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Can the district development model deliver development in South African local governments?

Abstract: With the advent of democracy in South Africa, local government was targeted for transformation to be more representative of and responsive to local communities' needs. Boundaries were extended such that all areas in the country fell within a municipality. In addition to providing essential services such as water and sanitation, municipalities must promote social and economic development. They must also prepare an Integrated Development Plan that informs the municipality's activities, budget and should ensure focussed and coordinated delivery of services.

However, local government has been plagued with severe problems such as a lack of capacity and resources, poor governance and limited intergovernmental and intra-municipal coordination. President Ramaphosa (Current term 2018–2023) in his 2019 budget speech announced a District Development Model (DDM) intended to spatialise and coordinate government interventions and support municipalities in response to these issues. This paper describes the challenges facing local government and outlines the DDM concept and its rationale in the context of these challenges. We consider the potential of this model to improve the performance of local government, improve spatial governance and promote social and economic development. We conclude that the DDM may not be successful as it does not address the core problems of local government. A candid review of the current concept of local government, its powers, responsibilities, capacities and relationships is required.

Key words: District Development, local government, South Africa, integrated development planning

Introduction

The first free election in 1994 was a significant turning point in South Africa's history as it heralded the advent of democracy and hopes of social and economic equality and a better life for all. It was a time of immense change in legislation, government departments, organisations, and procedures. Instead of a hierarchical structure, the government was reorganised as three distinct interrelated and interdependent spheres. New provinces were created with legislative and executive powers. Local government, the sphere of government closest to the people, was tasked with implementing national, provincial and local policies, promoting democracy, social and economic development and providing essential services. To achieve these ambitious goals, it was necessary to reorganise the entire municipal system; its functions, structure, and municipalities' areas.

The transformation of local government occurred in three phases, the pre-interim, interim and final. Negotiations at the national and local level informed these phases, followed by new laws to regulate the process and nature of the municipal councils. The first elections of democratic municipal councils took place in 1995 and 1996.

One new emphasis was on municipal planning intended to focus local government budgets and spending on the community's priorities (Marais et al. 2021). The Development Facilitation Act (RSA 1995) introduced land development objectives, which focused municipal budgets on the Reconstruction and Development Programme's goals (RSA 1994). The Local Government Transformation, Second Amendment Act (RSA 1996) introduced integrated development plans (IDPs) with much the same objectives as the land development objectives (Harrison 2001). Among the suite of legislation enacted to enable the final phase of local government transformation is the Municipal Systems Act (RSA 2000), which entrenched the IDP as a core element of developmental local government. A mandatory component of the IDP is a spatial development framework (SDF) which is an indicative plan to guide spatial development and investment and land development decisions (Harrison, Todes 2001). More recently, the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) (RSA 2013) confirmed the role of SDFs as part of a spatial planning system.

The grand vision for local government was for them to work alongside communities to meet their needs and provide the desperately needed water, sanitation, electricity, and road infrastructure. It would deepen democracy and enable local economies to grow. However, the reality of local government has drifted far from the visions of the first democratic 1994 government, also referred to as Mandela's government (Powell 2012). Many local governments are in financial distress due to, *inter alia*, the failure of residents to pay for services; their inadequate and declining economic base; and corruption by councillors and officials (Financial, Fiscal Commission 2013a, b, Auditor General of South Africa 2020, 2021, CoGTA 2021a). Numerous interventions by national and provincial governments such as turnaround strategies, training of councillors and municipal officials, incorporating financially unviable municipalities into those with a more

extensive economic base, and additional legislation have had little effect. Instead, audit outcomes have deteriorated over time. In this context, the President, Mr Ramaphosa, announced a new strategy – the district development model – to focus state spending in municipal areas. This new ‘one plan’ for a district or metropolitan municipality is intended to consolidate budgets from national and provincial sector departments into a development plan, budget and implementation strategy for that area (CoGTA 2021b). However, it does not displace IDPs or SDFs, which are still required. The district plans raise several questions regarding the IDP, SDF and district plan (known as the district development model (DDM)) and their relationships and effectiveness. These questions are explored in this paper.

