



Research Article

A REVIEW OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA: TOWARDS DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT

South Africa can be referred to as a thriving democracy with explicit separation of powers between the legislative (national and provincial parliaments, including municipal councils), executive (national and provincial cabinets, including municipal councils), and judicial authorities. Its governance landscape has been transformed into three different spheres of government including national, provincial, and local governments executing their respective constitutional mandates in the spirit of cooperative governance. This paper reviews local governance with a focus on the agenda of developmental local government. Although not an empirical paper, the interrogation of various policies and relevant literature serves to paint a picture of how development local government was to have been interpreted and what needed to be done to incorporate the principles into local government strategy and governance.

While the paper presents a review of the five epochs, it does not pretend to provide full historiography relating to the topic, since this would have lengthened the paper very much. Thus, only a brief overview of local government issues of historical importance is provided, although insight into these historical issues provides a bigger picture of the local authorities. Particular focus is placed on the conceptualization of the terms 'local government' and 'system', including the nature of local government as a political institution as well the vision it seeks to realize.

Keywords:

Local government;
Development agenda;
Municipal government;
South Africa

Abbreviations: NIL



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INTRODUCTION

The legitimacy of public legitimacy depends mainly on its congruence with the supreme law, the Constitution (the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996) which articulates critical defining features of any policy directive in the country. These include a democratic system of government, unitary and federal states, separation of powers, and the power of the Constitutional Court. A clear understanding of these features is critical as they often shape the (public) institutions' approach to policy or strategy-making processes (Sturm, 2016).

South Africa resembles a paradoxical case of a federal system in a unitarian state (Wright, 2014; Hlophe, 2013). This paradox became a contentious subject during the negotiations from the oppressive system of apartheid to a free and democratic South Africa (Govender, 2012). There was no win-win situation as there is no single precept of policy describing South Africa either as a unitary or federal state system (Schwella, 2016). Some scholars attribute such omissions as deliberate and intelligibly concealed fear by those who led the negotiated settlement, involving the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC),

to combat fragmented development resembling the old apartheid regime (Schwella, 2016). Thus, governance in South Africa portrays features of both unitarism and federalism (Hlophe, 2017; Wright, 2014). In practice, the country is predominately unitary, strongly characterized by elements of federalism provided for in its supreme law, the Constitution (Schwella, 2016). According to Wright (2014), the elements of federalism are not enough to be the determining factor of government'.

South Africa can also be referred to as a thriving democracy and its governance landscape has been transformed into independent spheres of government with national, provincial, and local governments executing their respective constitutional mandates as part of cooperative governance (Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation [DPME], 2014).

According to Section 153 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, municipalities have both basic service delivery and developmental duties. Both the White Paper on Local Government (1998) and the Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP) envision a local government that is people-driven and developmental in nature (DPLG, 1998; ANC, 1994). In pursuit of a developmental mandate, a municipality is required to look beyond service delivery, but devise means of social embeddedness wherein local citizens play an active role in findings ways towards socio-economic development (DPLG, 1998).

Since the developmental trajectories followed are often determined by national realities and institutional arrangements characterizing the nations concerned, the South African vision of a developmental local government is defined by the following key features: maximization of social development and economic growth, development policy integration, and coordination, the democratization of development, empowerment, and redistribution including special provision for quality leadership (state-led) and continuous learning (DPLG, 1998). Furthermore, the policymakers seemed to have discerned future institutional capacity deficiencies, and then changed the upper spheres of government, to 'support and strengthen the capacity of municipalities' to execute their constitutional mandates as purported in Section 154.

South Africa, like the rest of Africa, is affected by the colonial past – especially its past unique vision of separate development or segregation. To understand the actual impact of colonialism on the vision of establishing a developmental state, it important to, at least, make succinct reference to the critical epochs that the country has gone through.

In light of the above, this paper traces the evolution of local government with a particular focus on the five epochs, namely, the colonial period, including the Dutch rule (1652 to 1795) and the British rule (1795-1910), the Union of South Africa (1910-1948), apartheid rule (1948-1993/4), and post-apartheid local government (1993/4 to date). Although each epoch brought a distinct feature to local governance in South Africa, the structural form of local government itself did not change much.

