

SOUTH AFRICA'S MUNICIPAL ROADS AUTHORITIES: ARE THEY BUILT ON A WEAK FOUNDATION?

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ABSTRACT

The South African White Paper on Local Government of 1998 spelled out the framework in terms of which the local government system of that time would be transformed. Municipalities were thereafter established and assigned powers and functions. After more than a quarter of a century, there can no longer be any doubt that many municipalities are to a significant extent failing in their primary purpose, i.e. to deliver services. The paper examines assumptions made by the drafters of the White Paper in respect of key attributes for service delivery, such as skills and funding, budgeting and effective spending, leadership, and organisational stability. The paper finds that many of these assumptions were highly optimistic.

Keywords: Auditor General, dysfunction, local government, SAICE, service delivery, South Africa, White Paper.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTITUTION'S MANDATE FOR MUNICIPAL SERVICE DELIVERY

The new government in 1994 assessed the then existing local government system, with its multitude of local authorities often divided along racial lines, and deduced that, "clearly", "delivery on new municipal mandates cannot be achieved within the existing institutional framework" (i.e. that inherited in 1994) (Department of Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development (DPACD), 1998:14¹).

The White Paper on Local Government of 1998 spelled out the framework in terms of which the local government system would be transformed, and described characteristics of these new municipalities.

In 1996, the new Constitution allocated to municipalities the responsibility for local service delivery – Clause 152 of the Constitution stated:

"The objects of local government are — (a) to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities; (b) to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner; (c) to promote social and economic development; (d) to promote a safe and healthy environment; and (e) to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government" (South Africa, 1996). (Emphasis added)

¹ The pages have no numbers. References in this paper to "page numbers" in DPACD 1998 are to the sequence of the page in its total of 120 pages.

The White Paper appeared to take for granted that if municipalities possessed the characteristics it described, then service delivery would flow smoothly. However the descriptions included a large number of assumptions. (Section 4, below, delves further into the White Paper assumptions.) For example, that municipalities would ensure that “services are provided at levels which are affordable, and that municipalities are able to recover the costs of service delivery” (DPACD, 1998:25) – moreover that it would be possible for municipalities to “take strong measures to deal with those households who can afford to pay for services but are not doing so” (DPACD, 1998:89).

If these assumptions were justified, the municipalities would likely have proved more than adequate for effective and efficient service delivery. Note though that it was, and still is, vital that all of the assumptions, without exception, would be more or less fulfilled. Service delivery is like a chain, which chain is only as strong as its weakest link – in this instance, the links being, among others, the characteristics described by each prediction (e.g. relating to skills, finance, governance). All these “ducks” must be in “a row” for services to be delivered.

2. STUDY PURPOSE

Whereas many municipalities are to some or another extent failing at delivering their mandated services, a first step to understanding what needs to be done to improve service delivery is surely to reflect on the extent to which these failures could be due to an inbuilt weak “foundation” of the local government system.

3. STUDY BACKGROUND

3.1 Evidence of Service Delivery Performance of Municipalities

While many municipalities have, by and large, performed well at delivering the services expected of them in terms of the Constitution, a sizeable number have not. Two useful indicators of service delivery are:

- The findings of the ‘report cards’ prepared between 2006 and 2022 by the South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE) on the condition of public sector infrastructure.
- The Green Drop, Blue Drop and No Drop certifications of the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), most recently in 2023.

Arguably, though, the most comprehensive annual assessments of the state of South Africa’s local government, and the consequences for service delivery, are the Auditor General’s annual reports on municipalities in terms of the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA), the most recent of which covered the financial year 2021-2022 (Auditor General, 2023.)

That of the previous year also reflected as follows on the five-year term of municipal councils that ended with the November 2021 local government elections.

“... the trends in the report demonstrate that the fourth administration (2016-2017) left municipalities in a worse financial position than when they took office”.

