



Responsive and Responsible Local Government: An Introduction

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About the Book

This book is a platform for a conversation about what it means to build a responsive and responsible government at the local level in South Africa and beyond. It is meant to provoke a debate and discussion about what purpose is served by a responsive and responsible local government; how it conducts governance and planning; how it handles politics and political power dynamics that are constantly changing; and what administrative and technical processes constitute local administration under these conditions. The book is a forum of various voices informed by different theoretical, ideological and scientific purviews joined together by the intention to understand the conditions and factors that impinge on responsiveness and responsibility of local government.

The book is made up of papers first presented at the 21st National Conference of the South African Association of Public Administration and Management (SAAPAM) in 2022, but these were revised and redrafted in line with the rationale of this book. The chapters are sequenced such that there is a logical and broad thematic flow in the conversations and discussions contained in the book. An attempt was made to ensure that there is no undue overlap, duplication, and redundancy in the discussion.

Responsible and Responsive Local Governance

The framing idea behind the book is responsive and responsible governance at the local government level in South Africa and beyond. The reason why it was important to frame a discussion of this nature is that the literature and discussions on local government can become trapped in various calabashes of thought with little crosspollination of thought and talk across them. The reality of local government is that the calabashes

of local politics/power dynamics, local economic development, local service delivery, efficiency of government (including audits), intergovernmental relations and so forth are incompletely understood when divorced from each other. Discussed apart from one another, these thematic areas can only explain local government dynamics, but when they form connected strands in a collective discussion, they have much to explain about why the goal of a developmental local government remains elusive.

South Africa is among those African countries that signaled a commitment to move in the direction of a democratic developmental state. This is a type and form of the state that in its intentions, plans, programmes, values, principles, processes, conduct and outcomes relates governance to the improved quality of lives of its people. It is therefore a state that is interventionist in the sense that it is willing to intervene in the economy and society in general in order to direct society towards sound development outcomes. It is developmental and democratic in the sense that the improvement in the quality of lives that citizens increasingly experience is accompanied by their improved democratic experience. It has already been well-established that because of its proximity to local communities or the people on the ground, local government is the centre in the process of building this type of state.

As Minister Nkadimeng says in the foreword to this book, there was a constitutional imperative for the post-apartheid government to place at the centre the task of improving the quality of life of all citizens and freeing the potential of each person to become a fully empowered and useful citizen in the building of prosperous society. Local government is responsive when it seeks to meet this aspiration, when it responds to the best of advice and evidence available in this direction, and when it conducts itself with the view to become developmental and democratic in the full sense of these words. It is responsible when it builds a healthy relationship with citizens on the ground, with other local governments and with governments above local level. A responsive and responsible government understands that development outcomes determine whether they are successful or not.

Chapter Outline

Chapters in this book show that there are occasions where this imperative is understood, but there are times where it seems this is not always understood. The chapters give some of the key factors that explain these experiences with local government in South Africa. They provide, on the basis of empirical evidence, sometimes conceptual exploration and at times even theoretical exposition, a basis for understanding what impedes the building of a developmental and democratic local government and what might be needed in an incremental process of building in the direction of responsive and responsible local government.

In Chapter two, Rasodi Manyaka frames the discussion by tackling the question, what exactly does a responsive local governance entail? It responds by exploring the developmental