While the paper presents a review of the five epochs, it does not pretend to provide full historiography relating to the topic, since this would have lengthened the paper very much. Thus, only a brief overview of local government issues of historical importance is provided, although insight into these historical issues provides a bigger picture of the local authorities. Particular focus is placed on the conceptualization of the terms 'local government' and 'system', including the nature of local government as a political institution as well the vision it seeks to realize. Without an understanding of these critical issues, i.e. the nature of the organization,

its vision, and the context under which it operates and the practice of strategy, a discussion will be merely philosophical and utterly meaningless in practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa advocates for a local government that is developmental and (self-) sustainable, facilitating social-economic development in a safe and healthy environment with a special provision for participatory democracy. These are the underlying local government rules or normative guidelines that should not be confused with party politics or restricted to finite political terms since politicians or policymakers come and go (Fukuyama, 2015), although the municipality and its constitutional mandate (rule of law) and governance principles (accountability or democracy) are perpetual.

Local government as a system generates a need to firstly, understand what constitutes a system. In this regard, there are two key features of a system involving varied, but interdependent 'elements' (Carayannis, Campbell & Rehman, 2016:4). Such elements do not operate in silos, but as integral components of a whole, as they are organized, grouped, or integrated such that together, they work interdependently towards a predetermined goal (Gharajedaghi, 2011). For example, the Municipal Systems Act (2000) describes a local government system as involving active community participation in governance; i.e. planning, service delivery, and overall municipal performance.

According to Sajja (2017:2), a system is '...a ubiquitous phenomenon ... [found] everywhere... yield[ing] qualitative results'. However, the notion of ubiquity is subject to the municipal boundaries; that is, a municipal system is everywhere within its demarcated jurisdiction as predetermined by the relevant demarcation authorities. The ubiquitous nature of a system is therefore determined by its context.

The Green Paper on Local Government (1997) introduced a vision of local government in South Africa as a developmental local government system. The conceptualization of this vision prioritizes the meaning of 'developmental' and what 'local government' must do, ignoring the word 'system'. Figure 1 provides a succinct depiction of an ideal local government system, especially in relation to its environment.

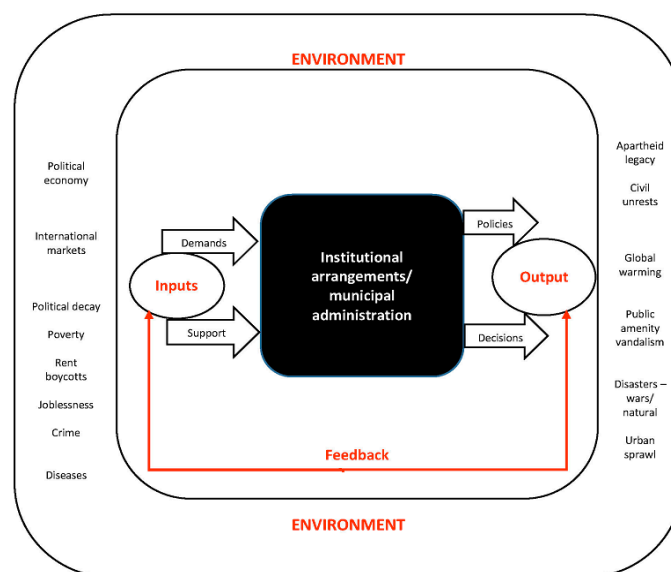


Figure 1: Generic components of the municipal system

Source: Adapted from Sajja, 2017:3

Figure 1 illustrates a plethora of environmental issues, from the international political economy to the emergent culture of non-payment of municipal services (rent boycott), affecting local governance. Environmental issues enter the municipal system either as demands (service delivery consequences of urban sprawl) or as the cancellation of municipal debt due to increasing unemployment. On the other hand, good governance and general political stability may stimulate local investment as a form of support. However, whether inputs enter a system as demands or forms of support depends solely on the institutional capacity to process them such that decisions are taken, or policies adopted, give positive feedback.

