some solutions to improve the implementation of the LGTAS, as well as solutions for improved service delivery at the local government sphere.



INTRODUCTION

Development problems are so complex and uncertain that the traditional problem-solving approaches of government institutions are no longer sufficient in order to deal with them. Governing modern society so as to achieve sustainable development, therefore, requires new forms of governance that explicitly deal with the diversity and divergence in societal and policy processes (Loorbach 2004:1).

South Africa, like many other countries, has made the shift from government (the power to govern) to governance (the act of governing), whereby all societal actors are interacting in complex networks. This shift can be linked to the emergence of network local governance. This network sets as its over-arching objective the meeting of community needs as defined by the community within the context of the demands of a complex system of multi-level governance (De Deurwaerdere 2005:2).

The network of local government model demands a diverse set of relationships among all government spheres, the private sector and civil society. The relationships are intertwined and the systems of accountability are multiple. The political process is about identifying problems, designing solutions and assessing their impact. Success is not a simple matter of efficient service delivery, but rather the complex challenge of whether an outcome, favourable to the local community, has been achieved. It should be noted that the fundamental goal of a democratic governance system is citizen satisfaction. Therefore, the effectiveness of good governance needs to be judged by the capacity of local government structures to not only supply essential services congruent with the needs and desires of its local communities, but also to ensure socio-economic development and improved quality of life for its local communities (Stoker 2002:18).

The global experience is that public participation by local communities begins with local government. With the introduction of the Constitution (1996) and the White Paper on Local Government (1998), it has become clear that South Africa has learned from this experience by establishing decentralised municipalities with developmental duties. The Constitution (1996) clearly states that among the objectives of local government are “to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities” and “to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government”. In the White Paper on Local Government (1998), it is recognised that the local government sphere is primarily developmental in the sense of being committed to working with citizens and groups within the community, and to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs, and improve the quality of their lives. In an effort to meet local developmental needs, the South African government has introduced various policy initiatives, which will be discussed in the next section.

POLICY INITIATIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Since 1994, the South African government has introduced a number of policies to facilitate development. Some of these developmental policies include the:

- Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (ANC, 1994)
- Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR) (South Africa 1996a)

- Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) (South Africa 2006)
- Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) (2009) (Department of Public Service and Administration 2011:7)
- New Growth Path (NGP) (South Africa 2011)
- National Development Plan (NDP) (South Africa 2012).

The key policies are discussed briefly below.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (1994) and the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR) (1996)

The primary goal of the RDP was to enhance the quality of life of the poor, deepen democracy, and involve society at large in the development process. The RDP identified five key programmes to achieve its primary goal, namely meeting basic needs, development of human resources, building the economy and strengthening of the democracy (ANC 1994). Certain challenges prevented the RDP from being successful. Key amongst these challenges was insufficient funding and the lack of human resource capacity. In an attempt to address these challenges the GEAR was introduced (Jahed 2011:7; South Africa 1996a).

GEAR was a macro-economic strategy, which focused on macro-economic stabilisation and trade, and financial liberalisation, as priorities to foster economic growth, increase employment and reduce poverty. This strategy had its successes as well as its failures. According to Ncube *et al.* (2012:9) the successes included reduced fiscal deficits, lowered inflation, exchange rate stability, tax cuts on company profit, and decreased barriers to trade and liberalised capital flows. The biggest failure was the assumption that redistribution would come from job creation within the context of reduced public expenditure. The global economic crisis in 1998, with a decline in world demand for South Africa's exports such as gold, put an end to the GEAR strategy.

Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) (2006)

Improved economic growth and economic performance gave the South African government renewed hope that the two main social challenges of poverty and unemployment could be addressed with the implementation of ASGISA (South Africa 2006). This initiative identified the following six factors, which restricted economic growth at that stage:

- the volatility and level of the currency
- the cost, efficiency and capacity of the national logistics system
- shortage of skilled labour
- barriers to entry, limits to competition and limited new investment opportunities
- regulatory environment and the burden on small and medium businesses
- deficiencies in state organisation, capacity and leadership.

