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Conclusion and Recommendations

*but as we become free,
we cast off the chains of servitude.
So Faith, Love and Hope must abide:
But without freedom and dignity,
They remain hollow shadows.*

*Liberating Love
(Canaan Banana, 1980)*

The theme of the study is the developmental role of the municipalities in the Western Highveld Region of Mpumalanga Province, *vis-a vis* the needs of the communities in the Region. The investigation, a geographical study, opted to view the Region as a historically disadvantaged peripheral space, and also assumed that the current transformation phase in South Africa beckons for the betterment of this space and its people. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to provide a summary of issues raised in the study and to draw conclusions pertinent to the findings.

There is no doubt that local government occupies centre stage in present-day geopolitics. The recognition by both developed and developing countries that local government is an important level of governance is applaudable. The new thesis of decentralisation is an attempt to reclaim the place of local politics in both the core regions (developed countries and peripheral regions (developing countries) on macro scale.

A geographical understanding of local government in developing nations in particular, is a recognition of a space-time relationship that defines developing countries as spaces or domains that have been on the fringes of development. The post-colonial regimes in Africa were characterised by a nationally preferred thesis of centralisation of power, in an effort to consolidate national unity, a post-colonial survival strategy. The centralisation of local politics has yielded an array of problems. Inherited Western sectors and administration continue a top-down process that discourages local empowerment, governance or initiative. Wunsch (2000:488) notes that, "*institutional forms and processes at the centre do not appear in any normative or organic way to reflect an African foundation or perspective*". This view is shared by

Olowu (1992) in Reddy (1995:1) who argues that, “*this local institution, often borrows heavily from the structure of the former colonial rather than from their own people’s rich experiences*”. In time, this situation has alienated governments from the popular masses. A new thesis evident in some countries, particularly South Africa, is a response to years of popular neglect and deprivation.

Local government in South Africa is inseparable from the historical events that have shaped the South African socio-economic and political landscape. It was in fact the most conspicuous terrain of both struggle and domination. From colonial occupation, which left the legacy of both British and Dutch influences, to apartheid social engineering, which institutionalised racism in South Africa, local government has always remained centre stage. While the 18th and 19th century colonisation in South Africa introduced the most dynamic system of local government, the wars of dispossession fought between the colonialists and the indigenous people have destroyed the native local structures that controlled South African rural life. With the advent of apartheid rule in the first half of the 20th century, local government was turned into an institution of racial control and an exclusive right of White South Africans. On the other hand, the struggle against racism and colonialism, managed to cement a popular force that defined the South African political scenario along non-racial and non-discriminatory terms. This struggle for a non-racial South Africa in the 1980s revolved around local government. The continued institutionalisation of apartheid through the Black Local Authorities, the Homelands and the Tricameral Parliament, received an unprecedented wave of violent mass protests that finally dislodged the apartheid rule from its grip at the close of the 1980s.

The dawn of the new era, characterised by a non-racial dispensation, saw changing spaces in all South African localities, rural and urban. The transformation of these spaces which were defined as White suburbs, coloured townships, Indian townships, African townships and African Homelands, is an effort to create new South African non-racial spaces or “*structured institutional environments*” (Barnes & Morris, 1997:185) capable of delivery. The RDP, a South African renewal and development tool, has been adopted so as to guide local authorities in their mandate for community development. The question of rural municipalities that are contesting the local political terrain with the traditional leaders is as fundamental as the success of the rural municipalities.

This geographical investigation sought to ascertain whether the rural municipalities of the Western Highveld Region, while deriving their mandate from the Constitution of South Africa and the RDP blueprint, are able to meet the basic needs of their constituencies. This Region, which is predominantly rural and comprises of districts that were formerly defined as homelands, is a present day space still characterised by neglect, deprivation and destitution.

A closer analysis reveals that, critical to the needs of the Region, are roads, water and health facilities. This is confirmed nationally by the chairman of the Development Bank of Southern Africa who asserts that "*we are painfully aware of the enormous scale of infrastructure backlogs and lack of access to basic services experienced by our people on a daily basis*"²⁶. The study also established that there are efforts by the rural municipalities to try and address the needs of the Region. However, these efforts are not adequate enough to satisfy the communities' needs. It also noted that the impact of underdevelopment in the Region in areas like Moutse, which, although not part of the homeland administration, were the worst hit through official neglect. There is also a vast contrast between different former homeland territories. Moretele, a former territory of Bophuthatswana displays a relatively poor infrastructural development when compared to KwaNdebele, which has a better network of services.

There is sufficient evidence to prove that community involvement betters people's lives. The primary respondents in this study, the Reconstruction and Development Committees, testify to this involvement. It was learnt that these communities attempt in all ways to bring development to their areas. A notable factor, however, is seemingly the lack of well-defined working relationships between the communities and their municipalities. The weak links between communities and their municipalities necessitates a satisfaction profile, which suggests that communities are not happy about the intervention programme of their municipalities. An argument raised by municipalities is the fact that they lack both human and financial capacity to deliver the necessary commodities. The budget, which is apportioned by the Highveld District Council, is usually insufficient to advance priorities of the Region. The

²⁶ Address by Jay Naidoo at the Opening Ceremony of SALGA AGM, Bloemfontein, 5 April 2001.

persistent culture of non-payment of municipal services by communities is also a hindrance.