Moreover:

“The lack of improvement in municipal outcomes is an indictment on the entire local government accountability ecosystem, which failed to act and arrest the decline that continued to be characterised by service delivery challenges in municipalities,” says Maluleke (Auditor General, 2022:1).²

None of this came as a surprise, as some of the same municipalities have for a decade or more been identified as problematic. Media reports or court judgements name the same issues year after year. Each year, too, promises are made as to how improvements will be effected – very seldom can this improvement be observed.

What has service delivery actually been like?

- Choosing infrastructure condition as the indicator because (i) it is a measurable indicator and (ii) there is, for South African municipalities as a group, trend information comprehensive and reliable enough for the purposes of this paper.
- Within that, focusing on road infrastructure condition, given that this paper is to be presented at SATC.

The SAICE infrastructure report cards have, every five years starting in 2006, tracked the condition of the infrastructure of broad range of sectors, the road sector among them. On a scale of “A” (“World class”) through to “E” (“Unfit for purpose”), the road condition grading has progressed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: SAICE infrastructure grading of “municipal roads” and “overall” condition (Source: SAICE 2006; SAICE 2011; SAICE 2017; SAICE 2022³)

		2006	2011	2017	2022
Major urban areas, municipal paved roads	Grade	Note 1	C-	C-	D
“Other municipalities”, paved roads			D	D-	D-
Provincial and municipal unpaved roads			E	E	E
“Overall”, across all infrastructure sectors (Note 2)		D+	C-	D+	D

- Note 1: in 2006, the report card distinguished only between “major urban areas” (for which the grade was “C”) and “all other areas” (for which the grade was “D-”), not distinguishing between national, provincial or municipal ownership.
- Note 2: including “overall” for purposes of comparison.

² Within months of this paper being presented, the next local government elections will be held. It will be interesting to read what the Auditor General will, in her first report subsequent to these elections (to be published sometime mid-2025), have to say about the fifth administration (2017-2024).

³ How much infrastructure condition monitoring is undertaken varies widely, depending mostly on the zeal and resources of the authority that owns the infrastructure, in practice few South African road authorities undertake regular condition assessments. Acceptable roads information for the 2022 SAICE report card was received only from SANRAL, two of the nine provincial roads authorities, and half of the metropolitan municipalities. Information from other provinces and municipalities was comparatively scarce and too incomplete to enable firm general conclusions to be reached. It can be inferred that authorities which are not sufficiently informed of the condition of the roads would very likely also not be able to manage these assets in a satisfactory manner.

A positive move has been that in 2018 the national Department of Transport initiated a programme to force provincial road authorities to develop, maintain and operate pavement management systems. However the process was interrupted by covid-19 and, since, staff changes. Progress is therefore not where it was planned to have been. (Personal communication, SANRAL anonymous employee, 2023.)

Comparison between 2011, 2017 and 2022 indicates an overall decline in the condition of municipal roads.

Slabbert, Newlands and Vanderschuren, the authors of the sector report on roads that contributed to the 2022 SAICE Infrastructure Report Card, have in a series of articles since published in the official magazine of SAICE described their findings in more detail.

The following brief summary of points of interest has been abstracted from these articles (Slabbert et al., 2023a, 2023b):