The following interventions were proposed as part of ASGISA:

- infrastructure programmes



- sector investment strategies
- skills and education initiatives
- second economy interventions
- macro-economic issues
- public administration issues.

Critics argue that ASGISA had unrealistic policy goals. However, despite this, it has created a platform that identifies institutional challenges in specifically, the local sphere, that impede growth and employment creation (Madumo 2012:48).

The Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) (2009)

The MTSF identified the following five development objectives:

- halving poverty and unemployment by 2014
- ensuring a more equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth and reducing inequality
- improving the nation's health profile and skills base and ensuring universal access to basic services
- building a nation that is free from all forms of racism, sexism, tribalism and xenophobia
- improving the safety of citizens by reducing incidents of crime and corruption (Department of Public Service and Administration 2011:7).

Linked to the five over-arching objectives, the MTSF has outlined 10 priority areas intended to give effect to these strategic objectives. These priorities have also been translated into 12 outcomes that will enable government to measure delivery and better manage performance over the long-term. All the priorities as stipulated in the MTSF need to be implemented. However, the challenge is for government to address these competing demands with limited resources.

The New Growth Path (NGP) (2010)

The NGP places employment at the centre of economic policy for government. Six key economic sectors were identified, namely infrastructure development, agriculture, mining, green economy, manufacturing and tourism as having the potential to unlock employment opportunities as job drivers. The policy document proposes the following measures for improved economic development:

- appropriate fiscal and monetary measures, which should be linked with measures such as a more competitive and stable exchange rate; and
- targeted measures to improve the performance of the economy such as rural development, the strengthening of industrial and trade policies, the improvement of skills and education, the promotion of small businesses and co-operation, and the development of the African region (Jahed 2011:13-14; Department of Economic Development 2011).

Despite the fact that with the NGP, government has again demonstrated its commitment to overcome unemployment, poverty, and inequality, it is not explicit about the extent to which

the NGP will supersede, or even override, previous high level economic policies. Another concern is the fact that government departments do not align their policies with the NGP. The departments also seem to be using different consultative mechanisms. Engaging with the NGP should allow for only one entry point for social partners into government (Business Unity South Africa 2010:8).

The National Development Plan (NDP) (2012)

The NDP aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. According to the plan, these goals can be realised by mobilising all South Africans, growing an inclusive economy, building capabilities, enhancing the capacity of the state and promoting leadership and partnerships throughout society. Furthermore, the plan identifies the task of improving the quality of public services as key to achieving transformation. This will require provinces to focus on identifying and overcoming the obstacles to achieving improved outcomes, including the need to strengthen the ability of the local government sphere to fulfil its developmental mandate (Manual & Chabane 2013:1; The Presidency 2012).

The above-mentioned policy initiatives represent three approaches to development and improved service delivery, each approach redefining the state-society relationship. With the introduction of the RDP in 1994, the approach was reconstruction, with the state fulfilling the role of provider, and citizens being recipients. GEAR represented a shift in approach, with the state limiting its role to oversight, enabling the market to provide, and creating customers and clients. The focus of the current approach with the latest initiatives (ASGISA, MTSF, NGP and NDP) is an inclusive delivery through social protection and expanded state intervention (McLennan 2008:20).

From the above, it is clear that all spheres of government have been tasked with coming to terms with their developmental roles, particularly the local government sphere, and specifically regarding institutional functionality and capacity.

CHALLENGES OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT MODEL

Notwithstanding the fact that South Africa has taken a significant stride towards ensuring development and improved service delivery through developmental local government, the majority of municipalities are still facing a number of challenges. In a document, titled *The State of Local Government in South Africa*, compiled by the Department of Cooperative Governance (2009:8-70), a hands-on assessment of every municipality in the country was done. The following major problem areas were identified and examined, namely governance, financial management, service delivery and labour relations.

