




# Understanding the Service delivery protests in South Africa: A case study of Duncan Village



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## Dates:

Received: 16 Mar. 2022  
 Accepted: 19 Aug. 2022  
 Published: 12 Dec. 2022

## How to cite this article:

Ndasana, M., Vallabh,  
 D. & Mxunyelwa, S., 2022,  
 'Understanding the Service  
 delivery protests in South  
 Africa: A case study of  
 Duncan Village', *Africa's  
 Public Service Delivery  
 and Performance  
 Review* 10(1), a644.  
[https://doi.org/10.4102/  
 apsdpr.v10i1.644](https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdpr.v10i1.644)

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**Background:** In the years since the first democratic election in 1994, South Africa has experienced mass violent demonstrations in townships, which include the Duncan village massacre in 1985. The phenomenon of violent service delivery protests has become a norm in South Africa. Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM) protests constitute the key focus of this study.

**Aim:** The aim of this study was to explore the key challenges that relate to service delivery protests in Duncan village.

**Setting:** This study was conducted in Duncan village, one of the townships in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM), which is located approximately 5 km from East London's central business district in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

**Methods:** In-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders from Duncan village, including the ward councillor, in the data collection process.

**Results:** The findings of the study revealed that housing shortages, an unhygienic living environment, poverty and unemployment were identified as major challenges facing residents in Duncan village.

**Conclusion:** The BCMM should regulate community clean-ups in order to ensure better living conditions. Develop electronic database to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of houses. Also, community meetings should be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis not only during election or protest time. Moreover, the ward councillor should be available and easily accessible to Duncan Village residents.

**Contribution:** The article sought to investigate the challenges that relate to service delivery protests in Duncan Village and concludes that lack of housing, poverty, dirty location, and lack of communication were the main causes of violent service delivery protests.

**Keywords:** governance; local governance; protests; service delivery; municipality; ward councillor; residents; Duncan Village; annual report; SALGA.

## Introduction

South Africa has a history of mass violent demonstration, such as the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, the 1976 Soweto riots and the Duncan village massacre in 1985 (Reddy 2016). Against this background, 19 people were killed and 138 people were injured during the violent protest in 1985 at Duncan village. The South African Local Government Association (SALGA 2010) contends that since 1990, South Africa has a historical experience of protest action that is directed at the state. Based on the above narrative, before 1994, most South African citizens were denied access to social amenities such as clean water, electricity, refuse removal and sanitation. However, these social amenities were only provided to the white residents (Presidency 2015). After 1994, when the new democratic government was elected in South Africa, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was announced with the purpose of addressing social and economic complications facing the country, such as violence, lack of housing, lack of jobs and lack of democracy (Lavery 2012; Presidency 2015; SALGA 2010). Therefore, this article seeks to understand the causes of poor service delivery protests in Duncan village.

The *Daily Dispatch* (2015) reported that Duncan village is one of the townships in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM) in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The township is located approximately 5 km away from the East London City Business

District (CBD). Therefore, this study seeks to explore the challenges facing Duncan village residents in relation to service delivery.

### **Violent mass demonstration: A problem statement**

The *Daily Dispatch* (2015) reported that the Mdantsane bypass in East London has been the site of almost weekly blockades by service delivery protesters from Duncan village. Also, the busy city is obstructed regularly with burning tyres and stones dispersed by shack dwellers on the road. However, recent studies have argued that lack of housing, sanitation and electricity are some of the burning issues concerning the service delivery protests (Lavery 2012; Reddy 2016; SALGA 2010). This underscores the relevance of this study.

### **Research questions**

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are the challenges of service delivery protests in Duncan village?
- What is the impact of violent service delivery protests in Duncan village?

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objectives of the study were the following:

- to identify the challenges and causes of service delivery protests in Duncan village
- to assess the impact of violent service delivery protests in Duncan village.

### **Legislative framework for service delivery**

In South Africa, government is constituted in terms of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Act 108 of 1996). Chapter 3 of the Constitution, Section 40, clearly states that the Government of the Republic of South Africa is constituted by national, provincial and local spheres of government, which are distinctive, interdependent and interrelated. All spheres of government must observe and conduct their activities within the parameters that the chapter provides. The Constitution further states that all spheres of government and all organs of the state within each sphere must provide effective, transparent, accountable and coherent government for the republic as a whole.

### **Municipal Systems Act**

The *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act* 32 of 2000 intends:

- to provide for community participation
- to provide a framework for local public administration and human resource development
- to empower the poor

- to ensure that municipalities put in place service tariffs and credit control policies that take their needs into account by providing a framework for the provision of services, service delivery agreements and municipal service districts.

