



The quest for service delivery: The case of a rural district municipality in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa



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Background: In South Africa, poor service delivery has been a major problem in many municipalities, partly because of corruption, political patronage and skills deficits at local administrative levels.

Aim: This study aimed to critically assess the extent of service delivery deficit and find ways to improve service delivery in the study area and beyond.

Setting: This study is framed on the ideals of theory of social contract that states the relationship between the state and society. In this line, this study highlights Weber's theory of bureaucracy and the new public management (NPM) that gets its theoretical foundations from public choice and principal-agent theories.

Methods: The study used primary data collected from 120 respondents. A descriptive quantitative method was used using questionnaire and content analysis of official documentations.

Results: The study finds that residents in the study area are not satisfied with the level of current municipal services provided. In addition, the study reveals that the municipality does not generate enough funds because of non-payment for the services rendered that will substantially reduce basic municipal services provision. Furthermore, contrary to the common belief that rural municipal residents demand free services, this study finds that residents are willing to pay modest fees for the quality services rendered.

Conclusion: The residents in the Dr JS Moroka Local Municipality (DR JSMLM) value essential services such as water and electricity more than other services. The status of service delivery in the municipality is rated poor. However, the residents still believe that there are possibilities for the improvements in the service delivery if the municipality adheres to its Integrated Development Plan (IDP) for the years ahead.

Keywords: municipality; rural district; service delivery; Mpumalanga province; South Africa.

Introduction

Both developing and developed countries have the responsibility to provide basic services such as housing, water and sanitation, land, electricity and infrastructure to their public in an efficient, equitable and sustainable ways. From the economic efficiency perspective, there is a need for balancing market and government (i.e. administrative) failures that often exist in service delivery. Whilst pure public goods should be provided by government regardless of its weaknesses and pure private goods should generally be left to the market (Hammer 2013). Global overview of the public sector shows that a country's public sector is shaped by its current economic circumstances and by its history, its politics, its resources and the demands placed on it by its public (CIMA 2011). South Africa features a dual economy with a developed economy in major metropolitan areas coexisting with an underdeveloped economy in townships, informal settlements and poor rural areas (African Development Bank 2018). Such a dualistic nature of economy can potentially lead to both market and government failures in service delivery. In South Africa government failures in service delivery are more visible at local levels and the quest for service delivery is long overdue. After democratic dispensation in 1944, *Batho Pele* [People First] has been the principle governing the public service delivery in South Africa. However, underprivileged service delivery has been a major problem in many municipalities, partly because of corruption, political patronage and skills deficits (Nkomo 2017).

The South African Constitution, in Section 151(1), provides for the establishment of municipalities in the local sphere of government (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa [South African

Government] 1996). In South Africa, section 152 of the Constitution states local government as the engine of basic service delivery. The local sphere of government, municipality, is the one nearest to the people. However, poor service delivery in many municipalities have been retarding racial and class integration and equality in South Africa (Nkomo 2017).

Dr JS Moroka Local Municipality, named after the medical doctor and politician who was president of the African National Congress (ANC) from 1949 to 1952, is in the Nkangala District Municipality in the province of Mpumalanga. Like other municipalities in the country, Dr JS Moroka local municipality (here after, Dr JSMLM) has been subject to financial crisis (Dr JSMLM Audit Report 2018). The municipality has been heavily relying on grants from the National Treasury. The municipality has incurred unproductive and wasteful expenditure of R431 324 and irregular expenditure of R227 804 021, as it did not follow proper tender process (Dr JSMLM Audit Report 2018).

This study is framed on the ideals of theory of social contract that states the relationship between the state and society (Loewe, Zintl & Houdret 2020). The objective of this study is to review challenges of service delivery in the South African municipalities in general and investigate the context in Dr JSMLM. In addition, this study suggests ways for improving service delivery. Furthermore, this study focuses on the compliance and implementation of the legislations in local government sphere and discusses the challenges that are faced by the municipalities in providing services delivery. The motivation for this study is the persistent and violent nature of service delivery protests in the study area and across South Africa. In addition, the causes for public grievances in the study area are not well-documented and yet there are no thorough studies conducted in rural municipalities as in Dr JSMLM. The findings in this study corroborates with the findings in other studies conducted in other municipalities in South Africa (Chikulo 2016; Grant 2014), to mention a few. In line with other studies, this study highlights the challenges of service delivery in the study area because of financial constraints, lack of human capacity and inaccessibility of technical resources (Amesho et al. 2021). In addition, contrary to the wide belief that municipal residents demand free services, this study found that Dr JSMLM residents are willing to pay modest fees for the quality services rendered. This result shows that there is possibility of delivering public services through markets. However, the feasibility of market mechanisms in South African rural municipalities is the area for further study. The rest of the article is organised as follows. The following section presents literature review in the context of municipal service delivery challenges. Section three presents data, methodology and descriptive data analysis used in this study. The last section concludes the study with suggested policy implications for better and all-inclusive service delivery in the study area and beyond.