We begin the paper with an outline of the current local government structure and its responsibilities, followed by an overview of the problems besetting municipalities. We then explain the nature and function of the IDP, SDF and DDM. Thereafter, we discuss some of the complexities created by the DDM. The paper concludes with a few thoughts about the potential of the DDM to deliver development.

Local government in South Africa

Before the advent of democracy, local governments were constituted differently for Black and white communities. Provincial legislation controlled municipalities for whites, while various national regulations applied to Black areas (van Wyk 2012). There were stark differences in the form, legitimacy, financial viability and levels of services rendered by these local governments. The transition to democratically elected local governments began with negotiations for each municipality in the ‘pre-interim’ phase before 1994. Talks on a national level led to provisions in the interim constitution and the Local Government Transformation Act (LGTA) (RSA 1993 a,b) that enabled the appointment of municipal councils by the various Local Government Negotiating Forums. The extension of municipal boundaries to include all racially defined neighbourhoods and settlements within the functional area of each municipality was part of the negotiations. During 1995 and 1996, elections of the first democratic municipal councils initiated the interim phase of the transition. For the first time, (transitional) metropolitan municipalities were established that included (transitional) sub-councils in the highly urbanised regions of the country. In the remainder of the country, there were either transitional local governments or regional councils (Pycroft 1996, van Donk, Pieterse 2006, De Visser 2009, 2016). On 6 December 2000, the final phase of the transition occurred with the establishment and election of councils according to the White Paper on Local Government (RSA 1998a) and a set of statutes that set out the boundaries, structure and functioning of ‘transformed’ local government (RSA 1998b, c, 2000).

Currently, there are three types of local government, metropolitan municipalities (metros), district municipalities (DM) and local municipalities (LM). Most

LMs are extensive and may incorporate several towns and a large rural area, and in some cases, parts of former Bantustans¹. The Hantam LM is over 39 000 km² but was home to only 21 000 people in 2016. In contrast, the Johannesburg metro has over five million residents but only covers about 4% of the area of the Hantam LM (Municipalities of South Africa 2022a, b). A district municipality (DM) contains three to five local municipalities, and its primary functions are to provide bulk and regional services. Metros have both DM and LM functions. All land in the country falls into either an LM or a metro.

The composition of municipal councils, how they are elected and the form of the executive authority are set out in the Municipal Structures Act (RSA 1998b). The regulations governing their activities, including planning and budgeting, are contained in the Municipal Systems Act (RSA 2000). The latter also specifies the content and the process of compiling the integrated development plan (IDP). This strategic plan should (a) coordinate and integrate all the municipality's plans and resources with its budget to enable implementation, (b) constitute the policy framework for the municipality and its operations, (c) determine the annual and medium-term budgets, (d) inform the structure of the administration and its activities, (e) be the basis for municipal performance evaluation, and (f) align with national and provincial sector departments' development plans (De Visser 2009, p. 22, Kroukamp 2014, p. 105, Koma 2016, p. 129). The compilation of the IDP, from identifying needs and priorities to approving the strategies, projects and proposed budgets, should be done in collaboration with the community.

Part of the IDP is a spatial development framework (SDF) that must implement the development principles, determine the desired spatial form and desired patterns of land use, and the strategies and policies and indicate the location of specific investments required to achieve the aims of the plan. The SDF is thus the spatial interpretation of the IDP's goals. SPLUMA sets out more detailed requirements for SDFs and links them more clearly to national and provincial policies and plans, and emphasises the implementation components.

