

“The Smoke That Calls”: A Review of Service Delivery Protests in South Africa 2005 - 2014

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ABSTRACT With the advent of the new democratic dispensation in 1994, the South African government committed itself to delivering free basic social services to the black population who were previously excluded through apartheid policies. Local government which is constitutionally mandated to deliver basic services, has made substantial in-roads in the delivery of basic services, particularly in the previously disadvantaged black communities. However, despite significant achievements in the delivery of service to these communities, backlogs still remain. As a result, there has been an explosion of protests against poor service delivery around the country. These protests often turn violent and increasingly result in xenophobic attacks on foreign African nationals and foreign – owned small businesses in the townships and informal settlements. The paper reviews the nature and causes of the protests and concludes that the violent protests are emblematic of a crisis of representation at the local government level. The study recommends that in order to overcome the crisis in local government and stem the violent protests against poor service delivery, the government will need to improve the capacity of local authorities to effectively deliver basic services and improve the citizen’s participation in the planning and delivery of basic services.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews the nature and underlying causes of the protests that occurred between 2005 and 2014. The service delivery protests have become a pervasive aspect of the changing political landscape and are increasingly turning violent, xenophobic and therefore becoming a threat to South Africa’s democracy and stability. The first part of the paper provides a background to local governance reform and the provision of basic services to the previously disadvantaged black population. The second part reviews the rate of the delivery of basic services by local authorities. The third section reviews the nature of the service delivery protests. Section four discusses the nature and underlying causes of the protests. Section five discusses the “institutional vacuum” at the local level and the tendency of communities to resort to violent protests. The paper concludes that, although substantial in-roads have been achieved in providing access to basic services; nonetheless, huge backlogs remain especially for households in rural areas and poor households in informal settlements in urban areas. As a result, there has been increasing disillusionment with the scale, as well as the quality of basic services provided by local authorities,

leading to violent protests witnessed in the past decade.

Developmental Local Governance

As a result of the legacy of apartheid, the provision of basic services by the government to the previously disadvantaged Black population in South Africa, has since the emergence of the new democratic dispensation in 1994, become linked with the issues of human rights, inequality, poverty alleviation and social justice. As the Presidential Local Government summit (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (DoCGTA) 2014: 3) explicitly pointed out:

“The core services that local government provides - clean drinking water, sanitation, electricity, shelter, waste removal and roads - are basic human rights, essential components of the right to dignity enshrined in our Constitution and Bill of Rights.”

The provision of these core services have formed the basis for all the development frameworks, and the mandate of the new non-racial democratic local governance in South Africa. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996, (Act 108, 1996) in Chapter 7 states that the objective of local government is to:

*“to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities;
to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner
... and to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.”*

Thus in South Africa, developmental local government are statutorily mandated to deliver basic services to those who were previously excluded by apartheid policies (Chikulo 2004). The White Paper on Local Government (Ministry of Constitutional Development and Provincial Affairs (MCDPA) 1998:17) provides a new vision for developmental local government: “local government committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives.”

The new vision for developmental local government was subsequently elaborated in an official report thus: “Our vision of developmental local government was that it would be the building block on which the reconstruction and development of our country and society was built, a place in which the citizens of our country could engage in a meaningful and direct way with the institutions of the state” (DoCGTA 2014: 3).

Furthermore, the Service Charter of 2013 affirms “the Constitutional responsibility of the state clearly articulated in the Bill of Rights to deliver services to the citizenry.” (Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) 2013:2). To this end, legislation was developed to give effect to the new developmental local government. The Local Government Municipal Systems Act 2000 (Act 32 of 2000) amongst others was enacted to enable municipalities move progressively towards the socio-economic upliftment of local communities and ensure universal access to basic services that are affordable for all citizens. The provision of basic services by local government, especially to the previously marginalized black population is thus closely associated with service delivery.

“Service delivery” in South Africa, is commonly used to describe the provision of basic services that citizens depend on like water, electricity, sanitation, land, and housing. Fox and Meyer (1995:118) define service delivery as the provision of public activities, benefits, or satisfactions to citizen. This normally entails the pro-

vision of a service or intervention by the government, to the citizens as expected by the citizens and mandated by the Constitution or Acts of Parliament.