- The condition of the road networks varied greatly from metro to metro – for the one, “... it is estimated that between 30% and 40% of the road network is in a poor to very poor condition” – many roads have deteriorated beyond the optimal condition for resurfacing, and “need rehabilitation, which means that some or many of the road’s layers must be reconstructed. As a result, the available funding is not adequate to have a meaningful impact and improve the overall condition of the roads network.” (Slabbert 2023a:68) On the other hand, another metro was able to report that the length of roads in the same category was only 3%. (Ibid:69). The SAICE assessment of yet another metro is that its road network “indicates total neglect of responsibilities over decades”. (Ibid:71)
- Worryingly, in respect of another metro, the SAICE team reported that “the strategies proposed in the consultant’s report indicate insufficient experience to give appropriate advice”. (Ibid:73)
- Another metro has not undertaken visual assessments since 2014. (Ibid:73)
- in 2020/2021, the most recent year for which information was available, DMs had been able to spend only 63% of the funding allocated by the Division of Revenue Act for road purposes. (Ibid:74)
- “More needs to be done by authorities to build the capacity of their roads departments. The key risks identified can largely be mitigated if their workforces within roads departments are skilled, experienced, and conduct their work with a high degree of professionalism.” “Authorities should have a large cohort of engineers capable of ensuring quality control during every step of the project cycle. This has budgetary implications for an authority. However, there are significant savings to be realised from efficiencies this capacity brings about” (Slabbert 2023b:36-37).
- “Paved road conditions are very closely linked to the institutional professional experience and capacity to manage road networks – the better the capacity the better the road condition.” (Slabbert 2023a:74) (Emphasis added.)

3.2 The Attributes a Municipality Would Require for it to Deliver the Mandated Services

Slabbert et al. identified three very important issues which are commonly raised in discussions about infrastructure, not just roads infrastructure, in South Africa. These are:

- shortage of skills;
- shortage of finance (the effects of which are aggravated by underspending of budgets);
- that data is not collected and, if it is, is not made use of in the management of that infrastructure.

Putting that list together with issues raised by other contributors to the SAICE report cards over the years, with numerous other documents (e.g. DPW et al 2007; DPW unknown;

CIDB 2014), and with the author's view based on decades of experience in the field, the following, listed in random order, are the five attributes most essential if a municipality is to deliver the mandated services:

- Adequate funding, for capital and operational purposes.
- Effective spending of prudent budgets.
- Adequate skills.
- Leaders and citizenry who share high levels of ethics and cooperation.
- Stable leadership.

To emphasise the point about service delivery being like a chain: for effective and efficient service delivery, for example by municipalities, all of these attributes must be at least adequately represented in the organisation and in all that does or attempts to do.

4. METHODOLOGY

Given that the evidence of service delivery performance of municipalities indicates systemic areas of failure common to numerous municipalities, the logical step is taken to investigate the foundational document of the municipal system, viz the White Paper on Local Government of 1998, starting with a check of the assumptions made by the White Paper – especially those relating to the “five attributes” listed in the preceding section.

5. STUDY FINDINGS: ASSESSMENT OF THE WHITE PAPER ASSUMPTIONS

The 1998 White Paper at some point of its 120 pages considered every one of the attributes listed in the preceding section. What were its assumptions in respect of each, and what might a scorecard look like? Specifically, how do the assumptions match up to the attributes that the previous section identifies as the “most essential if a municipality is to provide the mandated services”?

Very briefly, the White Paper views and assumptions related to each of the attributes are:

5.1 Adequate Funding, for Capital and Operational Purposes

The White Paper prediction evidently was that that municipalities would be able to raise substantial revenue, mainly through service charges and property assessment rates. The ruling party as recently as 2021 confirmed this interpretation:

“..... The 1998 White Paper further assumed that service tariffs would be set at levels that will be affordable for all households and that sufficient revenue would be generated to ensure financially sustainable municipalities” (ANC, 2021: 1).

That is, there would be adequate funding, for capital and operational purposes, for financial viability while delivering on the municipality's Constitution-given mandate. These funds would come from the municipality's own resources, transfers from national and provincial government, and from private sources – in the form of revenue, grants, loans etc. Not forgetting the importance of credit control to help ensure the payment of revenues due.

Coupled with this, wasteful expenditure would be drastically reduced if not eliminated.