Furthermore, the IDP must be aligned with national and provincial sectoral plans. Provincial or national legislation may require local governments to implement the sector plans (RSA 2000). This well-intentioned injunction is very demanding, and few municipalities have fully complied with it. Given that municipalities have far fewer resources or power than the other spheres of government, it is nigh impossible for them to compel provincial and national sector departments to participate in their IDP and spatial planning process or share their plans with them. Consequently, there may be little alignment between plans, budgets and projects undertaken by sector departments in municipal areas, leading to the construction of houses where there are no engineering services or a lack of facilities (such as schools) where they are needed.

¹ Areas under traditional leadership which were excluded from municipal planning before 1994.

The fading dream of developmental local government

Local government has had some successes. Since 1996, the percentage of households with access to piped water on their property increased from 60,8% to 88% in 2019. Likewise, access to the electricity grid has increased from 58,2% in 1996 to 85% in 2019 (StatsSA 2012, 2020). Over 18,7% of the population has benefited from state-subsidised housing (StatsSA 2020). Generally, the metros have performed better than their rural counterparts, mainly attributable to their larger financial and human resources. However, even metros face rising backlogs due to continuous in-migration and the rapid formation of smaller households that exceed their ability to provide serviced land (DALRRD 2019).

The financial viability of local government has been a concern from the outset (van Donk, Pieterse 2006). By the third phase of the transition, the vision of developmental local government was stained by the “hard political and economic realities, overwhelmed by the scale of institutional changes involved and the distance between the ideal and delivering practical change” (Powell 2012, p. 12). By 2004, the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) had to intervene and provide technical assistance to municipalities to help them carry out their functions (DPLG 2004). However, this did not improve the situation (Powell 2012, p. 18). Over the years assessments of local governments revealed severe problems, forcing the National Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) to intervene, yet these interventions have had little success in preventing deterioration (CoGTA CoGTA 2009, 2020b, 2021a, The Presidency 2014). Recent audit reports confirm the worsening position. The Auditor General (2020, p. 9) commented that many municipalities are

crippled by debt and being unable to pay for water and electricity; inaccurate and lacklustre revenue collection; expenditure that is unauthorised, irregular, fruitless and wasteful; and a high dependence on grants and assistance from national government. Most concerning are those municipalities that cannot even prepare credible financial statements, even after paying millions to consultants for assistance and receiving sizeable support from national and provincial government. The financial statement stories of these municipalities remain untold or are unreliable, with their communities, creditors as well as current and future investors being left in the dark.

In August 2021, 64 municipalities were considered dysfunctional and 26 were under provincial administration, which implied that they could not fulfil their functions (CoGTA 2021a, PMG 2021). According to the Minister of Finance, 63% of municipalities in South Africa were in financial distress, 102 had adopted budgets that they could not fund for the 2021/22 financial year, and 40 were in a “financial and service delivery crisis” (Mboweni 2021, p. 10). The declining ability of municipalities to meet the needs of local communities has led to numerous ‘service delivery’ protests (Chigwata et al. 2017). Communities have taken municipalities and provincial governments to court to force them to

provide services and fulfil their obligations (Stevens 2019, Businesstech 2021a). Additionally, there are damaging effects on local economies (Sihlobo 2021). The DDM is a response to this crisis of local government.

The district development model

The District Development Model, or ‘one plan’ is described by Patel (2021: online) as

The DDM is a practical impact-orientated method by which all three spheres of government converge at district or metropolitan level in a spatially targeted and strategic way to break down “silos” in government and ensure better and more coherent service delivery and development outcomes in each of the 52 district and metropolitan areas of the country. ... The plan as a compact containing implementation commitments by all three spheres of government and stakeholders ... [to] a demonstrated commitment at the highest level to a long-term predictable programme of action. It can also advance social cohesion underpinned by meaningful upliftment of people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Improved coordination and alignment of state actions through a district-wide plan for the municipal area is one of the main objectives of the DDM. The national and provincial Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) departments will be the drivers of the DDM initiative, with national CoGTA as the accountable department.