Towards the successful implementation of strategy, there should be synergy between strategy and organizational structure (Kavale, 2012; Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008; Rehman et al., 2019) and to begin with, understanding local government as a political institution. In a generic sense, political institutions too, "... are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction" (North, 1990). From this succinct definition, key features of an institution are traceable. According to North (1990), there three major factors characterizing political institutions. Firstly, these institutions do not exist in a vacuum, but 'in a society'. Secondly, they are 'humanly devised', thus acknowledging the significance of the human factor in organizations, and primary actors in government institutions could include the electorate, politicians, and public functionaries. Thirdly, they 'are the rules of the game'; this simply refers to the normative guidelines for human interaction. Key features here include humanly devised issues (contrasting with environmental factors) that are messy, dictating the rules of the game, and setting constraints on human behavior (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2008). In society, human devices and the rules of the game need to be observed in decision-making and the implementation thereof, as these are the basics of politics in general or political institutions per se.

Easton's definition of politics as the "authoritative allocation of values" (in Das, 2014:20) typifies what local government does within its jurisdiction area. In terms of the constitutional provisions, none of the three spheres of government may encroach into the jurisdiction area or functional integrity of the other. Thus, the autonomy of each other is respected, but this does not exclude obligatory support to the municipalities by both provincial and national spheres.

Political institutions do not emerge and evolve at the discretion of individual political leaders but in response to the collective needs of the electorate (Busetti, 2015). In South Africa, these institutions are bestowed with the authority to formulate, enforce, and apply laws (RSA Constitution, 1996). Significantly, local government is established as the third sphere, after national and provincial spheres respectively, specifically as the lowest (hierarchically) tier of governance systems, which is envisaged to be "distinctive", but also "interdependent and interrelated", as outlined in Section 40(1) of the Constitution.

Chapter 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides for the establishment of the local sphere of government, with both executive and legislative powers vested in its council. This presents local government as a form of a decentralized governance system rather than a mere extended administrative arm of the other spheres – provincial and national (Community Law Centre, 2007). The power bestowed on municipalities needs to be defined as power or competence plays a significant role in realizing strategy (Gray, 2015). For example, the competence of municipalities in establishing a developmental local government needs scrutiny.

While the Constitution only explicates developmental duties or the role of local government involving proper structuring of institutional arrangements, basic services, social and economic as well as community, as outlined in Section 153 of the White Paper on Local Government (1998), it explains that a developmental local government means a local government “working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives”

The functional definition establishes the premise for a thorough understanding and analysis of the historical emergence, evolution, sustainability, or demise of (government) institutions. Munroe (2002:43) states that '[w]here the purpose is not known, abuse is inevitable'; it is, therefore, necessary to discuss purported functionality in terms of firstly, understanding that local government is a political institution; secondly, as a system (holistic approach in executing its mandate); and thirdly, as pursuing a particular (political) vision at a given time. In a democratic dispensation, a dominant theme in politics is service delivery – a topic often used closely with local government. This is not incorrect, since institutions are defined in terms of the nature of the services they offer or the visions they hold.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Municipal government is the third sphere of government, comprising municipalities established throughout the country. The SA Constitution further bestows executive and legislative powers to the Municipal Council to make decisions concerning the exercise of all the powers and the performance of all the functions of the municipality. As a democratic system, governance in South Africa is based on both the principles of participatory and representative democracies, basic freedoms of citizens as enshrined in the Bill of Rights, accountability, and transparency.

An analysis of the historical local government system is critical for understanding the development trajectory envisaged. However, Gray (2006:19) cautions that “[h]istory can never instruct policymakers as to what should be done, but a disciplined, policy science-filtered history should diminish the ease with which officials may seek intellectual comfort from simple and misleading isolated analogies” (Gray, 2006:19). What Gray postulates regarding history is elevated further in the White Paper on Local Government (1998) since it acknowledges the legacy of separate development (apartheid and colonialism) as one of the factors that guided the form of the current municipal institutions.

