

3

South Africa's Municipal Planning and Implementation in the Context of Covid-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Prospects

Kagiso I Makalela and John N Molepo
University of Mpumalanga

This article aims to evaluate the planning and implementation of municipal programmes during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa. South Africa's post-apartheid government entrusted the planning and implementation of its multifaceted delivery of services at the municipal level. It is prevalent that almost all South African municipalities are still plagued by a plethora of challenges pertaining to service delivery. Moreover, the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic continued to negatively affect municipal plans and implementation. It is pragmatically evident that in many parts of the country, the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented socio-economic and governance conundrums reverberating across various municipalities. The article argues that the implementation of the national State of Disaster declaration due to Covid-19 resulted in municipal planning fragmentations, and perpetuated service delivery backlogs in many municipalities. The local sphere of government remains an important role player in ensuring the effective delivery of services and basic infrastructures. The developmental role accorded to local government requires adequate administrative capacity and the implementation of sound strategic tools. However, almost all South African municipalities had difficulty primarily in delivering expected services to service delivery beneficiaries because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The advent of Covid-19 propagated unrelenting and ineffective planning and implementation at the local level. To this end, the Covid-19 protocols and regulations contributed deleteriously to planning and implementation fragments. Important to note, this article follows a conceptual approach using literature to substantiate the argument. The article concludes by proposing crises-driven innovation and measures to ameliorate planning and implementation conundrums at the local level amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Covid-19, Integrated development plans, Lockdown, Backlogs, Planning, Virtual project teams.

Introduction

The development role of local municipalities came under the spotlight due to the unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Important to note is the fact that an ample of municipalities around the world undertook a wide range of strategies

to halt the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Amid the constitutional mandate of the local government to deliver services, municipalities are also expected to respond swiftly to the emergence of pandemics. The latter is because the local government is considered the delivery arm of the state, in close contact with service delivery beneficiaries. In this instance, municipalities are at the forefront in machinating control measures emanating from the socio-economic and planning fragmentations perpetuated by the fallout in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (Dutta & Fischer, 2021). The local sphere of government remains to play a prominent role in ensuring effective service delivery and basic infrastructure. However, it is clear that the developmental role accorded to the local government is still far from being unobtrusive as the lack of administrative capacity and implementation of sound strategies remains a scorching concern. As evident, many local municipalities have been struggling to produce credible planning and implementation of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) even prior Covid-19 pandemic, and that resulted in unrelenting service delivery upheavals and backlogs (Asha & Makalela, 2020). In fact, poor services such as water, electricity, sanitation, and refuse removal continue to characterise almost all South African municipalities. These municipalities had difficulties primarily in delivering expected services to communities (Dikotla, Mahlatji & Makgahlela, 2014). Consequently, as part of the output of the delivery agreement mandated the Department of Cooperative Governance to develop and implement a differentiated approach to municipal financing, support, planning, and forecasting. Municipalities are required to develop focused interventions that respond to and keep abreast of contemporary issues (Talabis, Babierra, Buhat, Lutero, Quindala & Rabajante, 2021). Based on several considerations, the local government must be at the forefront of tackling the Covid-19 pandemic. Local governments are institutions that directly serve local communities, and local governments are aware of the characteristics of local communities (Herdiana, Mukhlis & Madya, 2020). However, the nature and the unexplored magnitude of planning and implementation in the context of Covid-19 necessitated a conceptual approach. To this end, the article focuses on document analysis to derive and support arguments.

Problem Statement

Before the advent and spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, the state of South Africa's municipalities was already in a quandary. Many municipalities had already lined up a list of priorities for implementation. The latter is notwithstanding the unrelenting challenges of load shedding, rampant corruption, and the precipitous increase in the cost of living, fuel and tariff hikes, dilapidated infrastructure, collapsing of state owned enterprises, poverty, and municipal service delivery backlogs, among others. Covid-19 contributed deleteriously to the existing challenges, and further forced every government to rethink its priorities (Gaspar, Lam & Raissi, 2020). Is it clear that Covid-19 disrupted service delivery planning and implementation. Therefore, the latter necessitates an effective government response. The article puts forward a comprehensive model for disaster