Accordingly, the DDM aims to improve intergovernmental relations, performance, and accountability by shifting from alignment to joint planning and capacity building. The uniqueness of each district is recognised; thus, plans must respond to local circumstances. Furthermore, the DDM should enable re-prioritisation of government spending to have a more significant impact while spatial targeting is emphasised (PMG 2020, CoGTA 2020d). According to a report by CoGTA (2020c), the pilot DDM projects were able to identify R27 billion and R20 billion of planned national and provincial government spending in the eThekweni Metropolitan and Waterberg District municipalities, respectively, which could be better channelled through the DDM.

The DDM is to be realised through district (or metro) hubs set up by national and provincial CoGTA departments. The hubs are the heart of the proposed model as they are responsible for all planning and coordination. They are a “functional network of support and a facilitation system for Intergovernmental Planning in relation to a specific district or metropolitan space or a combination of district spaces or metropolitan spaces” (CoGTA 2020d, p. 14). All national and provincial government budgets for specific areas must be ‘spatialised’ through the DDM. As extensions of CoGTA these hubs are accountable to it, not the mu-

nicipality, even though they operate within the municipal area. Thus, the hubs' staff will be appointed by, and answerable to, CoGTA (2019, p. 6).

Political oversight of each DDM will be the responsibility of a committee comprising a cabinet minister, a member of the provincial executive committee, the executive mayor of the relevant metro or DM and the mayors of the LMs within the district. A technical steering committee is proposed consisting of representatives from national and provincial CoGTA and other national and provincial sector departments and senior managers from the DM and LMs. Business and civil society representatives and senior managers of state-owned enterprises should also be part of the technical steering committee. The technical steering committee is responsible for the administrative arrangements to collect data, commission research, consult stakeholders and develop the 'one plan' for submission to the political committee (CoGTA 2020d, p. 12–14). Exactly how the hubs will relate to the political and technical steering committees is unclear.

Unlike the IDP, the 'one plan' should be a long-range plan that guides actions over several municipal council terms, which assumes political stability and considerable consensus between political parties to ensure commitment to a plan over multiple electoral cycles. The components of the 'one plan' follow a similar pattern to most strategic plans, namely (a) a shared vision, (b) an analysis of each area, including its needs and opportunities, (c) credible long-term implementation plans and (d) improved accountability and reporting to government and communities (CoGTA 2020d). Monitoring the implementation of the DDM is critical to avoid past failures of implementing plans without any form of monitoring or evaluation (CoGTA 2020d, p. 14, PSA 2020, p. 2).

The promises and pitfalls of the DDM

The DDM is perhaps the most ambitious strategy adopted since 2000 to address the inadequacies in local government. It promises a collaborative 'whole of government' approach in designing a plan for each metropolitan or district space.

It is premised on several assumptions. Firstly it presupposes that the main reason for the failure to achieve developmental local government is the lack of integration (CoGTA 2019, p. 2, 9), as indicated in a speech by Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma (2020), "the District Development Model seeks to strengthen the local sphere of governance, moving us away from silo planning, budgeting and implementation". The lack of commitment of some national and provincial sector departments to their role in enabling local governments to provide services was noted by Nkuna and Nemutanzhela (2012, p. 356) nearly a decade ago,

service delivery ... should not be isolated from the complementarity of other spheres of government. Local government ... takes the brunt of responsibility for poor service delivery, yet its powers and functions are on the periphery of the functioning of the whole government machinery.

Secondly, it accepts that national and provincial sector departments will agree to share their budgets and plans and not revert to their current autonomous approaches to managing their budgets and projects. The DDM assumes that “commonly agreed spatial and development” priorities and decisions “which transcend narrow, sectoral and personal interests or biases” can, and will be, reached through collaborative planning between the various spheres of government (through the political and technical steering committees) (CoGTA 2020d, p. 2–3). The lack of dispute resolution mechanisms supports the assumption of a willing change in the culture of all the role-players within the DDM framework that is necessary to realise the vision of collaboration between sector departments. Such change implies agreement regarding the possible re-prioritisation of sector departments’ projects, budgets, and even political commitments (Currie 2021).