These assumptions are evident at several points in the White Paper – for example:

- The White Paper stated (DPACD, 1998:90) that “the institutional restructuring of existing municipalities will result in increased financial viability”⁴.
 - Comment: The reasoning behind this statement is not given, and there is little evidence that any increased financial viability has actually been realised.
- The White Paper stated (DPACD, 1998:87-88) that “A municipality needs to develop a clear policy and set of procedures regarding the full or partial relief to those who are generally too poor to pay for rates”.
 - Comment: An unexceptionable statement but giving no hint that the order of magnitude was appreciated of the “relief” that would turn out to be needed.
- The White Paper (DPACD, 1998:89) presented a, with hindsight, wildly optimistic view of the credit control measures that would be possible, including that municipalities will “need to take strong measures to deal with those households who can afford to pay for services but are not doing so” ... “Such action can include cutting off services or court action to recover debts”.
 - Comment: It would seem that little thought was given by the drafters to the fierce resistance that cutting services has encountered.
- White Paper: municipalities must develop policies “to ensure that indigent households have access to basic services” (DPACD, 1998: 89).
 - Comment: How this would be done, or what the policies might include, was not described in the White Paper. However, in 2001, the Free Basic Services policy was introduced. While well intended, the policy, by removing a significant source of revenue, undermined the White Paper’s already optimistic view of the amount of revenue which could be raised from service charges.
- The White Paper discussed the ability of “municipalities in rural areas” to raise from property taxes some of the revenue they would need, concluding that:
 - “a combination of revenue-generating options, including betterment taxes, will need to be explored further to secure the financial viability of rural local government. [And] consideration should be given to adding to the revenue-raising powers of local government” (DPACD, 1998:90).
 - Comment: The prospects of raising significant revenue from rural areas have proven to be grossly overoptimistic.

Whereas an evident assumption was that municipalities would be able to raise substantial sums of the revenue they needed, mainly through service charges and property assessment rates, the White Paper should have more clearly foreseen, and made provision for the extent to which, from the start, municipalities would struggle to collect the revenues due – and why they would have to struggle, including:

- The very large numbers of desperately indigent residents, for many of whom even a token payment towards service charges would be unaffordable.
- Very large numbers of people might be able to afford the charges, but would be unwilling to pay, and would try to avoid doing so by one or more of a myriad of means, including doctoring or bypassing meters (if they had meters) – or simply

⁴ Increased financial viability for each of them individually, presumably, rather than for the sphere as a whole.

ignoring the bills and hoping for yet another amnesty for those in arrears, or illegally connecting to service lines (e.g. water and electricity)

5.2 Effective Spending of Prudent Budgets

Several principles for a “new” “system of municipal finance” were set out in the White Paper. These included:

- “Sustainability: Financial sustainability requires that municipalities ensure that the budgets are balanced (income should cover expenditure). Given revenue constraints, this involves ensuring that services are provided at levels which are affordable, and that municipalities are able to recover the costs of service delivery.”
- Moreover: “No bailout will be provided to a municipality that overspends its budget and/or fails to put in place proper financial management controls” (DPACD, 1998:25).

The White Paper did not foresee, or did not foresee the extent of the following (inter alia):

- Municipalities starting a financial year without fully-funded and balanced budgets⁵.
- Municipalities drawing up budgets which do not address their financial commitments (e.g. debt servicing, obligation to pay for services rendered by Eskom nor their service delivery obligations).⁶
- Not using the Equitable Share grant for its intended purpose (but e.g. using part of it to pay salaries);
- The gross under-budgeting for infrastructure maintenance, ignoring that this will inevitably result in higher costs (and service delivery interruptions) in the future (Wall, 2021).

A major factor in the condition of all of public sector fixed infrastructure is undoubtedly the generally way insufficient expenditure on maintenance and repairs. Municipalities are among the worst offenders. A major determinant of this is the financially constrained situation in which most municipalities find themselves – i.e. they do not generate enough income to budget sufficiently, even for essentials. As the Auditor General commented:

“The financial health of municipalities continued to deteriorate, partly because increased economic pressures⁷ meant that consumers were not paying the bills, but also because of poor financial management. Municipalities are losing money because they are not billing and collecting revenue, are using unfair and uncompetitive procurement practices, and are paying for goods and services that they either do not receive or do not use. Poorly managed local government finances directly affect municipalities’ ability to deliver the promised services to their communities ...” (Auditor General, 2023:6).