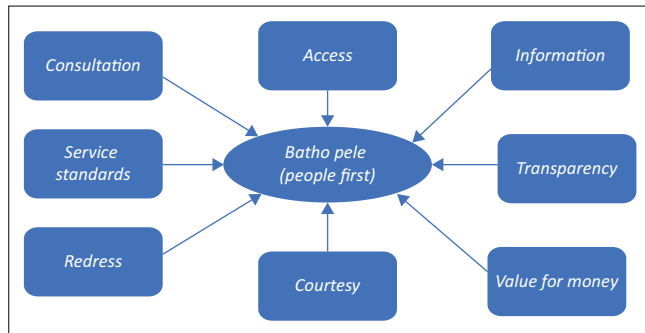
Literature review

The nature of local government and its responsibilities

Local governments have the responsibility to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner, promoting social and economic development and promoting a safe and healthy environment for their residents (Mabizela & Matsiliza 2020). The two major actors in service provision are the state and society. In South Africa, Apartheid's service delivery was based on the Weberian theory that dismally failed the country. Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy had started emerging in Western society during the second half of the 19th century. According to him, in this new type of organisation, leadership and authority were derived from a more 'rational' framework than charisma or tradition as his predecessors formulated (Serpa & Ferreira 2019). After the 1994 democratic dispensation, the New Public Management (NPM) was introduced as a policy in both the upper spheres and local governments with the aim of ensuring rapid service delivery and deracialising public administration. New Public Management gets its theoretical foundations from public choice and principal-agent theories, which claim that individual self-interest drives bureaucratic behaviour (Robinson 2015). South Africa's democratic governments have extended basic service provision to poorer areas of many cities, towns and rural areas (Nkomo 2017). However, despite the introduction of the NPM at local government, poor service delivery is still widespread in many municipalities, partly because of corruption, political patronage and skills deficits (Mutymbizi et al. 2020; Nengwekhulu 2009; Ntliziywana 2017; Ramutsheli & Van Rensburg 2015). New Public Management has been superimposed on the framework of the IMF/World Bank's structural adjustment programmes, which emphasised cost-cutting, commercialisation and privatisation to maximise the efficiency of service delivery. This meant that in many developing countries, the NPM ideas were not home-grown; they were externally generated and imposed (Ntliziywana 2017).

To make NPM practical the first democratic government of South Africa introduced the *Batho Pele* principles. The objective of these principles was to transform the public services at all levels. Since then, there have been attempts to improve service delivery by promoting the commitment of the public servants to prioritise serving people (Lekalake 2016). As shown in Figure 1, *Batho Pele* principles comprise eight components: consulting users of services; setting service standards; increasing access; ensuring courtesy; providing more and better information; increasing openness and transparency; remedying mistakes and failures; and getting the best possible value for money.

To achieve these objectives, it is necessary for every municipality to plan as indicated in the National Planning Commission (2011) of South African Government. Planning provides municipalities with a tool for aligning budgeting and project implementation with strategic priorities and to link across and coordinate the growing number of sectorial



Source: Adapted from the Republic of South Africa, 1977, *BATHOPELE - 'People First' White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery*, vol. 388, no. 18340, Government Gazette, Department of Public Service and Administration, Government Printers, Pretoria.

FIGURE 1: The eight principles of *Batho Pele*.

plans, programmes and projects that impact activities of the municipal government.

Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) are the planning instruments directed as strategies for enhancing service delivery in local government (Subban & Theron 2016). In South Africa, the IDPs were first introduced in 1996 in an amendment to the *Local Transition Act*, 209 of 1993. All transitional local councils were required to prepare IDPs. The need for an instrument that would assist newly constituted municipalities in performing their functions in a coordinated, developmental and fiscal responsible way was recognised and the IDP was constructed for this purpose. The introduction of the IDP created confusion as it competed with other planning instruments. Furthermore, lack of focus on community needs and priorities; improper implementation and monitoring; ill-conceived developmental outcomes, and poor links between the IDP and the budget can have negative impacts on development (Subban & Theron 2016). However, Asha and Makalela (2020) found that the implementation of the IDP is important to enhance municipal service delivery as it identifies key developmental objectives, which are translated into programmes and projects that accelerate service delivery.

The quest for service delivery in South Africa

Since 1994, as adopted in the *Batho Pele* principles, the people of South Africa have been expectant to redress racial-based service delivery injustice during apartheid. Studies on service-delivery-related protests targeting municipalities, found that on average, 94 protests per year took place in South Africa between 2004 and 2016 (Institute for Security Studies 2009, Municipal IQ 2017). This implies that accountability for service delivery is perceived as lacking in many South African communities (Bratton 2012). While access to services has increased over time, protesters' demands typically focus on the poor quality of services provided (Hunter 2015). In this study, the term service delivery protests are used to refer to a situation where community members decide to organise a public protest activity over lack of municipality services, such as water, electricity, housing and other basic services that are characterised by violence (Herman, Wallace & Tanja 2018).

According to Subban and Theron (2016) addressing the *Batho Pele* principles in an integrative manner with the development agenda ultimately provides a more holistic approach to socially inclusive development. There have been improvements in service delivery; however, the quest for better and all-inclusive service delivery has been continued for the last 27 years after democracy in the country (Lekalake 2016). Even in recent years there are still more frequent and often violent service delivery protests in the country (Breakfast, Bradshaw & Bradshaw 2019). These protests have the potential to reverse the democratisation process and undermine the rule of the law in the country (Chikulo 2016; Marcel 2015; Nkomo 2017). To address these social ills, the South African government should introduce and implement resilient social contract (Ndinga-Kanga, Van der Merwe & Hartford 2020).

The post-1994 democratic developmental South African state opted for a strong local government system as per its constitutional mandate (Reddy 2016). However, the quest for service deliver is not yet met and often public is dissatisfied with the quality and quantity of services. As mentioned in the National Planning Commission (2011) outbreaks of violence in some community protests reflect frustration not only over the pace of service delivery but also concern that communities are not being listened to sincerely. The public tend to protest if dissatisfied with the services offered because of insufficient interventions by government structures, and political manipulation, corruption and lack of accountability and transparency, inadequate citizen participation, poor human resources policy, failure to manage change, lack of employee capacity, poor planning and poor monitoring and evaluation (Ndevu & Muller 2018). Nepotism and corrupt tendencies in offering tenders should be avoided because it affects the quality of services, which might lead to violent protests (Chikulo 2016; Malose & Kiguwa 2013).

Municipal services include services that the local government is responsible for and other services, which the national or provincial government may delegate to local governments. Local governments have the responsibility for ensuring that all people living in their area have access to adequate and affordable services on a sustainable basis. However, service delivery protests in South Africa have been increasing in number and frequency of occurrences. Service delivery protests are linked to an inadequate provision of basic services at local municipality level (Morudu 2017). Despite powers given to local authorities to deliver and manage their own resources, most municipalities are struggling to achieve their objectives. The slow pace of providing services to the poor in South Africa has created a socio-political problem and such problems have been elevated into being a national concern (Herman et al. 2018). These problems have been persistently occurring in many municipalities even in recent years (Mutymbizi et al. 2020).

Government failures are more visible at local levels and are attributed to voter apathy, manipulation of evidence to

please councillors, biasness because of lack of public or media scrutiny, citizens overexpectation, political entrepreneurship and administration incapacity and forced integration of municipalities (Buthelezi & Dollery 2004). The study by Ramutsheli and Van Rensburg (2015) identified four main underlying causes of municipalities' failure to achieve their objectives. These root causes are inadequate human resources capacity, shortage of skills, unethical organisational culture and ineffective (or non-existent) performance management systems. Corruption of community leaders within rural communities, wherein leaders prioritise their own needs over that of community members is particularly highlighted as a big challenge in rural municipalities (Platteau 2004). Decentralised functioning of local government without necessary resources further cripples delivery in most municipalities, especially poorer and rural municipalities (Siddle 2011). All these failures contribute to the poor quality and inadequate services provided to communities.