Thirdly, it presumes that there will be an ongoing commitment over electoral cycles to the model by all political stakeholders, sector departments of national and provincial governments, and the relevant local governments. Given the recent results of the local government elections where the African National Congress lost its outright majority in many municipalities (Mashinini 2021), this assumption may be unfounded, particularly in the metros.

While joint planning and investment may solve duplication and irrational development (such as building houses where services are not available or cannot be provided), can the DDM solve all of the fundamental flaws that underlie most of the local government’s failures?

From the outset, local government has been plagued by several problems: (a) the lack of capacity, (b) poor financial control and management, (c) the inability to collect revenue or the inadequate economic base for revenue generation, (d) a lack of clarity on the roles of councillors vis-à-vis the administration and political interference in the administration, (e) corruption, and (f) the lack of accountability of local government (DPLG 2004, CoGTA 2009, 2020a, e, The Presidency 2014, Du Plessis 2017, Auditor General 2020, 2021, PMG 2021).

The vast size of most local governments is an administrative and democratic problem (De Visser 2009). The larger the municipality, the more voters per ward councillor, and the lower the potential to consider local issues. Administratively, there are costs involved in providing services to scattered communities in a large region and the risk of peripheral neglect.

The lack of staff who possess the required skills and experience has been a significant contributor to the poor performance of local government (LiPuma 2010, Koeble, Kroukamp 2014, Municipal Demarcation Board 2018, Auditor General 2020). While most metropolitan municipalities may have professional and technical staff, local municipalities may lack these skills. Cadre deployment and nepotism have also eroded the capacity of local government (De Visser 2009, p. 18). The employment of suitably qualified and experienced financial managers could address some of the problems related to poor financial management and the lack of appropriate financial controls. Consequently, the provision of critical professional and technical skills at a district level to support local municipalities could

be an essential component of the DDM hub, yet their role is limited to identifying and coordinating capacity building (CoGTA 2020d, p. 7). Thus, it appears that the DDM capacity building role is facilitative rather than interventionist.

If the DDM does focus on strategic development programmes and projects, it could create a 'critical mass' of investment that encourages further private investment. The extension of infrastructure to areas without decent roads, water, sanitation and power may well be enhanced through the DDM. However, it is the lack of maintenance of such infrastructure and facilities that lies at the heart of many protests. Such operational functions do not appear to be part of the DDM configuration. Yet it is the local government's overall capacity to provide reliable and quality services that informs (dis)investment decisions (Mashego 2021).

Improved billing systems and revenue collection will contribute to a municipality's income stream. Still, it is dependent on several factors, including (a) accurate data (meter readings, cadastral data and valuation roll), (b) the political willingness and ability of the municipality to collect the revenue and manage debtors, (c) deal with illegal water and electrical connections, and (d) the ability of residents to pay for their services. Such issues need to be dealt with politically, which may conflict with councillors' re-election ambitions. Although the DDM seeks to improve local governance and the economy, it is not designed to deal with grave municipal revenue generation, billing and collection problems.

Monitoring of the DDM hubs will require accurate and timely information. Reliable data at a municipal level, are limited. Furthermore, not all local governments have up-to-date records on the status of their infrastructure and are hence unable to prepare credible infrastructure maintenance and investment plans or budgets. Effective planning, implementation, and monitoring require a far more comprehensive and effective data collection and data maintenance system.

With the concentration of capital funding streams in the 'one budget', the political and administrative conflict between the various stakeholders could deepen. Preventing the diversion of this budget has received little attention. It is unclear how corruption, one of the major problems facing local government, will be addressed, particularly in a political system where councillors are accountable to their political party and not their communities (Sihlongonyane 2015, p. 93).

Adding the DDM hub as an additional component to the already complex set of relationships between local and district municipalities and local, provincial and national government departments, along with politicians, communities and administrations, may only intensify the intricacy of relationships. Weaker financial or political stakeholders may be gradually left out of decision-making processes to simplify matters, leading to the marginalisation of some communities or even local municipalities.