Since the South African local government system is traceable from both the colonial and apartheid epochs, the study presents a critical analysis of a vision that municipalities sought to achieve throughout the epochs under review. By this, the researcher(s) does/do not assume the role of historian, but instead the primary focus is on how the visions of the regimes of the day influenced local governance. Such an analysis of the transition from separate development to the desired future of establishing a developmental local government will help to unpack the relations between municipal strategies and the vision of developmental local authority.

The current municipal institutions emanate from historical factors involving colonialism and apartheid. Critical to this is the link between municipal strategy and vision over the years of separate development. Thus, understanding the past requires a little historical analysis to clarify local government origins and critical events that transformed it into the current form (Thornhill, 2014; Fourie, 2009). Its roots involve slavery and oppressive systems associated with both Dutch and British colonialism and apartheid rule in South Africa (Fourie, 2009). Slavery and

colonialism have had a significant bearing on the politics, social, economic, cultural, and geographical issues of local governance in the democratic dispensation.

The concept of the strategy remains a prominent feature in the evolution of local government in South Africa, and this became evident under colonization, apartheid, and democracy (current) as the paradigms of strategic intent during their respective dominance. This is because whatever the government of the day does, its political leadership and bureaucracy (at all levels and spheres) design their strategies and visions along with the dictates of a predominant world-view – colonialism, apartheid, and democracy. As will become evident from the discussion below, these paradigms, therefore, provide a solid foundation for the theory and practice of strategy within a local government system.

It is also imperative to understand that it became the norm for the Europeans, wherever they chose to settle and colonize, to develop "... institutions that protect property better than colonies where [they] did not settle" (Albouy, 2012:3059). It is on this basis that the local government was established in South Africa. As a matter of fact, almost all African government institutions resemble pre-colonial traditions and are now grappling with the colonial legacy (Bandyopadhyay & Green, 2012; Bradley, 2011; Bellucci, 2010).

Irrespective of whether the lens used to look at the precise origins are Afrocentric or Eurocentric, this paper gives attention to the local government system in its current form, meaning that the historical analysis takes the current form of local government into consideration, which constitutes a colonial legacy.

DUTCH RULE - 1652-1795

Municipalities in South Africa were established shortly after the settlement of Jan Van Riebeeck, captain of the ship of the Dutch East India Company (IDASA, 2012). History shows that local government in its current form was bequeathed to South Africa by the Dutch colonial rule (Tsatsire, Raga, Taylor & Nealer, 2009). Since only property owners, as sole property taxpayers, were allowed to participate in municipal election processes, local governance became elitist in nature (Tsatsire et al., 2009). This system of government not only alienated ordinary civilians in terms of franchise rights but in terms of the provision of basic services and such exclusion was deliberate and hence institutionalized.

The institutional arrangements of the newly established local authorities were archetypes of the Dutch East India Company, hereinafter referred to as the VOC – Vereenigde Geocroycerde Oos-Idiese (Lenel, 2002). Just like the VOC, the municipal service delivery machinery was designed to serve the interests of the colonizers. Under Dutch rule, the local authorities comprised a formidable team of magistrates (landdrosts) and (municipal) councillors (heemraden), who were appointed and charged with the responsibilities of overseeing the local government and administration of the newly established districts (Tsatsire et al., 2009). This demonstrates the seriousness attached to the quality of local government functionaries.

The political will or vision of the Dutch colonial powers was institutionalized through a municipality. It is imperative to highlight the fact that local authorities began as the first sphere of government to be established in South Africa as provincial and national districts emerged later. Although currently, it lies lowest in the hierarchical structure of government, after the national and provincial spheres (RSA Constitution), originally local government emerged as the most powerful government institution, bestowed with legislative, executive, and judicial

authorities. This implies that local government was the first sphere of government to be established in South Africa.

From the early years, human settlements became the centerpiece of local governance. The establishment of human settlements by Jan van Riebeeck and his associates was mainly to have a refreshment port strategically located between the Netherlands and India (Lenel, 2002). For this purpose, the Cape of Good Hope became one of the subsidiaries of the VOC.

