

A GUIDING FRAMEWORK FOR THE EFFECTIVE OPERATIONALISATION OF IDP AS A TOOL FOR SERVICE DELIVERY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

Effective service delivery remains one of the foremost challenges faced by municipalities across South Africa, where the consistent provision of essential services like water, sanitation, healthcare, and infrastructure is crucial for sustainable community development. Within this context, the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) serves as a strategic tool designed to align municipal resources and planning with the developmental needs of local communities. However, the implementation of IDPs has often faced significant challenges, including issues of misalignment, insufficient resources, and a lack of stakeholder engagement, leading to gaps between planning and service outcomes. These challenges are particularly pressing in the Ehlanzeni District of the Mpumalanga Province, where ineffective IDP implementation has contributed to service delivery failures, sparking public dissatisfaction and protests. As such, this study seeks to examine and develop a guiding framework for the effective operationalisation of the IDP, aiming to transform it into a more functional instrument for meeting the service delivery needs of local communities.

This study focuses on examining the challenges faced in the operationalisation of the IDP, with a particular emphasis on the Ehlanzeni District in the Mpumalanga Province. The IDP's implementation in this region has faced notable setbacks, including poor planning, inadequate budgeting, and operational inefficiencies, leading to service delivery failures, public dissatisfaction, and protests. The

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central aim of this paper is to propose a guiding framework for the effective operationalisation of the IDP, ensuring that it becomes a functional tool for addressing the service delivery needs of local communities.

The research seeks to answer the question: How can the IDP be more effectively operationalised to improve service delivery in the Ehlanzeni District? The study will also explore the underlying causes of poor service delivery, such as resource misallocation, lack of stakeholder engagement, and insufficient technical capacity. It will assess how these issues can be addressed through strategic planning, budget alignment, and enhanced monitoring.

The scope of this research includes an analysis of the current IDP implementation processes in the Ehlanzeni District, with a focus on water, sanitation, and electrical infrastructure. The study will also consider broader challenges faced by municipalities across South Africa, particularly in the context of governance, stakeholder participation, and inter-governmental co-ordination. The research thus aims to contribute to the development of a more effective and sustainable framework for service delivery through the IDP in South African municipalities. The following section looks at the methodology used in this study.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative methodology that was used to investigate IDP recipient opinions and perceptions. Creswell and Creswell (2017) state that using this method offers the advantage of providing an in-depth analysis of the subject as there is probing involved. The target population for this research study comprised 1 584 staff and senior management in the Local Municipalities of Mbombela, Nkomazi, Thaba Chweu and Bushbuckridge of Ehlanzeni District Municipality in the Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. They were identified through the municipality websites and local government databases. Purposive sampling was also used in selecting municipal officials because their positions and roles are publicised; from this, the researcher knew which individual would serve the research purpose. A sample of 20 interviewees was selected. According to the study description supplied

in the permission letter, municipalities assisted the researcher by providing a list of individuals who work daily on the IDP in the municipalities as well as service delivery. The researcher was able to generate primary data from the participants and review reports, such as the Auditor General report, Spatial Development Framework and IDP of the municipalities. An interview guide was used as the primary data collection instrument for this research study. Interview notes were handwritten. Audio and video recordings were used where permission to do so was given by the interviewees. The data collected was analysed thematically.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE BASIS FOR THE IDP

Legislation plays a key role in the management of public policy (Oni 2016). The Constitution of South Africa is revered globally for its approach to functional principles for human equality and democracy. A background of apartheid influenced the authors of the Constitution to do away with the past historical injustices. The 1996 Constitution promotes equal opportunities and access to resources for all: “The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.” (Constitution of South Africa 1996: Chapter 2, Section 9(3)). The geography is mentioned because the previous government had created “Bantustans”, where blacks were supposed to live; these places were, however, deprived of access to resources and the level of service delivery enjoyed by whites (Ogra *et al.* 2016). All citizens of the country have a right to the basic services that municipalities provide, and municipalities should take the lead on this. According to Sections 152(c) and 153(a) of the Constitution, municipalities must promote and manage their administration, budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the communities (Constitution of South Africa 1996).