In the context of where this study was carried out, a review of Dr JSMLM IDP (2017–2022) shows that since the adoption of the first 5-year plan (IDP) in 2018, more citizens have access to basic services such as water, electricity, good roads, sanitation and housing. Increased opportunities for economic development were also brought by new dispensation. For the improvement of the practical impact of governments programme, greater accountability, monitoring and evaluation are required (Chitja 2014). This is made possible through the framework of key performance areas. The central focus areas of Dr JSMLM key priority areas (KPAs) are financial viability, service delivery and infrastructure development. In addition, local development, municipal transformation, institutional development, good governance and community participation are also one of the priority areas.

Research methodology

Study area

Dr JSMLM is in the Nkangala District Municipality in the province of Mpumalanga. Figure 2 presents detailed map of Dr JSMLM highlighting major roads, relevant areas of interest such as airports and ports and areas of significant population density.

The municipality has a total population of 249 705 population (StatSA 2011). Dr JSMLM area has two nature reserves, namely Mkhombo and Ndlala, Ndebele art, Beads and Crafts and Ndebele renowned artist Ester Mahlangu. Tourism and agriculture are other economic drivers of the area. The municipality consists of 31 wards mostly rural by nature, 2 provincial roads, Route R573 (*Moloto Road*) and Route R568 connecting neighbouring municipalities in the eastern part of the municipality. The western part is isolated because of a lack of regional linkages. The municipality serves 31 wards and services that they deliver are roads and storm water management, water and sanitation, waste management, housing, electricity amongst other basic services (Dr JSMLM

IDP review 2019/20–2021/22). This study evaluates the challenges of service delivery at the municipality.

Sampling method and sample size

The selection of samples from the population of the study location is based on factors such as accessibility. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 wards (out of 31) based on ease of accessibility and then household heads included in the sample are chosen randomly. As shown in Table 1, the total sample size of questionnaires distributed was 120. The study used primary data collected from 120 respondents comprising five ward councillors, 15 municipal staff members and 100 household heads. A self-designed questionnaire was used to gather the data needed to achieve the objectives of the study from residents within the sampled wards, councillors and municipality employees. The questionnaire was used to gather primary data. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended and close-ended questions. As a result of low levels of literacy in some areas, the questionnaire was administered by the assistant researchers.