As the white communities trekked inland from the Cape region, they established settlements that necessitated municipal services (Fourie, 2011). Settlements in the vicinity of the new subsidiary saw an immense increase in human activity and pressure for basic services (Fourie, 2011). This scenario imposed an inescapable need for formal governance structures to facilitate policy-making ideal for governing human interactions, internal institutional arrangements, and external relations – economic, political, religious, and cultural activities. The increase in human activity also implied more manpower was needed, and the obvious candidates were the indigenous peoples namely, the Khoi and the San, who were the first people found in Cape. The VOC had to import slaves from East Africa and Asia (IDASA, 2012). This also resulted in the arrival of the French Huguenots (1680) and many other immigrants from other parts of Europe (IDASA, 2012). This posed more human settlement challenges within the municipal area.

With the demands growing beyond supply in 1657-1795, Van Riebeeck extended the municipal boundaries by allowing some servants of the VOC 'to become free burgher farmers and begin the process of colonization' (Fourie, 2011:3). An over-concentration of human activity in the Cape of Good Hope, due to the arrival of other settlers (the French) and the slaves, distressed the first municipality in South Africa in terms of the provision of basic services. Although the genesis of local government in its current form (vested with executive and legislative powers) in South Africa is credited to the Dutch, it does not mean that there were no governance systems in the pre-colonial era.

Significantly, an exclusive feature of local government under the Dutch rule was its emergence as "the (local) government of the property owners by the property owners." It was the "government of the elites by the elites (magistrates)," but included the active involvement of the servants of the VOC in an agrarian economy, thus advancing the cause of colonization. The emergence of these farmers could be seen as an incentive of some sort as they were now relieved of their duties and control of the VOC and were freed as burger farmers. Significantly, a highly-skilled bureaucracy and incentives that seemed to characterize the Dutch Rule are critical in establishing a developmental local government. From the Dutch, the colonial scepter was handed to the British.

BRITISH RULE - 1795-1803 AND 1806-1910

Britain's rule was not a coincidence, but a well thought out external colonization agenda following the earlier treaty among European nation-states who sought to unite their continent and the royal policy, propagating the extension of European rule in other parts of the world, including South Africa (Calvert, 2001). Thus, the legislative system under British rule was just a tool to advance the interests of the Europeans and did not represent the indigenous people (Muiu, 2010).

This period was characterized by major activities at the port (Cape Town), causing complex governance issues involving the need to expropriate more land and the decentralization of political power to newly established districts (Muiu, 2010;

Tsatsire et al., 2009). This motivated the increased inland movement of white communities (Tsatsire et al., 2009). Under British rule more governance structures were established – including more local authorities and districts.

The early expropriation of land by colonizers became evident after the Cape of Good Hope started as a colony of Britain (1795), and colonization moved with speed inland (northwards). It was countered by the opposite expedition of the Nguni people (Xhosas) moving southwards. Despite this, the British Empire successfully established four additional colonies – Natal, Oranje Free State, and the Transvaal (Tsatsire et al., 2009).

Key features of British rule involved the adoption of strategies such as the expropriation of land, as the government grew beyond the one sphere of local government. Infact, the establishment of these four districts was the genesis of the provincial government, and later a central government was established under the auspices of the Union of South Africa (1910).

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA – 1910-1993/4

British rule was still intact during this era and it was only the structure of government that had changed since the Union of South Africa consolidated the British colonies (Natal, Oranje Free State, and Transvaal) under one umbrella (IDASA, 2012). The formation of the Union of South Africa completed the three spheres of government in their current form – national, provincial, and local. In South Africa, these spheres evolved bottom-up; from the Cape of Good Hope (local) to colonies (provincial governments), and the Union of South Africa (national). The national government was, therefore, the last sphere to be established.

The formation of a national government allowed the centralization of certain functions that used to be the competence of municipalities and later provinces. These included infrastructure, agriculture, land, and the macro-economic policy, amongst others (IDASA, 2012). Although the Union conferred civil and political opportunities to white communities in general, Africans were segregated further through the Natives Land Act of 1913 and the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 setting boundaries and restricting their movement. Since the land was now a national competence, municipalities had no choice but to administer discriminative policies.

The municipal governments, given their close proximity to the local citizens, faced major opposition to racial segregation. The Freedom Charter, a blueprint for an alternative government, was later adopted at the 1955 Congress of the People, in Kliptown (Mazibuko, 2017). The opponents of racial segregation were infuriated by the introduction of apartheid in 1948.