⁵ “Unfunded budgets and rising unauthorised expenditure clearly show the weaknesses in financial planning.” (Auditor General, 2023:5).

⁶ “With limited cash in the bank, municipalities prioritise paying salaries and councillor remuneration, which came to ... 64% of municipalities’ estimated recoverable own revenue and the equitable share allocation they receive from national government. They then use what is left to pay municipal suppliers, including Eskom and the water boards....” (Auditor General, 2023:42).

⁷ E.g. the poor state of the national economy, and extremely high unemployment. (“South Africa’s unemployment rate in the third quarter of 2023 was recorded at 31,9%” (Statistics South Africa, 2023: online).

Sadly, according to the Auditor General's June 2023-published report on municipal financial management, i.e. that for the 2021-22 financial year, only 33 of the 257 municipalities received a clean audit⁸ (Auditor General, 2023:14).

To sum up, it would not be unfair to state that some of the key principles of the "new" "system of municipal finance" quoted above have, in the intervening years, been ignored – or possibly not understood – by many municipalities.

5.3 Adequate Skills

The prediction of the drafters of the White Paper was evidently that all those responsible for the successful operation of municipalities, from the elected councillors through to the general workers, would be sufficiently skilled and also willing to utilise these skills to the benefit of the municipality. Moreover, if the municipal administrations were not sufficiently skilled, it would not be too great a problem to address the shortfalls.

However the White Paper made no assessment (e.g. numbers of qualified people) of the skills to match the needs of the projected-to-rapidly-grow infrastructure of the future as the requirements of those without infrastructure would, as promised by the national government, be progressively addressed. If such an assessment had been done, and its results made available to the drafters of the White Paper, they would surely have realised the extent to which a shortage of the higher levels of skills would inhibit service delivery at many of the municipalities.

Lawless has over the years researched the shortage of engineering staff in municipalities – for example her surveys, completed in 2005 and in 2015, of the presence or absence of engineering expertise in municipalities. Even the 2015 data, although old, is still more than adequate to illustrate that municipalities further from the amenities that a sizeable urban area can offer (those coloured red through orange in Figure 1) are those which struggle the most to acquire and retain the sophisticated skills required to run even the smallest municipality.

Yet somehow the Demarcation Board, when setting up municipalities to serve mostly rural areas, expected that they would be able to attract suitably qualified staff.

The White Paper did not foresee, or did not foresee the extent of:

- Organograms inappropriate for the infrastructure portfolio of a municipality and/or its service delivery responsibility.
- Recurrent vacancies, especially in key technical and financial posts.
- Appointments that are not based on merit (apart from corruption, reference here to the extent to which underqualified people are appointed – of biggest concern the CEOs and Municipal Managers, Technical Services Managers and CFOs).
- Difficulty of attracting qualified staff to remote locations (e.g. to many of the mostly rural municipalities).

⁸ "A financially unqualified opinion with no findings ("clean audit") means the municipality:

- produced quality financial statements free of material misstatements
- produced quality performance reports that measure and report on performance in a manner that is useful and reliable
- complied with key legislation relating to financial and performance management." (Auditor General, 2023: 138).

- The largely ineffectual performance of national programmes to build capacity (e.g. Project Consolidate).⁹