Data analysis and discussions

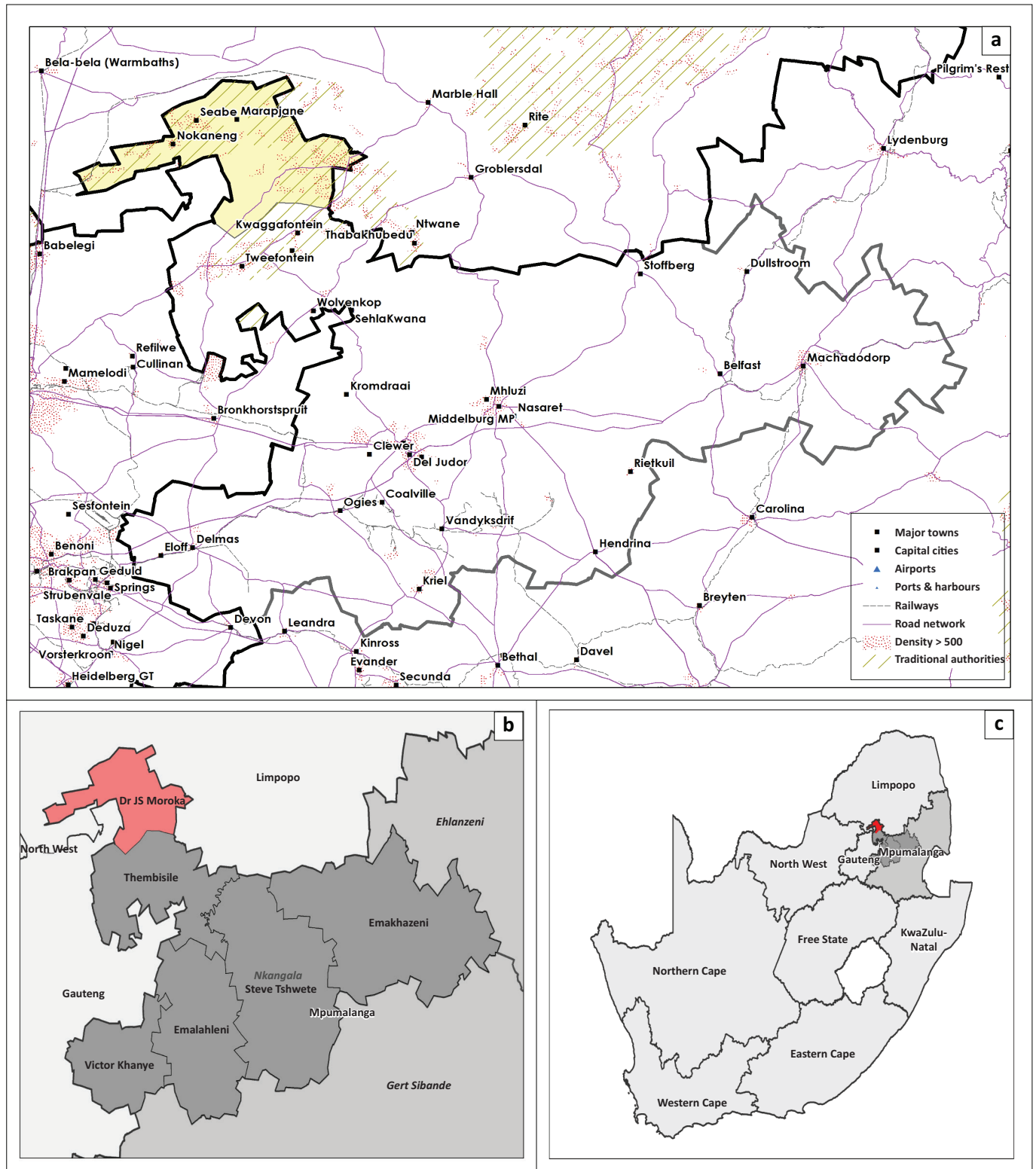
Data analysis

A descriptive quantitative method was used based on questionnaires and content analysis of official documentation. In addition, document review was carried out to unpack service delivery related aspects in the study area in its entirety.

Responses from councillors, municipal staff and ward residents

A total of 10 councillors, 14 municipal staff and 100 ward residents were given questionnaires to participate in the study by providing responses to questions. Their responses are tabulated in Table 2. Based on the question in the questionnaire, the respondents were asked whether they pay for municipal services or not. Table 2 summarises the responses from all the respondents. Ward councillors and municipal staff members pay for municipal services in full; however, 60% of the residents fail to pay. This creates financial constraints and will substantially reduce basic municipal services provision in the study area.

Table 3 shows that 100% of the respondents of councillors and municipal staff and 40% of the ward residents (household heads) are willing to pay for municipal service. This implies that most employees of the municipality are willing to pay for the municipal services, however, most of the community members are not willing to pay for it. Following the first question, the respondents were asked how much they spent on municipal services per month. Table 4 summarises the response on this question. As presented in Table 3, 60% of the councillors, 53.33% of the municipal staff and 27.5% of ward residents' pay services range between R200 and R300. The 52.5% of the ward residents pay less than R200 of the



Source: Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), 2011, *Statistics by place*, viewed 23 July 2020, from http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=964.

FIGURE 2: Map of the study area and its neighbourhoods.

service charges. This indicates that the municipality does not generate enough funds from the residents who are using the services. The third question was on whether the respondents agree or disagree about the community members paying for better service delivery. Table 4 summarises the willingness of the community members to pay for municipal services.

Table 4 shows that 100% of the councillors and municipal members indicate that they are willing to pay for better and improved service delivery and 75% of the community members agreed that there is a need to pay for services. However, 25% of community members indicate that they are not willing to pay for better services. From these replies, on average, there is possibility for delivering public services

through market principles and mechanisms, where users choose which products or services best meet their needs from a range of providers. Market mechanisms have been widely applied in many Western economies. When markets function well, they are generally considered effective at promoting efficient outcomes (National Audit Office 2012). However, markets can fail for a wide variety of reasons, for example, if users do not have good information on the range of providers, quality and prices in the market or if providers collude to keep prices artificially high. Left to their own devices, markets may also not be effective at delivering wider policy outcomes such as equity and universal services. The feasibility of market mechanisms in South African rural municipalities is an area for further study. The respondents were also asked to evaluate the status of service delivery in Dr JSMLM. Table 5 summarises the level of satisfaction of the respondents.