Although the CoGTA documentation (2020d) affirms the role of municipal IDPs and SDFs and denies duplication of plans, there are still questions regarding the relationship of the IDP and the 'one plan'.

Analysis of the existing DDM documents

An analysis of all 52 draft DDM plans published by CoGTA in July 2020 reveals the *de facto* application of the alignment between the IDPs and the DDMs. These 52 DDM plans cover the entire South Africa and therefore are representative of the only relevant empirical evidence related to this study. All references to the IDP, municipal SDF, draft provincial SDF and draft national SDF were identified as indicated in Table 1. Most (80,8%) districts or metros used their IDPs to inform their DDM Municipal Profiles. Intended or not, this may reflect a bias toward existing planning processes or resistance to adopting the new ‘one plan’ initiative. This clearly shows that neither joint planning due to the lack of using Spatial Development Frameworks from other spheres nor the alignment thereto could be found. However, eight District Municipalities (15,4%) did not reference their IDP (see Fig. 1), which creates an impression that they did more than re-package the IDP and sought closer alignment to the DDM initiative.

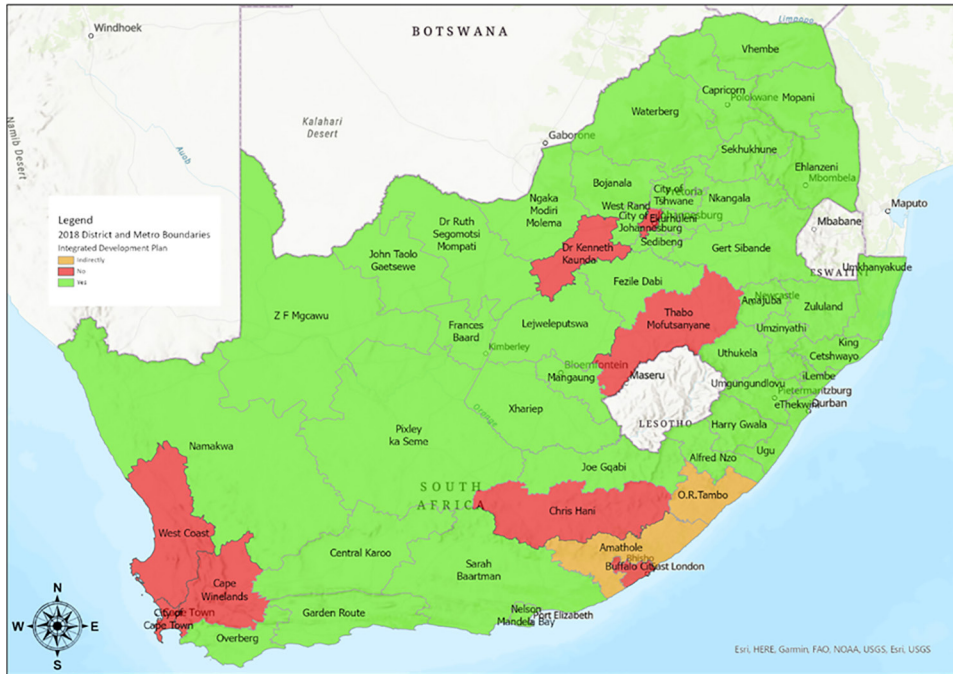


Fig. 1. District and Metropolitan Municipalities indicating their use of the integrated development plan process in their district development model Municipal Profiles
Source: Authors.

Fig. 1 creates the impression that the municipalities favour the pre-DDM planning instruments. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as shown in Fig. 2, where only (19,23%) of the districts used the Local or Metropolitan SDFs to guide their input into the DDM Municipal Profile. Neither the IDP nor the DDM appears to

Implications and conclusions

A critical function of the DDM hubs is to facilitate shared visions, plans and budgets through collaborative planning that implements national, provincial and municipal strategies and projects. The IDP was intended to achieve much the same objectives but has had dismal results. The DDM is likely to have the same outcome for similar reasons.