APARTHEID RULE – 1948 TO 1993/4

Apartheid was a form of intensified British rule as it mustered racial segregation. Subsequently, reversing spatial planning of apartheid and land reform in South Africa remains too complex for municipalities and other spheres of government (Berrisford, 2011). Though it became a dominant feature of apartheid rule, urban segregation was already intact a century before apartheid. This is according to Maylam (1995) who posits that municipalities such as Port Elizabeth (1855), East London (1849), and various Cape towns (including Cradock, Graaff-Reinet, and Grahamstown) issued urban policies pushing the non-whites to peripheries called locations or townships.

Service delivery followed patterns congruent with these establishments. That is, service-delivery followed the dictates of the segregation policy, and this included other critical governance issues including policy direction, leadership (representation), and institutional arrangements as seen during apartheid (1948-1994). Regarding a holistic analysis of apartheid rule, scholars and politicians unite on the issue of apartheid in South Africa as being a 'colonization of a special type' or internal colonialism (Sithole & Mathonsi, 2015; SACP, 2012). The focal point during this epoch was the implementation of the strategy of differential development, or divide and rule.

The apartheid regime introduced legislation propagating racial segregation called the Group Areas Act (Act 41 of 1950), segregating communities based on race and ethnical grouping. The oppressive system "sought to avoid a situation wherein wealthy white municipalities would have the burden of providing services to areas inhabited by black people" (Sithole & Mathonsi, 2015:11). According to Maylam (1995:24), the real reason was that urban segregation was defined in terms of a "sanitation syndrome...[which] explains urban segregation in terms of moral panic and racial hysteria, as whites increasingly came to associate the black urban presence with squalor, disease, and crime". In this way, the proponents of racial segregation would argue that it was for their own safety and hygiene that they had to be segregated.

To the antagonists of urban segregation, the very association of natives with 'squalor, disease and crime' amongst others triggered racial conflicts. To this effect, militant tendencies were launched by the African National Youth League (ANCYL) in the very first decade of apartheid (1940s), followed by the 1950s defiance campaigns, although they peacefully called for an alternative government as espoused in the Freedom Charter (1955). The 1960s was a decade of the armed struggle, the 1970s saw student uprisings, and the 1980s was an era of mass action and mobilization (Saunders, 2012).

Local communities continued to confront their socio-economic issues through political protests, broader consciousness, and the mobilization of people under the auspices of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) (Dolamo, 2017) and that offered some lessons towards establishing a developmental local government. The BCM emerged during the period following the political bannings and/or imprisonment of the leaders of the liberation movements such as the ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and the South African Communist Party (SACP), uniting black South Africans against their common enemies, apartheid and white supremacy (Dalomo, 2017). According to the pioneer of the black consciousness, Steve Biko:

"It is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time. Its essence is the realization by the black man of the need to rally with his brothers around the cause of their oppression – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It is based on a self-examination which has ultimately led them to believe that by seeking to run away from themselves and emulate the white man, they are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black" (cited in Dalomo, 2017:2).

This clarion call by Biko for political consciousness on the challenges facing society seems relevant in a free and democratic South Africa. While political consciousness and mass mobilization prepared local communities to devise their own means to resolve challenges, the aftermath of pro-democracy political activism planted the seed of civil disobedience. The current community protests are reminiscent of the

years of the defiance campaigns since similar to that era, municipal properties are being damaged, and a culture of non-payment for municipal services persists.

This legacy is crippling the democratic rule in South Africa and the ability of the current government to channel mass consciousness and mobilization to address the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, including new strategies other than protests, need to be explored. The challenge boils down to strategy-vision interactions.