The Constitution further requires the promotion of social and economic development of communities. The realisation of the so-called socio-economic rights is perceived to have the potential to facilitate the pursuit of social justice (Mathebula 2018). This is because members of society

must have secure basic standards of living. Municipalities became the new agency for development in a de-centralised bottom-up approach to social development (Ogra *et al.* 2016; Malefane and Mashakoe 2019). Key social development issues dominant in most countries include employment creation, water and sanitation, infrastructure development, and local economic development (LED), among others (Mathebula 2018). It is, therefore, important to ensure basic service provision to various communities is met, where these services include water, electricity, road infrastructure and education.

The White Paper on Local Government of 1998 underscores the imperative of a social developmental approach and economic growth for municipalities, aiming at maximising social development and economic prosperity (Maake 2016). Emphasising the need for collaboration between local government, citizens, and community groups, the white paper advocates for sustainable strategies to address socio-economic challenges within communities (Makalela 2017). Additionally, the white paper highlights the importance of integration and co-ordination in local governance to achieve sustainable development goals, emphasising the active participation of community members in strategic planning and implementation processes (Mathebula 2018; Sebake and Mukonza 2020).

In parallel, the Development Facilitation Act, 67 of 1995 (DFA) focuses on expediting rural development initiatives by mitigating land disputes and promoting the use of land for socio-economic advancement (Ngcukaibobi 2018). Mandated by the South African Constitution of 1996, the DFA advocates for integrated planning processes to facilitate sustainable land development, aligning with the objectives of local governments (Department of Land Affairs and Housing, South Africa 1995). Furthermore, the DFA underscores the importance of setting clear land development objectives to guide socio-economic development initiatives, emphasising the need for viable communities with access to basic services (Dlamini and Reddy 2018).

Similarly, the Local Government: Municipal Demarcation Act, 27 of 1998, emphasises the need for municipalities to develop integrated

development plans (IDPs) as legislative provisions supporting local government objectives (Maake 2016). The Act aims to foster cohesive and sustainable development within local jurisdictions by delineating municipal boundaries that consider the interdependence of communities and economic factors (Local Government: Municipal Demarcation Act 1998). Additionally, the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 117 of 1998, and the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000, further reinforce the necessity for municipalities to adopt IDPs as strategic tools for integrated and sustainable development, aligning with the constitutional obligations of service delivery and socio-economic progress (Malefane and Mashakoe 2019; Musitha 2016).

TECHNICAL ASPECT OF THE INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The value of the IDP as a strategic plan and a tool for service delivery has been in the public domain and is an issue of incessant academic scrutiny. The issues are not only a concern for academic scholars but also for the public, who are recipients of service delivery, and for public officials. In the South African context, the Auditor General (AG) identifies some inconsistencies, such as the misalignment of planned processes, as well as intended IDP and Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP) outcomes for a variety of local municipalities in South Africa (Matlala and Uwizeyimana 2020). The SD theory emphasises that targets in all sectors incorporate the concept of SD into the operations of local government for them to work well (Vintro et al. 2012; Kolk 2016).

Sustainability can be one of the core aims of developing an IDP. The expectation of the effectiveness of the IDP as a strategic tool for service delivery becomes a priority if ever South Africa is to achieve equitable SD. In addition, service delivery protests, a prevalent event in South Africa, are evidence of challenges to IDP management and implementation (Asha and Makalela 2020). This then requires an in-depth analysis of the IDP to reduce these challenges in municipalities.

The AG findings indicate that service delivery provision is not as expected, and many municipalities may not be fulfilling their constitutional mandate. The Mpumalanga Section 47 Report 2016/17 shows that water and sanitation have been a problem in Bushbuckridge,

Nkomazi and Mbombela (Mpumalanga Provincial Government 2017). The challenges allude to poor planning and budget implementation on the infrastructural projects set out in the IDP. Similar challenges are experienced in electricity delivery. The Nkangala and Ehlanzeni districts are affected by poor planning, inadequate budgeting, and limited operational capacity, which hinder effective service delivery. For water and sanitation, municipalities struggle with maintaining the entire distribution chain, and wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) often face overloading issues due to insufficient capacity. Additionally, a lack of provincial and national support, as well as inadequate staff and maintenance oversight, exacerbate these problems. For electricity, significant debts to Eskom and high technical and non-technical losses, such as inefficiencies and electricity theft, contribute to revenue collection issues, further impacting service reliability. To address these challenges, recommendations include enhancing inter-governmental co-ordination, setting up monitoring and repayment agreements, establishing credit control measures, and developing a comprehensive database to track maintenance needs and improve accountability in infrastructure management (Mpumalanga Provincial Government 2017).