- **Governance:** The evidence suggests that the political/administrative interface has resulted in polarisation and factionalism. There is conflict not only among political office bearers, but also between politicians and administrators. Furthermore, there is a lack of effective performance management systems and an increasing dereliction of oversight duties. The inter-governmental relations system has been unable to coordinate planning effectively across the three spheres of government.



- **Financial management:** There is poor financial management and lack of control and accountability systems at the majority of municipalities, resulting in an increase in fraud, corruption, and the misuse of municipal assets and funds. Factors that impact negatively on the financial viability of municipalities are the enforcement of debt collection, an increase in aged debts, a high number of indigents, and the culture of non-payment.
- **Service delivery:** Service delivery backlogs are increasing to such an extent that government may not be able to meet the 2014 Millennium Development Goals. Sufficient funds are not available to eradicate infrastructure backlogs. The mismanagement and inappropriate use of Municipal Infrastructure Grants (MIG) is also a serious challenge.
- **Labour relations:** The current municipal environment is not an attractive proposition. The current human resource management systems are not conducive to attracting and retaining skilled staff that is required to ensure effective service delivery. Furthermore, politicians are interfering in the recruitment and appointment processes. Non-compliance with work place obligations has also been identified as a challenge.

In an attempt to address the above-mentioned challenges, the South African Government developed a framework in 2009, known as the Local Government Turn-around Strategy (LGTAS), which is discussed in the next section.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT TURN-AROUND STRATEGY (LGTAS)

In 2009, the Department of Cooperative Governance (COG), concluded after an analysis of service delivery by municipalities, that this sphere of local government is in distress and that a turn-around strategy is needed (Oberholzer 2012:1). Some of the reasons why the LGTAS were introduced include the weaknesses in the local government model, policy and legislative factors, politics, poor monitoring systems, lack of capacity and skills, and a weak inter-governmental support system (COG 2009:4). The aims of the LGTAS are firstly, to restore the confidence of the public in municipalities as the primary expression of the developmental state in the local sphere and to rebuild and improve the basic requirements for a functional, responsive, accountable, effective and efficient local government system. This strategy is based on the realisation that the *one size fits all* approach to local government is not successful. Every municipality faces different social and economic conditions, and has different performance levels and support needs. In the light of this, each municipality must develop, within the parameters of the national strategy, its own turn-around strategy in order to allow for a more segmented and differentiated approach to address challenges. Government is realising that the challenges in local government are both a result of internal factors within the direct control of municipalities, as well as external factors over which municipalities do not have much control (SALGA 2012).

The internal factors relate to issues such as quality of decision-making by municipal councillors, quality of appointments, transparency in the tender and procurement systems, and levels of financial management and accountability. The external factors relate to the revenue base and income generation potential, inappropriate legislation and regulation,

Table 1: LGTAS intervention framework

Intervention	Issues
Service delivery	Improved planning, resource allocation.
Governance	Improved coordination, intergovernmental systems, monitoring and control, improved ward committee functionality.
Spatial conditions	Redress spatial imbalances of the past.
LED	Local and regional economic assessments, support.
Labour relations	Improve relations, monitor relations and revive the local labour forum (LLF).

Source: COG (2009:42).

demographic trends, macro and micro economic conditions, undue interference by political parties, weaknesses in national policy, oversight and intergovernmental relations (SALGA 2012:1-4).

COG (2009:23) identified key thematic intervention focus areas of concern; these areas formed the basis of the LGTAS. These areas include service delivery, spatial conditions, governance, financial management, LED and labour relations. Table 1 is a summary of the focus areas for intervention.