### **Municipal Structures Act**

The *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act* 117 of 1998 intends:

- to provide for the establishment of the municipalities in accordance with the requirements relating to categories and types of municipalities
- to establish criteria for determining the category of municipality to be established in an area
- to provide an appropriate division of functions and powers between categories of municipalities.

### **National government**

The national government is given certain functions by the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Act 108 of 1996) that it should carry out. The national government delivers these functions by formulation of policy and their implementation strategies on which programmes are to be undertaken by the ministries, by state or nonstate organs or agencies. The functions of the national government include the following:

- In relation to service delivery, the national government is responsible for policy formulation and making.
- Developing national standards and norms, rules and regulations.

### **Provincial government**

Provinces have much wider responsibilities. However, in relation to service delivery, the provincial government should monitor and support municipalities as well as promote the development of local government capacity to enable municipalities to perform their functions and manage their own affairs.

### **Local government**

The local authorities are multipurpose bodies responsible for delivering a broad range of services that aim to:

- provide democratic and accountable government
- ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner
- promote social and economic development
- promote a safety and healthy environment.

Besdeo (2016) claims that there is a significant relationship between the national, provincial and local governments which has an impact on their success and proficiency in delivering better services to the entire nation. Reddy (2016) suggests that local governments have the most immediate obligations for the understanding of principles

that communities desire, because municipalities are the contact point between the state and citizens. The author further states that protests that are organised by community members are directed at the local government. Importantly, Besdeo (2016) claims that these protest actions are caused by the scarcity of the provision of social amenities such as water, electricity, infrastructure like access to roads and sanitation, housing and provision of additional support for socio-economic development.

### **Violent service delivery protests: An understanding**

Alexander (2010:2) defined violent service delivery protest as a 'revolt of the poor'. The author further argued that people embark on violent service delivery protests when the services such as removal of refuse and maintenance of a hygienic environment are not met by the municipality. However, Runciman (2015) studied violent protests in South African local government and found that protesters burn the streets as well as the state property to get attention of senior government officials and politicians. Also, when the residents destroy the existing infrastructure (for instance, municipal offices and schools), it is in the hope that they will receive a greater benefit from the national government. Central to this contestation is an assertion made by Lavery (2012), who argued that residents demonstrate their dissatisfaction towards service delivery to government through protest action. In the South African context, the author believes that findings obtained from this study will help the government to understand the challenges and causes of service delivery protests.

Burger (2009) argues that violent service delivery protests occurring throughout the country are likely to be caused by dissatisfaction of residents with the provision of basic municipal services, such as water, electricity and toilets, lack of housing, unemployment and high levels of poverty, especially in informal settlements. Other reasons for service delivery protests include accusations of extensive corruption and nepotism within local government structures (Burger 2009). A study conducted by Jobo (2014) stated that the lack of communication between councillors and the community has contributed to the number of protests. The author also argues that if residents are well informed by the councillors or other municipal officials, they are more likely to understand the process of service delivery offered by the municipality and this will lessen the chances of embarking on violent protest. Further to this, the author contends that poor leadership from ward committees and ward councillors is one of the causes of violent service delivery protest (Jobo 2014).

A study conducted by Alexander (2010) on service delivery protests revealed that public protest tends to affect those who are not involved in service delivery protest, such as foreigners; they are likely to be the target when people embark on a violent service delivery protest. Moreover,

some of the community members said there are burning of shops, looting of shops, destruction of buildings, blockading of roads, burning of tyres, chasing of unpopular individuals out of townships, burning of houses of the councillor, confrontations with the police and forced resignations of elected officials.

Based on the above narratives, the lack of housing, sanitation, electricity and removal of refuse by the municipality seem to be the most burning issues affecting service delivery protests (Burger 2009; Sibanyoni 2006). It is expected that this review will help the researcher to contribute to the subject of service delivery protests in South Africa, particularly in Duncan village in the Eastern Cape province. While there is scarce literature on service delivery protests in Duncan village, not many studies have been conducted (Jobo 2014). Hence, there is the need to explore this missing edge in local government, particularly in Duncan village.

Reddy (2016) suggests that service delivery is linked to development, which is an effort to close the gap between the rich and the poor. Also, service delivery is the level of work which is done according to specific compliance, goals, agreement and expectations, and delivery is when goods are met as per agreement.