Civil unrest is not a characteristic unique to South Africa, since, in recent years, similar discourses have been taking place elsewhere, especially in the Arab counties. The social uprising, known as the 'Arab Spring', predominantly stemmed from distressing socio-economic issues such as 'economic deterioration and government corruption' (Salih, 2011:186-187). These upraising in countries such as Syria, Yemen, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, amongst others, invoked varied tactics of violent conflict, including mass protests leading to the dethroning of political authorities in some instances (Salam, 2015; Salih, 2011). The aforementioned study notes how the Arab Spring impacted the governance of countries involved and congruencies between issues causing the dysfunction of municipalities in South Africa and the Arab countries. Of major interest in this study is how distress issues can escalate to political decay in the long run, impacting negatively on the vision of the government of the day. This is the challenge facing the democratic rule in South Africa.

DEMOCRATIC RULE – 1994 TO DATE

With reference to the local government, democratic rule began a year earlier than the actual dawn of democracy in 1994. The Green Paper on Local Government (1997) classifies the period between 1993 and 1999 as the transition from apartheid to democratic local government rule. According to the Green Paper, the emphasis was placed on the 'de-racialization and democratization' of municipalities established under apartheid rule.

Since the Constitution of the country was not yet adopted, the Freedom Charter, the Reconstruction and Development Programme, and the Botshabelo Housing Accord (1993) provided normative guidelines on the framework and principles of sustainable development underpinning the new system of local government (SAHRC, 2015). As was the case during the colonial and apartheid eras, the human settlement was given high priority.

The human settlement became the essence of the Botshabelo Housing Accord (1994), signed by housing stakeholders on the outskirts of Bloemfontein, namely, Botshabelo, which is now incorporated into Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. At the signing of this Accord, the then Minister of Housing, Joe Slovo (1994) outlined the government's intention as,

"...the establishment of viable, socially and economically integrated communities which are situated in areas allowing convenient access to economic opportunities, health, educational and social amenities and within which South Africa's people will have access on a progressive basis to a permanent residential structure with secure tenure, ensuring privacy and providing adequate protection against the elements; portable water and adequate sanitary facilities including waste disposal and domestic electricity supply" (cited in SAHRC, 2015).

These noble ideas of Slovo and others had to be part of the agenda for negotiating an alternative local government system. As part of the negotiations during the local government transition, the Local Government Transition Act (LGTA) was

established in 1993, prescribing the three phases of local government reform; pre-interim (local forums, temporary councils until municipal elections); interim phase (between municipal elections in 1995/96 to 1999); and final stage, when a new local government system focusing on developmental local government could be established (Koma, 2012).

Mufamadi (2005:1) defines the post-apartheid South African local government system as the one wherein a great sense of “care was taken to ensure ...a framework for progressively doing away with the consequences of a system which exposed White and Black South Africans to vastly different socio-economic environments”. To this effect, there is no dispute about the improved living standard of South Africans since the dawn of democracy (1994) – especially regarding basic service delivery as espoused in the Bill of Rights (CoGTA, 2014, Cronje, 2014), although the challenge is the sustainability of such improvements, including overcoming institutional capacity problems.

There are varied opinions on the root causes of local government problems threatening its sustainability. In its self-diagnosis, the government concedes that 'institutional capacity [including lack of requisite skills, corruption] and widespread poverty' are its fierce adversaries (CoGTA, 2014:5). This conclusion magnifies the earlier argument by Mufamadi (2005) on the need to develop the municipal capacity to overcome poverty and underdevelopment in South Africa. These government challenges, institutional capacity, and poverty, also became the focal points of the local government turnaround strategy (LGTAS) presented as examples of issues distressing municipalities in South Africa (CoGTA, 2009). As a result, such an assessment was hailed as historic honesty by the government of the day regarding the actual state of local government (Deloitte, 2012).

On the other hand, while Cronje (2014:1) agrees unequivocally about the existence of 'much evidence of wastage, incompetence, and corruption' in municipalities, he contends that these issues as the sole origin of distressed local government are equivalent to a 'misdiagnosis.' According to Cronje (2014), the 'under-performing macro-economy' is the major crisis facing municipalities in South Africa today. This scenario poses a serious threat to the ultimate goal of a developmental local government, which depends solely on a thriving economy. The threat further compromises the role of local government in converting this vision of a developmental local government into reality.