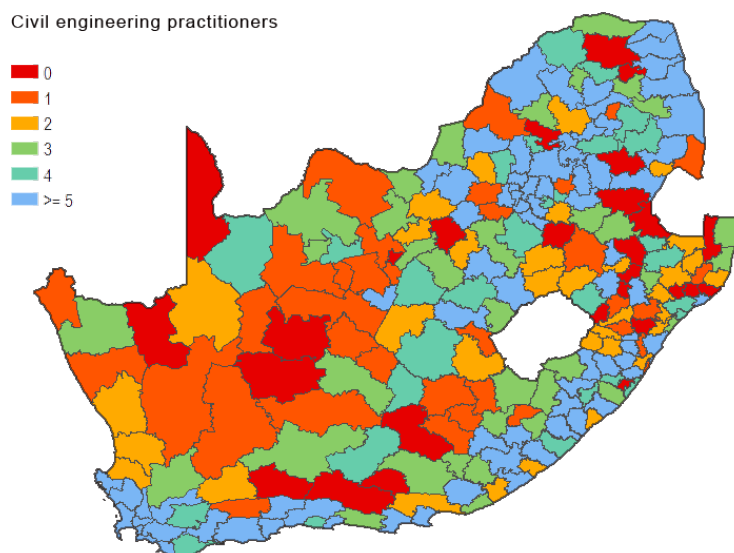


Figure 1: Civil engineering practitioners' presence in local government, 2015
(Source: Lawless, 2016)

5.4 Leaders and a Citizenry Who Share High Levels of Ethics and Cooperation

The prediction of the drafters of the White Paper was evidently that capable and ethical leaders would readily be found for all municipalities. Moreover, that these leaders, and officials and the citizenry, would subscribe to a high level of ethics and a shared, or at least compatible, culture conducive to cooperation and which is primarily focused on service delivery – adding to this, a cooperative/supportive populace, business, community and other spheres of government. Also, that all parties would willingly accept their responsibilities, and there would be mechanisms to hold them accountable for their actions or inactions.

It would seem however that this prediction about shared values, and high levels of ethics and cooperation, was way off the mark.

In 2021 the then Deputy Minister of Finance put his finger on a key factor in rebuilding infrastructure service delivery where it is broken:

“In our experience, we can confidently say, that a financial and service delivery crisis starts with a crisis in management and leadership. ... It is also perpetuated by a failure to deal decisively with disruptive management and leadership issues. If we are serious about fixing a financial and service delivery crisis, we need to first fix the political and administrative leadership crisis” (Staff Writer, 2021 – quoting the words of the Deputy Minister). (Emphasis added)

⁹ The Minister of Finance, no less, queried the efficacy of government programmes to build capacity in municipalities:

“National and provincial government have to date spent billions of rands in local government capacity building programmes. The poor performance of many municipalities shows that there was almost a zero return on that investment” (Ministry of Finance, 2021:11).

The extent to which infrastructure would be subject to wilful damage, for whatever reason, evidently did not occur to the drafters of the White Paper.

“Most alarming, though, is a dramatic increase in arson, theft and malicious destruction of public property by criminals and protesters. Theft of copper cables, aluminium guardrails, steel manhole covers and rail tracks results in personal tragedy, deprivation of legitimate users and disruption of commercial activity on an unprecedented scale” (SAICE 2022:15)

5.5 Stable Leadership

Continuity of service can underpin the improvement of staff performance, as individual staff members over the years gain more and more understanding of the municipality for which they work. The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) gave instances of this, pointing out that “almost all of the pockets of excellence have had a stable leadership at both political and administrative level for years” (SALGA, 2021:8).

The White Paper had nothing to say on this. The only references to concepts such as “stability” were to financial stability and the need for “stable and enabling framework” (DPACD, 1998:11).

What the drafters would have thought of the large number of coalitions governing municipalities currently, and the rate at which these coalitions fracture and are reformed but with a different representation of political parties – and the unsettling effect of this on service delivery – can only be imagined.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY FINDINGS

In view of all of these missing and weak links (so it has turned out) in the White Paper’s framework for transformation of the local government system, is it any surprise that there are so many instances of municipal service delivery failure (not just of roads or water)?

President Ramaphosa is aware that municipal service delivery failure is rooted in the “dysfunctional or in distress” nature of the institutions responsible:

“The poor performance of many local governments remains an area of concern. Too many of our municipalities, 163 out of 257, are dysfunctional or in distress due to poor governance, ineffective and sometimes corrupt financial and administrative management and poor service delivery” (Ramaphosa, 2023:18-19).