While there is abundant literature on service delivery protest in local government, particularly in Duncan village in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, no study has been conducted in Duncan village. Hence, there is the need to examine the missing side in municipalities.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study is informed by the transformational leadership theory. Korejan and Shahbazi (2016:454) define transformational leadership theory as 'a complex and dynamic process in which leaders influence their follower's values, beliefs and goals'. In addition, leaders are responsible for taking organisations to the future, distinguishing environmental needs and enabling proper changes. In this study, transformational leadership theory will be used to understand the key challenges or causes of service delivery protests in Duncan village. This theory is significant to this study in the following ways: (1) it will assist the management or leadership of BCMM to understand the complaints of Duncan village residents and how to provide solutions as leaders of the municipality, and (2) this theory will also provide guidance to BCMM on how to lead its communities to avoid service delivery protests in future. In the South African context, transformational leadership theory could assist BCMM to formulate a policy framework that enables the municipality to provide better service delivery to Duncan village effectively and efficiently. The relevance of the legal frameworks for service delivery and transformational theory is that transformational leaders are willing to share their vision with their followers. The process of communication focuses on sharing their views and ideas

with followers pertaining to their complaints for service delivery. However, legal frameworks for service delivery will provide guidance to transformational leaders on how to render service to their followers, particularly Duncan village residents.

## Research methods and design

This study employed the qualitative research method because of the fact that structured interviews were held with the residents. Structured interviews are better at predicting the actual performance when multiple candidates are interviewed.

### Study population and sampling strategy

In this study, the target population was the residents of Duncan village and the municipal executives of BCMM. A snowball sampling technique was used in this study to enable the residents to form a part of the sample. Twenty residents were interviewed.

### Data collection

Face-to-face interviews were conducted and the data were analysed thematically. Data were collected before coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was announced in South Africa.

### Ethical considerations

The respondents were assured of confidentiality. The researcher was granted permission by the Research and Knowledge Management Department at Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM) to conduct the research in Duncan village.

## Results

Interviews were conducted on 04 February 2020. The findings of this study are presented next.

### Duncan village residents' perspectives

The first objective sought to identify the challenges and causes of violent service delivery protests in Duncan village.

#### Lack of housing

The findings indicate that the lack of housing appears to be the dominant issue that causes service delivery protests in Duncan village. The participants complained frequently of the many problems, but the key problem referred to by many residents was the state of lack of housing under which many people live in Duncan village. The following narratives capture the community feelings:

'[W]e are living in a shack that can collapse at any time when it is raining, yet we always vote during election period.' (Participant 1, Male, 40 years old)

'I have been staying in Duncan village in a shack since 2008, but I never received RDP house, and I have a friend who came in Duncan village after me, but she has a proper house now, it's so said [*sic*].' (Participant 2, Female, 35 years old)

'I have applied for RDP house since 2015 but no outcomes, and I lost faith; I do not think I will get it.' (Participant 3, Female, 45 years old)

'When it is raining, the water falls into my shack, and I can't even sleep at night.' (Participant 4, Male, 37 years old)

#### Unemployment and poverty

The study found that the lack of jobs and poverty are some of the challenges facing the residents of Duncan village. The residents complained that they are not employed, and they have never worked before; they are surviving with social grants for the children, which are not enough for them to meet the needs of the entire family, whereas some residents are of the view that they get temporary jobs which end within a year, and that is why they are protesting. The following narratives capture the community feelings discussed:

'We do not have food to eat, no jobs available; it is painful to be poor, and the ANC does not care about us.' (Participant 5, Male, 50 years old)

'People who are working in our municipality, they are coming far, yet we are unemployed as residents of this place.' (Participant 6, Female, 30 years old)

#### Lack of electricity

The participants stated that in order for them to have electricity, they resort to illegal connection. The narratives below capture the feelings mentioned.

One interview participant stated that:

'In order for us to have lights we need to climb the electricity pole and do illegal connection.' (Participant 7, Female, 48 years old)

Another participant narrated that:

'Children are not safe with this illegal connection because sometimes it burst unexpectedly.' (Participant 8, Male, 39 years old)

#### Lack of toilets

The results underscore that the lack of toilets is another cause of violent service delivery protest in Duncan village. The participants complained that they are sharing a few toilets that have been built by the BCMM. They further stated that the toilets are not enough for them, and it is not safe at night, especially to children and women, because they are situated at a distance from their shacks. The following narratives capture the community feelings:

'We are using few toilets that have been built by the municipality; they are dirty and scary.' (Participant 9, Male, 36 years old)

'We are getting diseases because of dirty toilets that we are using.' (Participant 10, Female, 33 years old)

### Dirty location

This research found that the residents of Duncan village complained about dirtiness of their location. The following narratives capture the community feelings mentioned:

'How can you stay in a dirty place with children, and how can you eat in a place with bad smell?' (Participant 11, Male, 28 years old)

'The municipality does not collect refuse; it stays in front of our yard and there is a bad smell comes out.' (Participant 12, Female, 25 years old)

'We are fighting for our rights and what belongs to us.' (Participant 13, Female, 24 years old)

### Accessibility of ward councillor

The findings show that there is no regular interaction at all between the residents and the ward councillor. In addition, the results indicated that the ward councillor is not always available to the community. The following narratives capture the feelings mentioned:

'The councillor is nowhere to be found; she is very scarce to our location.' (Participant 14, Female, 23 years old)

'The last time I see [*sic*] my councillor, it was during campaign for election period.' (Participant 15, Male, 27 years old)

'When you are looking for a councillor, you are told that she is in a meeting.' (Participant 16, Female, 26 years old)

### Lack of communication

Participants revealed that the government officials should stop making empty promises, and that they should consult the community members and must communicate with them on a regular basis. The findings further stated that feedback on steps that have been taken should be provided timeously. On the other hand, some participants indicated that municipal officials should visit their area in order to listen to their demands before they are expressed as violent protests. The following narratives capture the community feelings:

'We do not get feedback from the meetings we held with our councillor; she only comes to us when we are protesting and makes empty promises.' (Participant 17, Female, 29 years old)

Furthermore, the participants highlighted that:

'[i]t takes time to hear about the complaints we raised, and there is no one who keep us updated.' (Participant 18, Male, 32 years old)

In addition to the above-mentioned items, the residents further complained about the following challenges:

- poor housing and a slow pace of conversion to formal housing
- lack of access to electricity, which has resulted in many illegal connections that pose a danger, particularly to children
- dirty location and a lack of toilets.

## Impact of the chronic violent service delivery protests in Duncan village on residents' lives

The last research objective sought to assess the impact of violent service delivery protests on the delivery of better services for Duncan village residents. The findings were as follows: the research found that there are no improvements at all; instead, the situation becomes worse each year. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents complained that it takes a long time for the municipality to respond to their complaints, and when the houses are issued, they are given to people who are new to the area, whereas they have been staying in Duncan village for many years.

On the other hand, this study found that residents embark on a violent protest to fight for the most important services such as electricity, which affects their lives. Sometimes they change their demands and protest for houses, especially if there are places where the municipality has built RDP houses while they are still living in a shack. Some of the residents stated that:

'The protest has been [*carried out*] effectively and efficiently; hence, we got [*a*] few toilets. We have been protesting but we never received houses, electricity and the location is still dirty.' (Participant 19, Male, 34 years old)

## Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality ward councillor's perspective

The main causes of protests and challenges facing residents as identified by the ward councillor of Duncan village.

The ward councillor has stated that:

'... housing needs is one of the most key challenges facing the residents of Duncan village.' (Participant 20, Ward councillor, 55 years old)

In his view, the ward councillor further stated that:

'Duncan village is crime-ridden and poor, unemployment in that area is very high [*and*] hence they always embark on violent service delivery protest'. (Participant 20, Male, Ward councillor, 55 years old)

'Informal dwelling upgrades such as access to electricity supply, water and sanitation were some of the key challenges mentioned by the ward councillor.' (Participant 20, Male, Ward councillor, 55 years old)

Next,

'... communities are not fully participating in development processes and there is a conflict between leadership which has a negative impact on community development processes'. (Participant 20, Male, Ward councillor, 55 years old)

'Residents are unable to access opportunities for the livelihood improvement, and the services that are provided to Duncan Village residents do not adequately meet their needs.' (Participant 20, Male, Ward councillor, 55 years old)

Lastly:

'the residents are not united, and they have different issues that are affecting the entire community'. (Participant 20, Male, Ward councillor, 55 years old)

## Effectiveness and improvement of services in Duncan village as a result of protests

Contrary to developing solutions for residents in Duncan village, the protests add to the problems; for example, community facilities like roads become dirtier and more difficult to use after the protests.

In the ward councillor's view, the level of crime worsened as people find the opportunity to steal from those who are on streets protesting for better service delivery. Residents were blamed for selling houses after they had been provided by the local municipality. As a result, the ward councillor further complained that residents are selling their RDP houses and move to stay in a shack.

### Intervention from the municipality to prevent future violent protests in Duncan village

The ward councillor indicated that BCMM capital budget has increased by 11% compared to the 2016–2017 adopted budget. The capital budget for better living conditions of the urban and rural communities of the city over the next three financial years is as follows:

- R1.65 billion has been set aside for the 2017–2018 financial year.
- A further R2.22 billion has been approved for 2018–2019 financial year.
- Another R2.39 billion in the 2019–2020 financial year has been allocated (Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality [BCMM] 2018).