As shown in Table 5, 7% of ward residents rate extremely dissatisfied in service delivery. A total of 10% councillors, 20% municipal staff and 37% of ward residents rated that the service is poor but with room for improvement of service delivery. A total of 10% of the councillors, 60% of the municipal staff members and 43% of the residents were neutral about the level of satisfaction on the service delivery provided. A total of 80% of the councillors and 60% of the municipal staff members mentioned that they are satisfied; however, only 13% the residents replied satisfied but with room for improvement. The fifth question asks the respondents to single out which services are in need in Dr JSMLM. Table 6 summarises the results.

Based on Table 6, councillors, municipal staff and ward residents mostly need water around the areas that they live in. All the respondents indicated that they are mostly in need of water, which is an essential need. The low percentage of the other services implies that the other services are still provided, yet the high value of water service may be because of the poor and inadequate supply of water in the study area.

Discussion

The quantitative analysis and responses from participants in this study show that most residents in the study area remain in a state of poverty despite the resources being provided by the government to alleviate poverty (National Treasury 2011). There are prevailing problems associated with defiance that prevent the municipalities and financial mismanagement challenges faced by the Dr JSMLM. Most of the villages in the municipality are very poor and rural that makes them reliant on the government assistance for essential services such as water, waste removal and sanitation. In Dr JSMLM, the delivery of municipal services has been diminished for the fact that the local municipality could not generate enough funding from the public services rendered to the communities. The lesser service delivery leads to more frequent protests and public unrests that affected the welfare of the society in the municipality. The other reason for frequent protests is mainly political leadership's lack of prompt responsiveness

TABLE 1: Total number of population sampled.

Population	Total number of population	Sampled
Councillors	31	5
Municipal staff	484	15
Wards	31	100 household heads
Total sample size	-	120

TABLE 2: Summary of the respondents on their response for whether they pay municipal services or not.

Respondents	The response		Percentages (%)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Councillors	5	0	100	0
Municipal staff members	15	0	100	0
Wards residents (households)	40	60	40	60
Total	60	60	-	-

TABLE 3: Summary of the respondents on their monthly expense for municipal services.

Respondents	The response (Rand)			Percentages		
	100-200	201-300	301-more	100-200	201-300	301-more
Councillors	0	2	21	0%	13.33%	52.5%
Municipal staff members	3	8	11	60%	53.33%	27.5%
Wards residents	2	5	8	40%	33.33%	20%
Total	5	5	40	-	-	-

TABLE 4: Summary of the respondents on their willingness to pay for municipal services.

Respondents	Are you willing to pay for better service delivery?			
	The response		Percentages (%)	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Councillors	5	0	100	0
Municipal staff members	15	0	100	0
Wards residents	70	30	75	25
Total	90	30	-	-

TABLE 5: Summary of the level of satisfaction of the respondents on municipal services.

Response	Councillors	%	Municipal staff members	%	Ward residents	%
Extremely dissatisfied	0	0	0	0	7	7
Poor service with room for improvement	1	10	3	20	37	37
Neutral – No opinion	1	10	6	60	43	43
Satisfied, but room for improvement	3	80	6	60	13	13
Extremely satisfied (no problems)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5	100	15	100	100	100

TABLE 6: Response from councillors on the most needed services.

Response	Number of councillors	%	Number of municipal members staff	%	Number of ward members	%
Water	4	80	9	60	79	79
Electricity	0	0	0	0	1	1
Sanitation	0	0	2	13.33	13	13
Road and storm water	1	20	2	13.33	4	4
Housing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Education (library)	0	0	1	6.67	3	3
Total	5	100	15	100	100	100

to issues raised by communities. The feedback from the survey questions further shows that the leadership is incompetent and corrupt, with a greater degree of disregard to communities. Ward committees are also not fully operational, resulting in poor communication with communities. If people are dissatisfied with the delivery of basic municipal services such as running water, electricity and sanitation, they tend to protest especially in informal settlements. The other reason behind frequent protests is that communities feel that politicians merely use them to get votes and do not deliver on their promises. As a result, residents get angry and resort to protests. When residents protest, more damage is done to infrastructure and property.