While universally, service delivery is usually defined as the provision of public goods and services, by a government or other public organisations, to those citizens who need or demand them, in South Africa, the definition is more encompassing, as it implies not only the ability to provide households with the services needed or demanded, but also a sense of redress by raising the standard of living of the black majority (Lennon and Maslow 2009:20). To the majority of the people, the emergence of the new dispensation meant the elimination of poverty, provision of better housing, accessibility to water, electricity and sanitation and the improvement of the general quality of life. Consequently, local government has been a primary site for the delivery of services to the previously disadvantaged black population in South Africa since 1994.

DELIVERY OF BASIC SOCIAL SERVICES

“clearly, the matter of service delivery is central to our freedom because we cannot enjoy this freedom while our fellow South Africans have no clean water, have no sanitation and are still using the bucket [toilet] system. We cannot enjoy this freedom while many among us still have no electricity and other basic services.

It is therefore very important that all spheres of government combine their efforts to ensure speedy implementation of programmes around these basic services”.

According to various sources (DoCGTA) 2014; South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) 2010; Statistics South Africa (Stats) 2011), the record of enabling access to basic services, in the sense of installing infrastructure, is admirable, and second to none on the African continent. According to the Presidency (2014: 73) significant improvements in the access to basic services have been achieved as follows:

- Access to electricity increased from 50 percent of the households in 1994/95 to 86 percent in 2013/14.
- Access to water increased from 60 percent of the households in 1994/95 to 95 percent in 2011/12.

- Access to basic levels of sanitation increased from 50 percent in 194/95 to 83 percent in 2011/12.

Furthermore, the non-financial census of municipalities which is conducted annually by Statistics South Africa (StatSA) attests to the fact that since 2000, the number of people receiving basic services from municipalities and service providers such as water, electricity, sewerage and sanitation, and solid waste management has increased significantly. In addition, 3.8 million households, classified as indigent were receiving free electricity, water and refuse removal services (StatSA 2014).

It is evident, therefore, that local governance, the coal face of South Africa's developmental state, has contributed tremendously towards the provision of a significant level of basic social services to the previously disadvantaged Black communities, since the dawn of the new democratic dispensation in 1994 (Table 1).

Table 1: Access to basic services 2001 – 2011

Year	Basic Services			
	Water in home	Toilet in home	Electricity in home	Weekly refuse removal
2001	33%	50%	70%	55%
2011	46%	57%	85%	63%

DISAFFECTION WITH SERVICE DELIVERY

Although significant in-roads have been made in providing basic services, huge backlogs remain especially for households in rural areas and poor households in informal settlements in urban areas. Despite delivering 2.8 million subsidized houses (RDP Houses) between 1994 and 2011, approximately 2.3 million people remain inadequately housed, a further 1.2 million households in more than 2,500 informal settlements have inadequate access to basic services (SAIRR 2010). In addition, the Non-financial statistics for municipalities reported deterioration in some basic services which are already being provided by municipalities. For instance over the period 2012 to 2013, Eastern Cape, North West and KwaZulu-Natal provinces reported increases in the use of the bucket toilet system (StatSA 2014: 2). A Human Rights Commission

Report (SAHRC 2010) also confirmed that municipal service delivery, especially with regard to essential services, was totally ineffective and in certain areas of the country non-existent.

Thus as far as actual basic services 'delivered', it is not enough to simply recite statistics of how many people have 'access' because there is a huge difference between 'access' and utilization of those services due to challenges of affordability. Additionally, in many municipalities infrastructure maintenance have largely been discontinued due to a lack of funding thus resulting in poor quality service, or complete comatose (Mc Donald et al. 2002; SAHRC 2010). This implies that while there has been significant progress with regard to service delivery in general, with the previously deprived communities, in service delivery the advancements seem modest when one considers the number of people who still have inadequate access to services (Adam et al. 2013: 15).

Furthermore, even the best performing local authorities in urban areas are unable to supply adequate basic services to households in the ever growing informal settlements on the periphery of urban areas, due to in-ward migration. As more people move into informal settlements, they demand services which were not planned for, the result is an "unending backlogs, which as a result undermine municipal performance" (South African Local Government Association (SALGA) 2009: 5). This problem is also often exacerbated by internal migration from the countryside and 'undocumented' migrants from neighbouring countries, as well as unregistered South Africans residing in the informal settlements which poses a challenges for local authorities. Although significant progress has been achieved in addressing historical backlogs in basic social services, the shifting patterns of demand in urban areas, due to immigration, is exceeding the capacity of most local authorities to satisfy demand for these services (Chikulo 2013). The challenge, therefore, is how to keep pace with the demand of urbanization, as well as cater for the thousands of farm workers who have been illegally evicted from commercial farms and inevitably end up in informal settlements on the outskirts of urban centres.