In summary, the overview of the evolution of local government provides details on how and why the local authorities were established in South Africa and the vision and strategies they pursued. As a formal structure of government, local government developed at the beginning of colonialism, focusing on service delivery for colonizers only, and later for all whites. It was only later that it became concerned with the plight of other citizens, especially the indigenous peoples. The historical background presented here provides hints as to what the local government system entails.

THE VISION FOR DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The scope of the local government vision is more often confined to legislative prescripts, and a definite political slogan, normally for five years, or upon mandates derived from a political manifesto, setting the tone of the policy direction for the new council after municipal elections. The Executive Mayor often becomes the primary actor in outlining the municipal vision, and in this case, the institutional vision becomes the personal agenda of the incumbent mayor, with a limited shared vision.

This led to a perception of the charisma of individuals at the helm of governance as analogous to the concept of a vision (Suranga, 2014). The charisma of people such as Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro, Mohammad Ali, and Julius Nyerere are classic examples of leadership epitomizing a vision. In local government, the third echelon (local community) may also be eclipsed by the charismatic characters of the executive mayors.

The White Paper on Local Government (1998) provides normative guidelines in terms of the strategic direction or vision that municipalities should adopt. It discusses a developmental local government as the ultimate goal (vision), focusing more on economic development (Ndevu & Muller, 2017; Koma, 2012). This implies that each municipality must subject their developmental efforts to the ideals of a developmental local government. A developmental local government is a legislated vision and cannot be deferred unless a policy review provides for this to happen. However, the critical issue here is whether a White Paper cannot be enforced in the case of deviations by municipalities.

Shortly after the launch of the White Paper on Local Government, which presented a blueprint for the vision of a local government in South Africa, Pycroft (1998:151) argued that when all has been accomplished in pursuit of this vision, a developmental local government will emerge as 'the final form of local government'. This implies that an institutional vision statement must answer the question, 'Where do we want to achieve?' The vision of a developmental local government is therefore the destiny of all municipalities in South Africa.

Koma (2012:109) also believes that "[d]evelopmental local government is a vision for the future form of local government in South Africa". This implies that the vision is not yet realized, but rather is aspired to in accordance with the public policy provisions. As a clearly articulated vision, a developmental local government is envisaged to instill improved organizational performance for day-to-day activities and challenges (Dayaram, 2010). To this effect, the White Paper on Local Government (1998) prescribes three inevitable tools that may help municipalities towards the final form of local government as involving integrated development planning (IDP) including budgeting, performance management, and active community participation in municipal affairs.

Kantabutra and Avery (2010) maintain that a vision is a key component within a triadic relationship involving strategy (implementation) and change. Those affected by the vision in question enthusiastically wait to "hear meaningful expression regarding what concerns them" (Dayaram, 2010:22). Participatory governance ensues from such expressions in the form of developmental projects and programs. As a public policy, the vision of a developmental local government is affected by a few other related policies.

CONCLUSION

This paper provided a succinct explanation of the evolution of local government in South Africa. It needs to be stressed that the current state of local government distress in South Africa is a true reflection of the nature and quality of the strategies adopted by municipalities. Municipal strategies are the sum of the actions and commitments that local communities, under the auspices of a municipality, take in pursuit of their ultimate goals. In fact, what appears to be major factors contributing to the distress of local government, such as the sins of incumbency, non-payment of

municipal services, lack of internal capacity contribution, and financial constraints, are actually the symptoms. A few examples could be cited to substantiate this particular conclusion. Firstly, poor institutional capacity reflects on the recruitment and professionalism of local government – lacking meritocratic principles and ineffective performance management systems. Secondly, inherent corruption shows leniency for wrongdoers and/or lack of consequence management. Thirdly, political interference illustrates a weakened administration, not enjoying an autonomous status. Fourthly, increased lawlessness, including the non-payment of municipal services and other forms of civil disobedience, reveals how indecisive the local sphere of government is in terms of law enforcement.

The proliferation of research into the functioning (or lack thereof) of municipalities in South Africa seems to focus on the aforementioned issues since some politicians, academics, as well as the ordinary citizens are keen for the country to prosper, shed off the apartheid evils of inequitable service delivery, and achieve the vision of ‘a better life’ for all who live in this country.

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