The study also discovered that there are weak links in some areas between traditional leaders and the municipalities. The two institutions seem to be contesting in a rather vigorous manner for domination of local politics, to an extent that suggests that chiefs feel isolated by the present dispensation, while municipalities attempt to claim their *de jure* responsibilities as legitimate third tier level of government. McIntosh (1995:419) observes that "*chiefs had previously acquired a certain influence at local level as a result of the important local co-ordination by local magistrates, who consulted them extensively in implementing government policy*". The dawn of the new dispensation has since stripped chiefs of these powers locally, forcing them to rely on central patronage to retain their authority and livelihoods. However, their attempts to regain control of local politics continues as they seek to define their search for a local niche, to fulfil their role in the present political conjuncture. Unfortunately the contest has to some extent denied some communities a chance to determine their destinies.

This study can therefore arrive at several critical conclusions, that:

- the needs of the communities in the Region are not adequately met;
- communities are not satisfied with this *status quo*;
- most Councils in the Region lack capacity;
- there is an ill-defined working relationship among stakeholders in the Region; and
- there is a need for national intervention.

Recommendations

This study suggests that there is a need to revisit the rural local government model. A revised model could:

- Acknowledge that the rural municipality should differ from its urban counterpart in form while content will retain a developmental role. A different form will mean that institutions of traditional leadership should be part of the rural municipalities not as observers as currently is the situation, but as members with voting rights. This will

assist in harnessing the principle of total inclusivity, which is very critical, given the South African background of imposition and intolerance.

- Traditional leaders in some areas are custodians of tribal land. It is difficult for municipalities to access such for development if there is a lack of co-operation between traditional leaders and the municipalities. Their entrenched participation in local institutions is vital for the appropriation of such land for development goals.
- There is a need to decentralise away from the District Council to the Local Council. The allocation of funds from the District to the locals is determined per capita. This is irrespective of the needs of various local communities. It would appear that, if local councils could be schooled in financial management skills, human resource management and capital project administration, they would be able to handle larger budgets and be able to account properly.
- The relationship between municipalities and role-players and stakeholders is critical to the success of any development programme. Meetings, workshops and seminars can be organised by related education structures, for example NGOs, as an effort to harmonise relationships. It is vital that communities are educated in the dynamics of service delivery process so that they can play a more meaningful role. The efforts of the Western Cape School of Local Government is a typical example of an intervention that could ensure that councillors and communities understand their roles at the local level.
- The Masakhane Campaign is a national campaign that seeks to undo the culture of non-payment of services. During this study, very few role-players and stakeholders seemed to grasp the strategic objective of the Campaign. Community participation in development is not only limited to their participation in LDOs and IDPs, it is also about paying for those services that they receive from their municipalities, otherwise there can be no development.
- Morris (1995:431) asks, *"how does one establish a viable local government system where there are such limited revenue-raising capacities, where most of the population relies on remittances and welfare disbursements?"* Municipalities should develop capacity to raise funds and revenue outside their territories. It is vital that relationships should be forged with other municipalities in developed countries, so that a *twinning* of the different municipalities could assist in raising funds from the twin municipality of the developed country.

- National government has been adamant that it will not take the responsibility for local government liabilities and that local government must make use of its taxation powers to meet expenditure needs. Local government's (less than 2%) share of nationally collected revenue (SALGA, 1999:10) is hoped to be adequate in subsidising access to municipal services. This fails in dealing with the problem of backlogs. It fundamentally defeats the assertion of the incumbent South African President²⁷ who advocates that "*no progress can be made towards dignity of our people unless we ensure the development of our rural areas*". A viable solution will be a once-off central government intervention that will write off municipal bills, some of which have been inherited from apartheid structures and unfairly retard the development of previously disadvantaged communities. This will be more of a social equity gesture than a question of efficiency. In this way municipalities will be able to be viable and sustained.

There is no doubt that the RDP presents a working platform for the resolution of development problems in the rural areas. Indeed without the local government structures there can be no contemplated vehicle capable of driving the change process at the grassroots level. Also, "*development cannot be achieved without the initiative of the masses to organise themselves through associations. For no people will ever release its creative capacity for productivity and development without real participation ...*" (Turok, 1993:100). This study teaches that an effective local government in the Region will seek to maintain constant contact with its constituency so as to ensure that communities are briefed on all matters of governance. Local government in the area will have to lobby for more funds from both the District Council and Provincial Administration for speedy delivery. However the current efforts are applaudable. The community needs to participate fully and be willing to learn and listen to its leaders. In this way local government will fulfil its mandate as a developmental tool. By the same token, communities will benefit from the current dispensation, and years of neglect and destitution will be but a past shadow.

²⁷ Presidential Address at the Opening Session the South African Parliament, Cape Town, 25 June 1999.