The mandate should be carried out in alignment with the needs of the stakeholders involved through consultations with the law and stakeholders. The Ehlanzeni District municipalities in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa are no exception. As such, the researcher sought to objectively prove and create a guiding framework for the operationalisation of the IDP as an effective service delivery instrument in South Africa.

Globally, the complexity of governmental activities and the impact of globalisation on economies have necessitated varying adaptive responses to meet state development needs (Dlamini and Reddy 2018). “Although strategic management is now becoming a popular discourse in Africa in general and South Africa in particular, the literature on using a strategic plan originated from the Western countries” (Gelfand, Erez, and Aycan 2007:482).

To make it effective, academics from different developing countries believe research on indigenous strategic practices is imperative (Ono et al. 2019). There is a growing trend in this regard, as more research can be seen in the public sector in developing nations, particularly in Africa (Obeidat 2021; George, Walker and Monster 2019). Nevertheless, such studies in Africa focus more on two principles: governance and development.

Molale (2019), in a study on participatory communication in municipal processes such as the IDP formulation and implementation, found that community members are passive participators. This means they only know of projects when Matlosana Local Municipality has decided to embark on a new project or a project has been completed. The author leaves a gap in how participation can be theorised to ensure the achievement of the agreed community goals (Molale 2019). Similarly, Mathebula, Nkuna and Sebola (2016) raise the same argument and recommend that a bottom-up approach should be adopted to have an effective IDP.

Dlamini and Reddy (2018) are of the view that there is a need to align budget priorities with those of provincial and national governments to ensure the IDP process is focused on service delivery. The authors highlight that once this is done, it will be necessary to monitor performance for the results to be realised. Testing these recommendations is thus important if a guiding framework for the operationalisation of the IDP as a service delivery instrument in Ehlanzeni District Municipality is created. Scholars have researched IDP as a tool for service delivery but do not agree on many aspects, such as the IDP processes and their implementation.

The technical dimension of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) encompasses its objectives, processes, and anticipated outcomes, constituting the backbone of municipal planning and resource allocation (Majam and Uwizeyimana 2018). Serving as a roadmap for effective governance and citizen engagement at the local level, the IDP aligns with the constitutional mandate for developing local government in South Africa (Constitution of South Africa 1996). Mathebula (2018)

underscores the IDP's role in expediting service delivery and fostering economic and social development within municipalities, which is crucial for addressing historical disparities and promoting cooperative governance.

The IDP undergoes a series of seven distinct phases, from analysis to monitoring and review, guided by legislative provisions and policy frameworks (Musitha 2016; South Africa, Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) 2000). During the analysis phase, community engagement helps identify pressing issues such as inadequate infrastructure and high unemployment rates, laying the groundwork for prioritisation and problem-solving (Mathebula 2018). Subsequently, municipalities develop strategies and projects tailored to address identified challenges, involving stakeholders like traditional leaders to ensure community-centric solutions (Makalela 2019).

Integral to the IDP process is the phase of project identification and integration, where projects are aligned with municipal objectives and strategies for coherent implementation (Musitha 2016). Municipalities are tasked with integrating all plans and initiatives within this phase, fostering collaboration and synergy among stakeholders to maximise developmental impact (Musitha 2016). The approval phase, as emphasised by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) (2006), underscores the importance of ensuring compliance with legislation and community input before finalising the IDP, ensuring its alignment with local needs and legal requirements.

Moreover, effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as advocated by Ndevu and Muller (2017), play a critical role in ensuring the IDP's success and relevance over time. By implementing performance management systems and value-for-money indicators, municipalities can track progress, identify areas for improvement, and enhance accountability to communities (Matsiliza 2017; Sebake and Mukonza 2020). Collaboration between national and local governments, alongside key stakeholders, is essential for the development and implementation of robust performance monitoring systems that reflect

local priorities and promote organisational learning (Sebake and Mukonza 2020).