The councillor further stated that from the above budgeted amount, they have prioritised the following services:

- Upgrade and provision of wastewater infrastructure with an allocation of R284 million.
- Water service has been allocated R130 million.
- Upgrade and construction of roads infrastructure network and storm-water drainage gets an amount of R271 million.
- R186 million is allocated for the provision of integrated human settlement.
- Electricity service has been allocated R134 million (BCMM 2018).
- Furthermore, the municipality is offering an indigent subsidy where people who cannot afford it will receive free basic electricity. The councillor also said that they have adopted the theme that says 'Unity in action: we are a city hard at work'. In this regard, BCMM in partnership with the Office of the Premier will be piloting an urban micro aquaponics project at Duncan village and Zwelitsha.
- The Metro has established new ward committees in all BCMM wards to improve communication between the Metro and communities.
- Ward committee meetings are held monthly to discuss service delivery issues concerning the ward development.

## Discussion

Emanating from this research, the lack of housing seemingly was the dominant complaint by the Duncan village residents. This finding aligns with studies conducted by Burger (2009), *Daily Dispatch* (2015), Jobo (2014), Runciman (2017) and Sibanyoni (2006). These studies revealed that frustrations around service delivery protests were further worsened by the lack of housing, poverty, lack of jobs, dirty location and lack of electricity.

This finding is supported by previous studies arguing that during the apartheid era in South Africa, most of the homelands were deprived from accessing the basic municipal services such as lack of houses, clean water, electricity, refuse removal and sanitation (Alexandra 2010; Jobo 2014; Lavery 2012; Presidency 2015).

The researcher visited Duncan village and witnessed the living conditions of that area and heard the feelings and emotions from the interviewees.

On the other hand, SALGA (2015) conducted a study titled 'Community protest: Local government perceptions', which argues that community protest actions compelled by electricity are typically because of affordability concerns. Therefore, this study concurs with this finding from Duncan village residents where the researcher found that the lack of electricity was the key problem residents were facing.

Concerning the accessibility of government officials, participants complained that the ward councillor is not easily accessible. He is only available during election periods. Moreover, the participants revealed that the ward councillor is not available as during election time, where they used to see him often, and that is why they resort to violent service delivery protests. Similarly, this finding is supported by a study conducted by Jobo (2014), who argued that the lack of communication between government officials and the community member is one of the causes of violent service delivery protest. This finding is also supported by the theoretical framework adopted in this study. According to the transformational leadership theory, leaders work with their followers and guide them through the change process (Korejan & Shahbazi 2016)

Therefore, the residents of Duncan village are very dissatisfied with the inadequate service delivery as well as the lack of development in Duncan village. The service delivery protests and their root causes, and their consequences, may lead to a lack of governability and serious economic disruptions for communities in Duncan village and other East London residents, thus the importance of this study.

### General recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following are some of the recommendations:

- The municipality should intervene by ensuring that the installation of prepaid meter boxes is done in each shack in order to avoid illegal connections. Furthermore, the municipality must ensure that indigent subsidy is given to all indigent citizens. Moreover, an investigation should be conducted to ensure that a subsidy is given to those who deserve it.
- Improve public participation, consultation and communication process so that people will witness all the processes with regard to service delivery.
- Community meetings should be conducted on a regular basis and not during election periods or protest times.
- The ward councillor should be available and easily accessible to Duncan village residents.
- Eradicate corruption regarding the distribution of RDP houses.
- Lastly, municipal officials should create and maintain harmonious relationships with ward committees as well as community members.

### Recommendations for further studies

The following recommendations are made:

- Researchers need to look at the allocation of resources such as IDP for Duncan village.
- Capacitate communities of Duncan village to initiate community development projects.
- Develop electronic database to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of houses.
- Regulate community clean-ups in order to ensure better living conditions.

### Conclusion

This article sought to investigate the challenges that relate to service delivery protests in Duncan village. The article concludes that the lack of housing, poverty, dirty location and the lack of communication were the main causes of violent service delivery protests. The municipality was lambasted by the residents of Duncan village for the delay in attending to the community needs. Residents were blamed for selling RDP houses. The municipality should monitor the RDP and make sure that the residents of Duncan village do not sell their houses.

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the respondents from Duncan village for taking their valuable time to participate in this study.

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Authors' contributions

M.N. was responsible for conducting the entire study, as well as data analysis and correspondence. D.V. and S.M. edited the article.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability

Data used in this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

### 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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