

## Responsive Local Governance and Administration: The Case of Sekhukhune District Municipality

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South African municipalities have a moral and legal obligation to involve local communities in determining, prioritising, and realising socio-economic development needs. This study explores the importance of local structures' participation and involvement to improve service delivery for development enhancement. The focus is on the involvement of non-governmental organisations, traditional leaders, local municipalities, and business sectors in the Sekhukhune District Municipality. The aim is to explore the importance of the participation of these structures in improving service delivery at the local level. Phenomenological and descriptive methods are used embracing a purposive non-probability non-statistical sampling procedure. An Atlas TI software program was used for data analysis. The article postulates that due to lack of resources and coordination among the local structures, development is compromised while service delivery is collapsing. It is envisaged that more resources need to be mobilised and local structures well coordinated. This study addresses the policy gap on local government through the involvement of local structures on the development initiatives through participatory democracy. The study makes a meaningful contribution to the body of knowledge on the realisation of the importance of participation and involvement of the local structures in development as the cornerstone of local government.

**Keywords:** Participation, Governance, Responsiveness, Accountability, Local economic development, Service delivery.

### Introduction

In many democracies, governance is generally taken to encompass three sectors, namely, the business sector (also referred to as the private sector), the government, and civil society that comprises interest groups, community-based organisations (CBOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-profit organisations (NPOs). By placing local structures at the centre of local economic development and prescribing their involvement in service delivery, the intention is to improve infrastructure development as a

key process of local economic development. The rationale for this paper is built on the South African Local Government Association's (SALGA) 2016 reminder that the South African Constitution (1996) envisioned local administrations playing a developmental role by being an instrument of effective and responsive service delivery to deliver improved wellbeing to the citizenry. The essence of every government is to be responsive to the needs and expectations of the people. The United Nations Development Programme observes that without the full involvement of major stakeholders and beneficiaries (inclusive of civil society) in design and implementation, programmes will not be effectively and efficiently delivered. This implies that public sector governance, especially at the local level, ought to be engineered to be responsive and representative, if it is to deliver the promise of service delivery.

This study reflects on the findings of an empirical survey undertaken at the Sekhukhune Municipalities in South Africa to identify the extent to which the socio-economic development process at the Municipality is responsive to the needs and population participation of local stakeholders, as envisaged in the 1996 Constitution and related legislation. It covers the following aspects in the discussion: literature review, theoretical implications of social structure, methodological perspectives, analysis and discussion of results, recommendations and conclusions.

## **Local Governance: A Context**

Local administrations in South Africa consist of eight metropolitans, 44 districts and 205 local municipalities. There are significant disparities between these municipalities: they range from world-class, high-capacity metropolitan municipalities to deep rural, sometimes almost dysfunctional, local municipalities. The mandate of local government in South Africa is captured in section 152(1) of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which states that the objectives of local government are:

1. To provide democratic and accountable government for local communities.
2. To ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner.
3. To promote social and economic development.
4. To promote a safe and healthy environment.
5. To encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.

In effect, section 152 of the Constitution stipulates that local governments should promote social and economic development of their local communities (RSA 1996). This is in line with the developmental role envisaged for municipalities in the Development