A study done by Dlamini and Reddy (2018) in Umtshezi Local Municipality shows how they have tried to ensure their IDP delivers services by aligning their budgets with that of local and national governments. The analysis of the IDP process by Dlamini and Reddy (2018:72) points out that the general principle is that the IDP must deal with the integration and co-ordination of all development functions of a municipality. They further add that this must be done and managed at the highest possible level in the municipality, thus allowing maximum intra- and inter-sectoral linkages. These authors used a mixed-method approach but, in their findings, only added secondary data and documentary reviews. Dlamini and Reddy (2018:72) argue that much needs to be done to ensure this integration and co-ordination comes to reality, and more research needs to be conducted to understand this. Maake (2016) recommends the same; however, the study findings show that the IDPs in the Mopani District Municipality are poorly formulated, grant-dependent, and do not generate any sustainable services. Not much literature that links the IDP and service delivery is readily available from the Ehlanzeni District Municipality. The researcher tried to add to the scarce literature by evaluating whether the IDP is a service delivery tool in itself, unlike how other scholars have approached the issue.

STAKEHOLDER THEORY

Stakeholder theory emphasises the significance of stakeholder relations in organisational planning, aiming to gather diverse perspectives and reach consensus (Vandenbussche et al. 2017). Freeman's research in 1984 underscored the importance of considering stakeholder groups beyond customers and employees, advocating for the maximisation of value for all stakeholders to achieve organisational goals (McGrath and Whitty 2017). This approach, known as Stakeholder Management Theory (SHMT), acknowledges stakeholders' varying interests and seeks to balance competing claims while driving organisational success (Thebe 2016). Managing conflicting stakeholder interests is a complex endeavour, with stakeholders possessing varying degrees of power, legitimacy, and urgency (Yu and Choi 2015). Stakeholders with power

can significantly influence organisational objectives, while those with legitimate claims expect the fulfilment of their expectations, such as basic service delivery (Penn and Thomas 2017). Urgent claims demand immediate attention and allocation of resources, challenging managers to prioritise and reconcile competing demands effectively (Yu and Choi 2015). This highlights the importance of operationalising tools like the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) to address pressing issues like housing, water, and employment while navigating stakeholder interests (Penn and Thomas 2017).

The implementation of SHMT hinges on management's ability to navigate stakeholder relationships and fulfil their responsibilities effectively (Reed 2019). The theory emphasises establishing clear responsibilities and resolving conflicts based on normative criteria or fiduciary obligations, such as fulfilling stakeholders' expectations outlined in the IDP (Hak et al. 2016). Effective stakeholder consultations involving diverse community actors beyond political elites foster a sense of ownership and promote value addition within communities (Moyo and Madlopha 2016). However, concerns persist regarding the inclusivity and effectiveness of these consultations, as well as the reliance on external consultants and the criteria for decision-making (Moyo and Madlopha 2016).

Community participation is an essential part of SD and poverty alleviation. According to Mathebula (2018:562), the enhancement of public participation in development decision-making is generally understood as an essential characteristic of governance for SD. Shabangu and Oksiutycz (2018:202) point out that the case for increased public involvement in political decision-making and implementation is made according to the functional gains of the political community in terms of better decisions, more effective implementation, enhanced legitimacy, and a more educated populace. In addition, claims to fairness and opportunities for individual and collective fulfilment, described as consequentialism, entitlement and expressivity, are justifications for participation.

KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The key findings section highlights the main insights derived from the analysis, focusing on the most impactful results and trends. This section provides a concise overview of the outcomes, offering a foundation for the subsequent discussion and recommendations.

Alignment of the integrated development plan and service delivery and budget implementation plan in the municipalities

Participants from the Mbombela Municipality raised the issue that there is always alignment with the SDBIP. “Yes, all targets and activities are aligned in the municipality that I work in” (Interviewee 15). This corroborates findings from the interviews conducted in Nkomazi. Participants from this municipality were of the view that there is indeed an alignment of these two since the legislative document makes it a requirement to ensure this. Nonetheless, Interviewee 18 from Bushbuckridge argued there was no alignment between the IDP and SDBIP as far as they were aware. Thaba Chweu Interviewees (Interviewees One, Two, Three and Four) all spoke in one voice, stating there is a partial alignment of the IDP and the SDBIP in the local municipality. Interviewee One further added, “We are working on ensuring that this alignment is possible within our municipality. A lot still needs to be done, but we will get there.” The picture we get from these responses from the four local municipalities is that there is an alignment of the IDP and SDBIP, but more needs to be done when we consider the findings from Thaba Chweu.