In addition to the intervention focus areas, the five key strategic objectives of the LGTAS are:

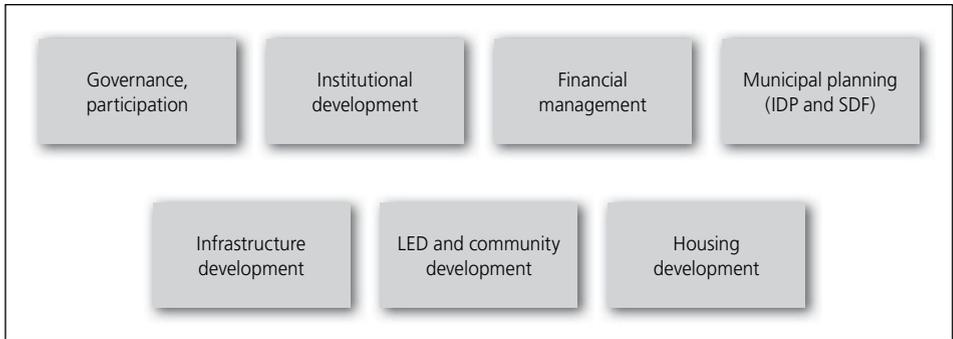
- Ensure that municipalities meet basic needs of communities – It is important to develop appropriate processes and systems within municipalities to accelerate quality service delivery.
- Build clean, responsive and accountable local government – This implies that appropriate systems, structures and procedures are not only developed, but also enforced to deal with corruption and maladministration.
- Improve functionality, performance and professionalism in municipalities – Core administrative and institutional systems must be in place and operational to improve performance.
- Improve national and provincial policy, support and oversight to local government.
- Strengthen partnerships between local government, communities and civil society (COG 2009:28).

Since the compilation of the LGTAS in 2009, the strategy was updated in 2011 and certain issues were re-prioritised. Some of the 2011 priorities of the LGTAS include the following (SALGA 2012:2-3):

- infrastructure backlogs should be reduced significantly
- all citizens must have access to affordable basic services;
- all informal settlements should be formalised;
- clean cities through effective waste management; and
- a single election for all three spheres of government (advantages include one financial year, single public service, and aligned planning and budgeting frameworks).



Figure 1: LGTAS focus areas for interventions



Source: COG (2010:9).

The implementation of this framework provides the country with an opportunity to work together in improving municipal performance. In 2010, COG released an implementation plan regarding the LGTAS. The main implementation activities included institutional strengthening, resource mobilisation, partnership formation with stakeholders, overall support and monitoring, and reporting (COG 2010:5). Focus areas, as identified, are indicated in Figure 1.

Certain authors hold the view that while the LGTAS cannot be faulted, it is the successful implementation thereof that is still in doubt (Venter & Landsberg 2011:151). In general, the LGTAS process has achieved limited success since 2009, and according to Oberholzer (2012:2), the reasons for the lack of impact include:

- lack of skills, capacity, financial sustainability and commitment within local government to facilitate interventions;
- lack of allocated funding to implement interventions;
- challenges within COGTAs own structures;
- lack of effective support and coordination by national and provincial government;
- focus on finding quick solutions and achieving compliance with minimum requirements, rather than developing a long-term sustainable solution;
- political instability; and
- transformation intervention fatigue.

In view of the above-listed shortcomings, it was decided to test the level of successful implementation by means of a case study. The case study is discussed in the next section in order to determine the extent to which the LGTAS has been implemented at the FDDM.

THE CASE OF FEZILE DABI DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY (FDDM)

The Fezile Dabi District Municipality consists of four local municipalities, namely Mafube Local Municipality, Metsimaholo Local Municipality, Moqhaka Local Municipality and Ngwathe Local Municipality. The study area is also known as the northern Free State region, and is located south of the Vaal River and Sedibeng District Municipality in southern Gauteng. The FDDM has its institutional head-office in Sasolburg (Meyer 2013:179).