Data that unambiguously compares governance with service delivery, municipality by municipality, is difficult if not impossible to come by. But some confirmation of the influence of good governance on service delivery performance can be inferred as follows:

Twenty-two municipal wastewater systems (of 850 systems) were awarded Green Drops¹⁰ at the conclusion of the most recent round of assessments of “comparative analyses and diagnostics to assist Water Services Institutions to focus on specific areas for improvement

¹⁰ Choosing Green Drop over the more recent Blue Drop, which is the assessment of water systems because much of the credit for these belongs to the water boards which abstract raw water, treat it, and supply it to municipalities – whereas wastewater systems are solely the responsibility of municipalities, water boards not being involved (with minor exceptions).

and restoring functionality of wastewater infrastructure” – “a wastewater system that [equals or achieves] 90% Green Drop score, is regarded as excellent and is then allocated the prestigious Green Drop status.” (DWS 2022: x)

38 (of 257) municipalities received clean audits from the Auditor General’s assessment of the 2021/2022 financial year (Auditor General 2023:14,15), which is admittedly not identical to the DWS study “The audit period under review was 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.” (DWS 2022: x)

The 22 Green Drop wastewater systems were owned by only ten municipalities. It may be asked if all of these ten were among those 38 which received clean audits.

There is not an exact match, but certainly there is some correlation. Of the ten, six received clean audits and the remaining four came close. (For the list of Green Drop municipalities, DWS 2022:x. For checking if these ten received clean audits, Auditor General 2023:14, 15 and 133.)

7. DISCUSSION

Some municipalities are managing to deliver services rather well, but the majority of municipalities are not, which implies that, for each of them, some of the “links” in the “chain” are too weak to support service delivery – i.e. some of the 1998 White Paper assumptions are, for those municipalities, off the mark.

This must have been apparent very soon after the establishment of the new municipal system more than two decades ago – some municipalities have failed at their service delivery responsibilities year after year.

In addition to major fiscal transfers from national government (some conditional, some discretionary) in recognition of the income base of municipalities being too low to allow them to be financially self-sufficient, there have been many specific interventions. Some of these include amalgamation of municipalities, the (thus far limited) introduction of the District Development Model, the introduction of systems such as the Infrastructure Development Management System (IDMS) model designed to assist municipalities with project planning and management, among others). The effort over many years put into the “capacity building” of officials and councillors has been massive.

Despite all these measures to support the existing municipal model, the service delivery performance of municipalities, on average, does not seem to improve – at least as evidenced by (i) the condition of infrastructure and (ii) the reports of the Auditor General. Notwithstanding the assistance noted above and many other interventions over more than two decades, the majority of municipalities have not shown any signs of the step change in service delivery performance that is needed.

It is surely obvious by now that some or all of the assumptions in the 1999 White Paper – the founding document¹¹ of today’s municipalities – were highly optimistic. In other words, the foundation of local governance is not strong enough to support the service delivery responsibilities that the Constitution states are among “the objects of local government”.

¹¹ The Minister (of Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development) of the time referred to the White Paper as “almost [being] regarded as a mini-constitution for local government”. (DPACD 1998: 6)

In one sentence, the “foundations” of local government, for many municipalities in South Africa, consist of suspect material.

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this paper has been to discover if the 1998 White Paper has been a “weak foundation” upon which to build responsibility for municipal roads (or any other municipal service delivery responsibility). What could or should be done about this weak foundation is a discussion for another time – suffice to say that government, presumably COGTA in the first instance, needs to have a fresh look at the 1998 White Paper, review the assumptions it made, and come up with a radically improved model. There would arguably be little prospect of significant service delivery improvement at many municipalities until this is done.

Any such review must take into account that a sizeable number of municipalities seem to manage pretty well under the circumstances, flawed model or not, which suggests:

- a one size fits all solution would be inappropriate; and
- it would appear that it might not be the institutional model which is necessarily always at fault, but the way in which it is often managed.

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