It is unlikely that sector departments in national and provincial spheres will give up control over their programmes and budgets without a forceful political directive and compelling reasons to comply, given that departments other than CoGTA are accountable to their political heads. It is equally unlikely that these political heads will hand over part of their budgets to a DDM hub.

The vision for developmental local government was based on an optimistic assumption of municipalities that had the ability and will to improve the lives of residents. According to the Auditor-General reports (2020, 2021), this hope has been misplaced. The country's economy, particularly the non-metropolitan regions, has not delivered jobs and incomes or municipal revenues to create better lives for residents. Self-interest has led to "the wrong hands at the till" (Auditor General 2020).

The well-intentioned planning processes (IDP and SDF) have been inadequate to deal with the fundamental problems of lack of capacity, accountability, and a poorly performing economy. It is unclear how a new planning model, the DDM, will change this situation. The Auditor-General report (2021, s. 12) clearly states what is needed to improve the functioning of local government: (a) solid ethical leadership, (b) improving the capacity and ensuring the stability of administrations, (c) effective controls that improve both performance and financial management, and (d) rapid identification of transgressions and consistent and efficacious measures to ensure accountability. Without strong political will, unremitting action against corruption and the unwillingness to pay municipal accounts, and an improvement in the national economy, there is no reason why another set of plans will solve the fundamental problems of local government. As Powell (2012, s. 11) eloquently states, "due to the fact that the problems of local government are so nested in the broader problems of our society, further local government policy reform and sweeping national turnaround strategies are likely to have imperfect impacts on 'the problem of local government' in South Africa." A holistic review of the entire local government system is required, taking its capacity, its relationships with other spheres of government, and the expectations of municipalities into account.

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Czy koncepcja District Development Model może zapewnić rozwój samorządów lokalnych w RPA?

Zarys treści: Wraz z nadejściem demokracji w Republice Południowej Afryki samorząd lokalny miał przejść transformację, aby stać się bardziej reprezentatywny i odpowiadać na potrzeby społeczności lokalnych. Granice jednostek zreformowano w taki sposób, aby całe terytorium państwa zostało pokryte przez gminy. Oprócz świadczenia podstawowych usług, takich jak dostarczanie wody pitnej i kanalizacja terenu, gminy muszą wspierać rozwój społeczny i gospodarczy. Muszą również przygotować Zintegrowany Plan Rozwoju, który wyznacza działania gminy wraz z ich budżetem oraz powinien zapewnić zintegrowane i skoordynowane świadczenie usług publicznych.

Samorząd lokalny boryka się jednak z poważnymi problemami, takimi jak brak kompetencji i środków, słabe zarządzanie oraz ograniczona koordynacja międzyinstytucjonalna i wewnątrzgminna. Prezydent Ramaphosa (kadencja 2018–2023) ogłosił model rozwoju lokalnego (District Development Model – DDM) mający na celu terytorializację i koordynację działań rządowych oraz wsparcie gmin w rozwiązywaniu ich problemów.

W artykule opisano wyzwania stojące przed samorządami oraz zarysowano koncepcję DDM i jej uzasadnienie w kontekście tychże wyzwań. Autorzy biorą pod uwagę potencjał tego modelu dla poprawy funkcjonowania samorządu lokalnego, polepszenia zarządzania przestrzennego oraz promowania rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego. Dochodzą jednak do wniosku, że DDM może nie spełnić oczekiwań, ponieważ nie odnosi się do podstawowych problemów. Wymagana jest bowiem pogłębiona rewizja obecnej koncepcji samorządu lokalnego, jego uprawnień, odpowiedzialności i relacji.

Słowa kluczowe: rozwój lokalny, samorząd lokalny, RPA, zintegrowane planowanie rozwoju