From the data analysis it is confirmed that the resident's prefer essential services such as water and electricity, more than other services. The status of service delivery in the municipality is rated as poor. However, the residents still believe that there are possibilities for the improvements in the service delivery if the municipality adheres to its IDP for the years ahead. The municipality has many rural areas that cannot afford to pay for the services where the level of unemployment is high. People are more concerned about the supply of water in their areas than other services as it is a basic need for everyone. Communities usually spend 2–3 days without water. The scarcity of water is because of Mkhombo dam, which has become dry because of the prolonged dry season. Regarding sanitation, many ward residents have pit toilets, which are supplied by the municipality and other residents have flush toilets in which they pay for the municipality to come and drain their toilets. Waste removal is not in all the areas, it is only in those areas wherein they pay for services. In other areas waste is dumped on the roadside.

Human capacity in Dr JSMLM is insufficient. The document analysis shows that there are 359 vacant posts. This leads to poor service delivery because the available staff has too much to handle, thus some important tasks are left unattended. The study also found that service backlogs cannot be met because of limited budget. It was also found that most residents are not paying for services, which makes it difficult for the municipality to provide services adequately as the money used for development is derived from payment of services.

Conclusion and policy implications

The primary aim of this study was to evaluate challenges of service delivery in Dr JSMLM with the intention to find remedial solutions to challenges encountered in the delivery of services in a sustainable way. The study found that water service is the most needed amongst other services. The majority of the residents in the study area are not satisfied with the level of current municipal services provided. The study also reveals that the municipality does not generate enough funds from the services rendered for the residents as 60% of the residents fail to pay for the services provided. This creates financial constraints and will substantially reduce basic municipal services provision.

The provision of safe water, sanitation, sewage and road and storm water ensures that there are economic benefits to the communities and it is of crucial importance for the preservation of human health and safety. Poor service delivery in roads and storm water could result in increased accidents on the roads, and waste removal could increase the air pollution and illnesses. Public participation should be considered through the election of ward councillors who are crucial actors in organising public participation. Communities are invited to attend IDP meetings so that they can give inputs on their needs. In this way, municipalities are assisted in making plans that are in line with community needs. Lack of human, financial and technical resources negatively influences service delivery. Dr JSMLM is understaffed with 359 vacant posts. As a result, the responsibilities of appointed officials become too much to handle. This leads to some important obligations being neglected. Technical, financial and human resources are needed to enhance service delivery.

According to the residents, the service delivery of Dr JSMLM is poor but with room for improvement. Few ward residents feel that they are extremely dissatisfied with service delivery; in their view the municipality is not doing anything for them. Dr JSMLM has a backlog challenge in service delivery provision. To overcome the backlog, there is an IDP in place. The plans indicate that the backlog will be there for the foreseeable future. The constraint envisaged is lack of funds to ensure that there is service provision. To enhance service delivery, the municipality should also outsource services to private service providers. The reason behind outsourcing is to reduce maintenance and administrative costs.

This study highlighted the challenges encountered in the provision of service delivery. It is hoped that the ensuing recommendations will assist in improving the quality-of-service provision in Dr JSMLM. The municipality should outsource certain functions to promote efficiency. By outsourcing services, communities benefit because jobs will be created and administrative and maintenance costs can be minimised. Human, financial and technical resources should be provided to enhance service delivery. The filling of vacant posts with skilled employees should be prioritised for efficient delivery of services. A debt recovery plan should be developed and complied to meet lack of financial resources from recovered debts. The national and provincial government should also be consulted to provide more funds to buy equipment and replace old infrastructure. Public participation should be given priority because municipalities have been created to serve the public. People know their rights and may revolt if they are neglected. Given a chance to participate in decision-making, they become cooperative and support the activities of the municipalities. The municipality should also follow and adhere to the national government's initiative such as the municipal service partnerships (MSPs) to enhance service delivery.

This study further shows that contrary to the common belief that rural municipal residents demand free services, Dr JSMLM residents are willing to pay modest fees for the

quality services rendered. This implies that there is possibility for delivering public services through market systems. However, the feasibility of market mechanisms in South African rural municipalities is a key area for further study.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

M.F.Z. and M.P.M. contributed equally to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on special request from the corresponding author, M.F.Z. The data are not publicly available because of their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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