The finding corroborates those of Mbili and Zondi (2017:1351), who highlight that more remains to be done to ensure these two are aligned. When this is done, it will strengthen IDPs’ effectiveness and implementation. These two documents are linked, and attention should be paid to them. The findings from Bushbuckridge clearly show the same problem as found in the City of Johannesburg. Furthermore, the findings of Majam and Uwizeyimana (2018:163) point out that problems with aligning the IDP and the SDBIP are common. They argue that this is due to the failure to understand the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This was not the case, as our findings show. Limited resources are another aspect that emerged from the participants of the municipalities that were

part of this study. Additionally, findings by Mbili and Zondi (2017:1352) are also confirmed in that the municipalities set out communities to ensure alignment of the two, following the dictates of the legislation.

Performance targets that are not measurable.

In Thaba Chweu, it was noted that the main challenge is tracking progress in the achievement of the mission and visions of the municipality set out in the IDP. Interviewee Two from this municipality was of the view that “when officials are not sure they understand the provisional, national and regional priorities, they are unable to align the IDP and SDBIP, which heavily impacts on service delivery”. These findings concur with those of Majam and Uwizeyimana (2018:13-165), whose findings show that alignment is impossible when there is a failure to craft measurable targets.

According to our findings, attention must be paid to the KPIs to ensure there is alignment, as Majam and Uwizeyimana (2018) propose. A Thaba Chweu official underlined the importance of these and argued that it is a process, and they are moving in the right direction to ensure alignment, which leads to better service delivery in their municipality. Moreover, performance goals that are not measurable are another theme that also emerged in the Nkomazi Local Municipality. Interviewee 13 provided a general picture of what this means, stating that strategic objectives and KPIs are time-bound, and when they lack these, it affects the entire IDP and SDBIP processes. Time and performance measurement criteria should not only be on paper but regularly monitored to ensure alignment. For service delivery to be achieved, we can utilise the Performance Management System (PMS) and ensure there is a steering committee to guide the process, which Mbili and Zondi (2017:1353) argue is key.

Performance management system, key performance indicators and the integrated development plan

The participants were further asked whether their municipalities had a working performance management system (PMS). Results indicated there is no working PMS in the Ehlanzeni District municipality. The

participant further indicated that the PMS is not working due to the poor capacity of the system, lack of resources, and staff shortages. It was also concluded that the performance of PMS was not effectively working due to the poor capacities of the system and lack of management resources. The participant further explained that there is a shortage of skilled staff in her municipality.

The study findings imply that most PMS were not working effectively due to insufficient resources. The interviewees further indicated that the PMS ensured the desired results were achieved during IDP implementation, that is, SDBIP, to ensure the correctness of the strategic direction of objectives, strategies and projects put forward by the IDP. All participants indicated that the PMS is communicated through municipal websites and meetings.

Performance management system development teams

The researcher sought to understand whether there is an established team for the development of PMS in the respective municipalities of the participants. All participants indicated that their municipalities had established a team that specifically deals with PMS development. During the interview discussions, participants indicated the PMS is linked to strategic plans, whereupon others indicated the PMS “is a strategic approach to management which equips leaders, managers, workers, and stakeholders at different levels with a set of tools and techniques for a regular plan, and monitors and reviews the performance of the organisation in terms of targets”. The participants further indicated that they do not have adequate and standard KPIs for the provincial government. However, the participants indicated that the municipality is working with the provincial government to develop standardised KPIs that meet the requirements. Performance Management Systems use these KPIs to measure the performance of the municipality as set in the plans.

Schilder (2000, cited in Ani and Persson 2016:10) argues that there is a challenge in developing PMS in the public sector. Our findings dispute this, as all participants emphasised that teams to develop the PMS are available and strive to ensure they work well. The municipalities have

been using a variety of theories, such as governance, SD and NPM, to achieve this development. As raised by the interviewees, the teams ensure goals are communicated (Interviewee 18), achievement of goals is rewarded (Interviewee Five), and support is garnered for the system from all stakeholders (Interviewee Nine). This is similar to the conclusion from Adonis (2018) on what teams and the PMS should resemble.

Service delivery areas of improvement.

