

**Local Government in Swaziland: Requirements for
Competent Administration in Urban Areas**

by

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SUMMARY

This research is about the service function and responsibility of the government sector. Ideas about what constitutes the proper role of government in social and economic development have shifted dramatically over the years. In the early years of independence in Africa the state held the dominant and undisputed position of being the initiator and implementor of all development programmes. Through the agency of the various multi-purpose organisations of the public sector, the state provided social and economic services on a large scale and at levels unknown of in earlier periods in pursuit of development goals. However, with the rise of the new public management the view gained currency that the public sector had failed or has had limited success in bringing about the desired development outcomes through public service delivery. Hence, the common assumption prevails that the private sector ought to assume more of the functions hitherto performed by public sector institutions.

Notwithstanding the cynicism that the government sector has encountered in the past two decades concerning its performance, the research rests on the premise that government, as the ultimate locus of power in society, must spearhead the development process and be instrumental in serving the citizens through the various public institutions. The research posits that public institutions have substantial opportunities to improve their performance in service delivery, deploy their resources more efficiently, improve livelihoods and empower citizens. The

research considers how this could be done in the context of a unitary state where government is constituted as national government and local government.

The decentralisation process is examined in the context of the public sector reforms introduced in the post-independence period to improve service delivery. The strength of decentralisation, it is argued, derives from the positive benefits claimed for local government and the realisation that the national government is likely to succeed in meeting the needs and aspirations of the citizens through service delivery when it operates within the framework of co-operative government. The research argues that local government, covering a substantial area of the public sector in modern states, can serve as the primary structure for development and for improving livelihoods through the variety of services it provides. Examined in detail in the study are core governing principles that when applied to the local level of government would constitute essential requirements for competent administration. The urban government system in Swaziland, consisting of municipal authorities, is the focal point of attention in the inquiry.

It is postulated that the aspects that are of vital importance in public service delivery are the performance aspect and the governance aspect. Both aspects are judged to be crucial because they offer the best prospect of invigorating public administration to the extent that they may determine whether public services are delivered competently by a particular public institution such as a municipality. Stemming from the above proposition, the inquiry employs

performance and *governance* (emphasis defined later) as the main analytical concepts. In line with the above reasoning, the research postulates that public organisations relate to environments. The environment is viewed as having the potential to shape public institutions as well as public policy. Thus, it is argued that public institutions can improve their performance when managers maintain an awareness of the environment and its changing features and/or dynamics. Based on this assumption, the research identifies key environmental factors and examines how they shape the political system under consideration i.e. urban government in Swaziland.

Performance management, it is argued in chapter 3, is critical and decisive in public service delivery as evidenced by the new orientation in public administration and management which emphasises strategies and frameworks that are aimed at improving government performance, achieving organisational excellence, and creating well-performing organisations. The ultimate aim of performance management, it is argued, is effective and efficient public service delivery. Well-performing and excellent organisations, according to this view, are those that put people at the centre and make customers the primary focus of service rendering efforts.

In the application of the performance management concept to urban government in Swaziland the research relies on the 4E framework of efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equity. It is found that there is a performance gap in the service

rendering activities of municipal authorities in that they are not properly adjusted to achieving sustained high performance in their service rendering role. It is concluded that urban government in Swaziland does not yet possess the capacity to deliver services in a high performance way. The above finding confirms the original assumption of the research that municipal authorities as evolving entities in a country that is itself in transition have yet to undergo a significant shift towards service excellence and that they have yet to reach a stage where they can be considered as high performing organisations that deliver services in an efficient, effective, economical and equitable manner.

In examining the issue of service delivery, the research is anchored in a governance approach because the complex system of intergovernmental relations, of which local government is an integral part, comprises this concept. Accordingly, local governance – an important specialised application of governance – is highlighted in chapter 5 as an important aspect in public service delivery. This aspect is vital, it is argued, because a model public organisation, such as a municipal authority inclined towards service excellence, is expected not only to manage public affairs in an excellent and outstanding manner, but also deal effectively with the various interdependencies in government as well as observe universally accepted norms and values. Even more crucially, contemporary society is marked by a gradual shift from the usual fixation with rules and regulations and/or compliance with procedures of the local government system to good governance – a set of principles now considered to be at the core of the new public service ethos. Good governance is thus considered important

in this research because it implies a focus on accountability for performance and results in local government. It directs focus to the need to provide public services to citizens in a competent and responsive manner – a paradigm shift that is of vital importance for the functioning of the public sector.

In the discussion of the governance aspect, several elements of good governance are selected and highlighted as essential pillars for effective administration and management in local government – *accountability and transparency, representativeness, participation, responsiveness and effective leadership*. The question that is examined is whether or not urban government in Swaziland has been re-oriented to the practice of good governance. Evidence suggests that municipal authorities in Swaziland have not yet been sufficiently re-oriented towards good governance. None of the municipalities in the research areas were found to have outstanding ratings in relation to the universally sanctioned good governance criteria of accountability and transparency, responsiveness, representativeness, participation and effective leadership. This confirms the original presumption of the research that only limited progress has been made to construct a local government system that is oriented towards good governance in Swaziland's urban areas.

Since it is surmised that the nature and performance of urban government is, to a lesser or greater extent, shaped by its environment the research identifies the environmental factors of local government in Swaziland. In chapter 4 of the

research the environmental factors that are judged to be of vital importance for local government – historical, environmental, political, social, and economic factors – are examined in detail in order to demonstrate the close connection between the local government system, on the one hand, and the environment on the other.

The colonial heritage is considered to be a decisive historical factor because it has shaped the present governmental system in Swaziland at both national and local levels. The most significant of the various environmental factors are the population shifts typified by rapid urbanisation and the concomitant high concentration of people in the country's major towns and cities which only have a limited capacity in terms of resources, physical infrastructure and administrative capability to sustain the rising population. The traditional authority system is considered to be the most decisive social factor in Swaziland due to its impact on the Swazi society in general and public organisations in particular. Of the political factors, the legislative framework, consisting of the local government statute and the Constitution, is considered to be crucial because it determines the autonomy, power, purpose, and function of the local government system in Swaziland's urban areas. Finance is found to be the most important economic factor because its availability and scarcity determine the ability of the local government system to finance projects and programmes and to make a difference in terms of improving the livelihoods of individuals and communities.