Table 2: Fezile Dabi District Municipality: Monitoring and evaluation report: Financial years 2011/2012 and 2012/2013

Key intervention focus areas	Evaluation for 2011/2012	Evaluation for 2012/2013
Improved access to basic services/ infrastructure development	The district municipality does not provide basic services, but needs to assist the local municipalities and ensure regional bulk master planning. However, provision has not been made in the budget of the district municipality.	No provision in the budget for master planning.
Financial management	Municipality received an unqualified audit report and municipality is financially sound. Asset management has been implemented. SCM policies are in place and are implemented. Salaries contribute 47% of the total budget.	Municipality received an unqualified report
Good governance	A community participation strategy is implemented. An IGR forum exists but poorly attended by local municipalities. An anti-corruption policy was developed but needs to be implemented.	The IGR forum attendance by local municipalities still remains poor. The anti-corruption policy has not been implemented yet.
Municipal planning	The IDP process and document is formulated in-house. The IDP is not aligned with the provincial policies and national policies. The IDP is also not fully aligned with the SDBIP or budget. Public participation was limited as part of the IDP process. The disaster management plan is part of the IDP. A detailed risk assessment plan is still required.	FDDM has not yet developed a simplified IDP. The IDP is also not fully aligned with the SDBIP or budget. A detailed risk assessment plan is in place.
LED and community development	A comprehensive LED strategy does not exist and the LED unit lacks capacity.	A comprehensive LED Strategy has been developed and approved. The LED unit still lacks capacity.
Institutional development	Organisational performance management system in place for job level 1 – 3. A planning unit does not exist.	Organisational performance management system in place for job level 4-7. A planning unit has been established. Vacancy of critical position (Director Technical Services) since October 2012.

Source: COG (2012; 2013)

Due to the limited extent of this article, only the LGTAS for Fezile Dabi District Municipality will be analysed. The Department of COG, Free State province, is tasked to monitor the LGTAS in the Free State, of which the study area forms part. All of the areas of intervention, as listed in Figure 1, were discussed in various commissions. Some of the issues highlighted by COGTA in its monitoring and evaluation reports for FDDM for the financial years 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 are listed in Table 2.

Additional issues that were highlighted for further action include:

- the district municipality must assist the local municipalities in its jurisdiction with financial management; and
- critical positions must be filled on time.

Criticism regarding the evaluation process includes the manner in which the evaluation was done by COG and creates the impression that it was done for compliance purposes only. An in-depth comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by FDDM is lacking. The focus is more on policies and systems that have to be in place than on the impact thereof on municipal performance. No concrete remedial action is proposed, which in essence defeats the purpose of the LGTAS, namely to improve municipal performance (Venter 2014).

FDDM is convening LGTAS forum meetings quarterly. The *modus operandi* of the forum is based on two levels. Firstly, presentations are made by all four local municipalities as well as FDDM on the implementation of their respective turn-around strategies. Second, sector departments make presentations on their support to local government. However, these forum meetings do not interrogate the impact of the proposed corrective measures or remedial action. This could be attributed largely to the fact that top managers delegate officials to attend the forum meetings and present the reports on their behalf. Thus, the LGTAS forum is reduced to a platform where presentations are made for only note taking, without reflecting on a clear strategic direction and a clear set of objectives and programmes to achieve the intended objectives of LGTAS (Hlapolosa 2014).

In addition, effective monitoring mechanisms by COG are lacking. The reports, serving at the LGTAS forum meetings, have to be submitted to COG for inputs. To date, no feedback on these reports have been received (Hlapolosa 2014). It can be argued that the LGTAS is being regarded by FDDM as yet another transformation intervention and, therefore, it is not fully integrated into the planning activities of the municipality. A number of key lessons can be learned from the FDDM experience.

SOLUTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF LGTAS

The following solutions are listed for improved implementation of the LGTAS or a similar or revised strategy.