All participants expressed that public housing schemes, government health schemes, free education, public employment, and water and sanitation need urgent improvement in communities. However, mixed responses were offered on the prioritisation of these service delivery targets. Interviewee 12 pointed out that, “All areas need improvement, but I believe water and sanitation should be prioritised in the Nkomazi Municipality. The SDG speak of these, and that is why I say so. When the IDP goals pay attention to these, a lot of protests and problems are avoided”. This is per the UN SDGs, as they emphasise access to clean water, which is also stated in the Constitution. In Bushbuckridge, it was noted that all areas need to be improved as different communities require different services, a position also established in the cities of Mbombela and Thaba Chweu.

The participants further indicated that communities remain in need of basic services, while there are existing challenges in municipalities due to a lack of revenue collection and political leadership, corruption, and poor support from the provincial department. This is also similar to the findings of Asha and Makalela (2020), which show that resource collection and utilisation must be improved. Other than the challenges, the participants further expressed that they do understand the current IDP, as most have participated in IDP reviews. Upon further probing, the IDP contains projects from different stakeholders and departments implemented in a set period.

Community-based planning

The participants further indicated that a community-based plan is one of the key processes the municipality should pay attention to. It was concluded that when the community-based plan is not taken care of properly, communities embark on protests due to a lack of involvement

in service delivery. In considering findings by Thebe (2017:125), it is noted that when municipalities are transparent and use the governance theory, some of these service delivery protests can be averted. The study findings imply that the community-based plan is a process of identifying community needs raised by community members. Hence, these needs should inform IDP priorities. The participants further indicated they were not satisfied with the contribution of community-based plans to IDPs. The participants indicated that most community needs are identified in the IDP; nonetheless, implementation may be a challenge as unbudgeted events emerge. All the officials noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a huge toll on their budget due to most resources having been channelled to contain the spread of the disease. Gatherings by community members to discuss the issues have also been affected during the past two years.

Mathebula and Sebola (2019:123) reveal that low participation affects strategic plans such as the IDP. Similarly, Asha and Makalela (2020) also found that a lack of community participation has negative impacts on the IDP and service delivery in Limpopo. Our findings also point to this fact. However, it was noted that the underlying reason for this is that community members are not gathering in numbers as they used to, and some ideas and needs are not properly captured.

MODEL TO OPERATIONALISE INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLAN

This section delves into the essential components required to effectively operationalise the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) as a service delivery tool. Each element, from stakeholder engagement to performance evaluation, is outlined to ensure a holistic approach that fosters alignment, transparency, and responsiveness in meeting community needs. By detailing these steps, the framework emphasises the structured progression necessary for achieving reliable and measurable service delivery outcomes.

Figure 1: A framework guiding the effective operationalisation of IDP as a tool for service delivery.

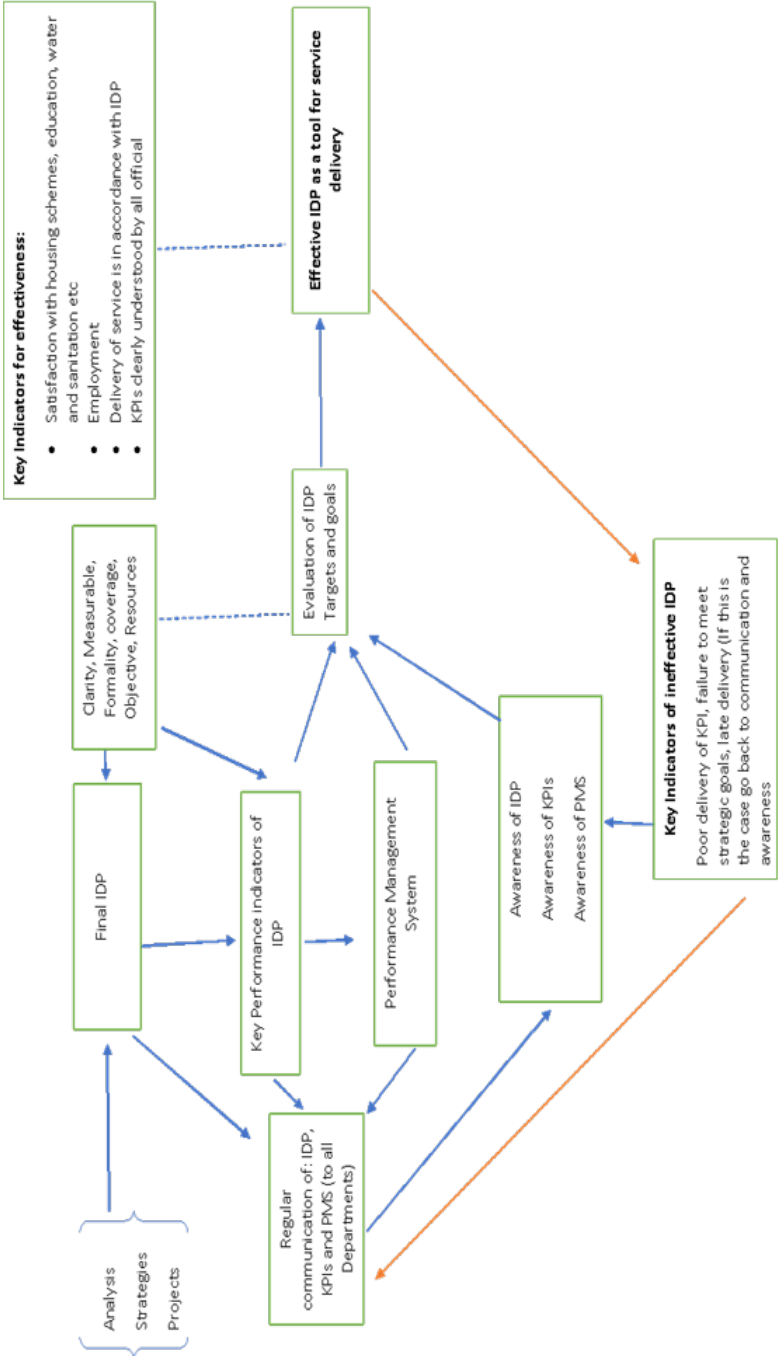


Figure 1 above is a framework guiding the effective operationalisation of IDP as a tool for service delivery. The framework was developed based on qualitative research and analysis of global and regional trends, along with insights from legislative and government reports, such as those from the Auditor General and local government in South Africa. Primary data from interviews with municipal officials, as well as document reviews of the IDP, Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP), and Spatial Development Framework, informed the framework's structure. Assumptions include the need for stakeholder engagement, alignment of municipal planning documents, and the importance of measurable performance indicators to address existing service delivery challenges. The framework emphasises a structured, transparent approach to overcome resource limitations and ensure responsive service delivery. To ensure this framework works during all stages of the IDP development, stakeholders must be involved to have a final, operationalisable IDP. The above framework shows the summary of this process, which includes the analysis phase, generating strategies and having projects in place. The presumed lines in the above figure point to the next step in the framework. Some processes can be implemented concurrently with each other. The broken blue line shows the effects or outcome of the process, which indicates the effectiveness of the IDP. The solid red arrows denote the steps that must be taken when the IDP has not been an effective service delivery tool. The next section presents the steps that must be followed in detail.

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholders such as community members and other institutions operating in the municipalities must be involved for the IDP to be operationalised as a tool for service delivery. This requires active participation and ensuring no stakeholder is left behind in this process. The contribution of the participants should be taken seriously, and evaluating their needs is key. A list of these needs should be made in this process, and through engagement with stakeholders, municipalities must rank these needs based on the consensus regarding them. Once this has been done, checking whether all the data have been captured is key. The municipality can communicate the gathered data to check that all were captured, and only then can they move to the next stage.

Key performance indicators

There is a need to assess the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which must be objective, measurable, and widely communicated within the municipalities and communities. The projects the municipalities seek to work on need to be well-resourced in terms of finances and human resources, among others. KPIs need to be in place since this simplifies the process and effectively monitors targets and the progress of the project. Timeframes must be in place to check for these, as well as scales to measure them.

Extensive communication of the objectives

One of the overarching processes in the effective operationalisation of the IDP as a tool for service delivery is to communicate the various objectives and strategies of the municipalities that emanate from the IDP. As the study above alerts us, some participants were unsure of the objectives, particularly on the PMS in place. There is the need to regularly communicate the issues that need to be understood within the organisation, for example, through posters that show the progress or having more meetings to discuss progress. Reinforcing a culture of a top-down and vice versa communication model helps in having goals and targets understood at all levels. Each individual will, therefore, know what is required of them at any given point in time, thus ensuring service delivery by the municipalities. In addition to the above process of developing effective communication systems, awareness of all the goals, objectives, and strategies within the IDP is also enhanced.