Strong leadership

Strong visionary leadership (political and administrative) is required for the successful implementation of the LGTAS. Improved coordination between political and administrative sections is required. Municipal leaders must be able not only to take ownership of the

process, but also to drive the process. Lack of strong leadership provides for goal ambiguity, poor communication and lack of coordination (Bastani 1998:40; Oberholzer 2012:3).

Strategic planning

The implementation of the LGTAS in municipalities requires flexibility and strategic vision. The highly mobile internal and external environments, as well as increasing pressure to make optimal use of scarce resources, make thorough planning and management at the strategic level very important (Du Toit *et al.* 1998:221). Strategic planning, within the context of LGTAS, is the process by which a municipality envisions the outcome of the LGTAS and develops the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that outcome. Strategies must be holistic and integrated, and in the local sphere should start with the IDP. It should be ensured that all processes are aligned and focused on the overall vision and key priorities of the IDP (Oberholzer 2012:3).

Skills and capacity building

The turn-around strategy must be sustainable. This could only occur if skills and capacity-building programmes accompany transformation. Such programmes must be implemented at all spheres of government, and at local communities (Oberholzer 2012:5).

Batho Pele principles

Public officials must realise that public service is about serving the local communities, with service delivery and consumer care at the forefront. Innovative service delivery methods should be rewarded, and infrastructure backlogs must be eradicated with all efforts made to provide the basic needs of people (Oberholzer 2012:3).

Implementation capacity

Capacity refers to the structural, functional and cultural ability of institutions to implement policies and strategies. Successful implementation depends on both tangible aspects such as human, financial, material, technological, etc. and intangible capacity such as leadership, motivation, commitment, willingness, endurance, etc. (Brynard 2005:19).

Process approach

An appropriate approach to the implementation of the LGTAS requires a process approach to decision-making and management. This means decision-making should be regarded as a process that develops over time, rather than an event that happens only at specific times. Accepting the process approach as the basic principle for the implementation of transformation interventions helps to lessen frustrations generally associated with such interventions. It also allows for performance with more realistic expectations (Bastani 1998:49).



Performance management

A turn-around strategy does not have much worth if the performance of officials involved in the implementation is not monitored. A high degree of accountability is therefore of importance. Performance management must be linked to the rewards of excellence. An integral part of performance management is monitor and evaluation, with financial risk management (Oberholzer 2012:3).

Outcome based approach

In line with central government's outcome based approach, local government turn-around strategies should also be outcomes based. Outcomes of a strategy must focus on the key priorities of the IDP, with the ultimate aim to satisfy the needs of citizens and to improve quality of life for all (Oberholzer 2012:5).

Cooperation and partnerships

Internal and external cooperation and partnership formation is required. Partnerships through participation are needed with local business and communities for mutual support and collaboration between local municipalities is required, to ensure economies of scale and shared best practices (Oberholzer 2012:3)

In the 2011 World Economic Forum (WEF) report called *The Future of Government* it is stated that governments must transform themselves into FAST (Flatter, Agile, Streamlined, Tech-enabled) governments. The report confirms some of the lessons listed such as increase citizen engagement, administrative efficiency, decentralised decision making, a highly skilled workforce with capacity, a reduction in the size of the workforce, and an innovative support structure (WEF 2011:12).

CONCLUSION

The LGTAS initiative was introduced in 2009 because of the poor performance of municipalities in general in South Africa. The poor performance of municipalities have continued and the situation has even worsened since the introduction of the LGTAS. The LGTAS has not achieved its goals regarding the turn-around and transformation of local government, especially regarding service delivery, capacity building, and LED implementation.

The study area, FDDM, which was used as the case study, confirms this situation. The LGTAS has not made a real impact on the improved functioning of the district municipality. Due to the fact that the strategy has not made a real impact, it is now required to re-formulate the strategy. Local government still needs to be transformed into optimally functional entities that could implement their mandates. A revitalised strategy needs to include aspects as listed in the solutions section of this article. In closure, any new strategy needs acceptance and implementation by motivated and committed officials for success.

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