Develop a performance management system

A team that develops and monitors the PMS must be established. As shown by the study, teams that develop these are not present in municipalities, which becomes problematic when trying to assess IDP implementation. This largely has a negative impact on service delivery. The framework puts forward the idea that teams dedicated to the development and monitoring of PMS must be established in municipalities, as well as community representatives. Acting on poor performance should be a quick and thorough process by this team. In addition, setting up training workshops to mitigate these obstacles must be encouraged across all departments and all levels. Rewarding top

performers can also be used as a mechanism to encourage performance and achievement of goals.

Evaluation of performance indicators

Evaluation of the IDP performance indicators and PMS must be established for municipalities to operationalise the IDP as a tool for ensuring service delivery. The processes of checking and assessing the KPIs and PMS must be done at different levels within the municipalities to understand the progress. The effect of having such a process is that the rechannelling of resources to other areas is enabled once a task has been completed. It also facilitates quick remedies to problems that may arise during the process of implementing the IDP that may affect service delivery. Going back to the drawing board and strategising is key to ensuring the attainment of the IDP goals.

Assess community member satisfaction with the services delivered.

The IDP should always lead to service delivery. When there is satisfaction among community members with the services delivered, such as water, housing, and education, it means all the processes of this framework have been followed through. In the instance where there is no satisfaction, it means a process within this framework has been overlooked or compromised. Identifying this problem is key. The officials will need to go back to the communication phase and understand whether the KPIs, IDP and PMS are understood by everyone in the municipality. Assessing the measurability, formality and objectiveness of the IDP goals should also be considered. The red arrows of the proposed framework (Fig 1) indicate this process.

CONCLUSION

The framework proposed in this study represents a significant step forward in improving the operationalisation of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) as an effective tool for service delivery within South Africa's municipal context. Developed through a qualitative approach involving interviews with municipal officials, document reviews of IDPs, and an analysis of government reports such as those from the

Auditor General, this framework addresses key challenges such as misalignment between planning and budgeting documents, inadequacies in performance management systems (PMS), and limited stakeholder engagement. The framework emphasises a holistic approach by integrating key elements such as stakeholder engagement, KPI assessment, extensive communication strategies, and continuous performance evaluation.

The development of the framework was grounded in empirical evidence and theoretical insights, focusing on operational gaps identified through participant interviews and document analysis. By examining the experiences of officials in Ehlanzeni District's local municipalities (Mbombela, Nkomazi, Thaba Chweu, and Bushbuckridge), the study uncovered common challenges in aligning the IDP with the Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP). The framework was refined to include phases that ensure alignment across all municipal processes, addressing practical hurdles to implementation. Assumptions made in developing the framework include the need for a strong, ongoing stakeholder engagement process and transparent, measurable performance indicators, which are necessary for tracking progress and meeting legislative requirements.

This framework contributes to the body of knowledge on municipal service delivery by providing a structured model that not only addresses strategic alignment between IDP and SDBIP but also introduces mechanisms for managing performance through PMS. It highlights the importance of communication in operationalising the IDP by ensuring that all municipal officials and community members understand objectives, KPIs, and strategies. This, in turn, helps foster a sense of ownership and accountability, which is crucial for sustainable service delivery outcomes.

The framework provides actionable insights for policymakers and municipal leaders by emphasising the integration of community needs and legislative requirements. By outlining the necessity of standardised KPIs and regular stakeholder engagement, it sets forth a roadmap for municipalities to prioritise resources effectively, particularly in areas like

water, housing, and sanitation. The framework also supports the use of PMS as an integral part of municipal management, helping leaders to monitor performance, address shortfalls in a timely manner, and adjust strategies as necessary.

Given the complexities involved in IDP implementation, the framework suggests that municipalities conduct regular reviews of KPIs, engage in continuous dialogue with stakeholders, and establish a steering committee for PMS oversight. These steps will ensure that municipalities can quickly identify and remedy misalignments or service delivery failures, thereby improving accountability and responsiveness. Future research could expand on this framework by testing its application in other regions, evaluating its long-term impact on service delivery, and exploring additional strategies for overcoming resource constraints. This framework provides a strategic guide for municipalities to operationalise IDP effectively, with a focus on alignment, measurable targets, and community engagement. Thus, by addressing gaps in existing processes and promoting a structured, responsive approach, it has the potential to significantly enhance service delivery outcomes and fulfil municipalities' constitutional mandates to their communities

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