Also, there is increasing anger and frustration with the quality of services provided as well as affordability. Although a significant number

of households may be connected to the infrastructure, a number of local authorities are not able to maintain the infrastructure that has been rolled out. This has been acknowledged officially by the government (Presidency 2014: 71):

“However... a challenge that has emerged is that there has been a decline in functionality of municipal infrastructure due to poor operation and maintenance in some municipalities. This means, for example, that while people might have access to a tap, there might be no water coming out of the tap.”

In addition, the commodification of service delivery since the early 2000's has resulted in water and electricity services becoming increasingly unaffordable to many households due mainly to poverty and unemployment. In addition, the free basic services provided by the government to indigent citizens are often inadequate, leading to disruptions in service delivery (Bond 2014:10; Mc Donald et al. 2002; StatSA 2014: 3, 17).

Furthermore the “Free Basic Services” policy adopted in 2001 provides a bare minimum of electricity and water (for example, 50 kiloWatt hours of electricity or 6 kiloliters of water per household per month), and then allows service providers to charge extremely high rates for subsequent consumption. The result is, as Bond (2014: 12) points out, a strategy for “talking left” while “walking right” – or more precisely, “turning the tap right”, disconnecting those unable to pay.

As a result, a significant number of households cannot afford the services, although they are connected to the main infrastructure. This means that due to issues of accessibility and affordability, ‘poor’ households that have access to infrastructure have in fact experienced little or no improvement in their welfare resulting from the provision of these services (Adam et al. 2013: 3). Consequently, the euphoria that accompanied the dawn of the new dispensation in 1994 had by 2004 been replaced by growing signs of despair regarding the new government’s inability to render sustainable basic services that were promised to the previously disadvantaged black communities. The result is an growing disillusionment with the availability, as well as the quality of basic services provided by local authorities in most informal settlements and black townships.

SOCIAL BASIS OF PROTESTS: INEQUALITY, POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The protests against poor service delivery are exacerbated by the growing inequality and poverty in South African societies. Despite the achievement of significant service delivery milestones, little progress has been made on the central objective of reducing poverty and inequality. Between 1998 and 2009 the Human Poverty Index increased from 20 percent to 25 percent; while 49 percent of the population was classified as poor in 1994, in 2006 the figure dropped to 47.1 percent (StatSA 2008) and by 2011 the figure had dropped to 45.5 percent (Stats 2014b). This translates into roughly 23 million people living below the poverty line. Among the population groups, the incident of poverty is highest amongst Blacks with 54.8 per cent, Coloureds with 34.2 percent, Indians 7.1 percent, and Whites 0.4 percent (HSRC /NDA 2014)).

Furthermore, in South Africa, poverty is often depicted by a female’s face (HSRC/NDA 2014:12). It is estimated that 54.4 percent of poor people in South Africa are women – the equivalent of 11.9 million people (Earth line Africa 2011:9). In addition, most of the poor are to be found in traditional, urban informal settlements and rural settlements (Human Sciences Research Council(HSRC)/ National Development Agency (NDA) 2014:12). Kwa Zulu – Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces record the highest level of poverty (53%, 52% and 52% respectively (HSRC and NDA(NDA) 2014: 13). While the poverty rate seem to be reducing, mostly due to pro poor policies which have been put in place, such as social grants, inequality standing at Gini coefficient of 0.69 in 2011 remains among the highest in the world (StatSA 2014). The continuing social and economic exclusion of millions of South Africans is thus reflected in high levels of poverty and inequality.

Similarly, the unemployment rate in South Africa is among the highest in the world: The unemployment rate peaked to 31.2 percent in 2003, dropped to 23 percent in 2007 and then increased to 24.2 percent at the end of 2009 (Presidency 2009). By the end of 2013 the unemployment rate stood at 24.1 percent (StatSA 2014b). The unemployment problem is compounded by the growing number of unemployed youth. It is estimated that 3.2 million people, 15 to 24 year

olds do not go to school, work nor attend college (StatSA 2014b). It is also estimated that 66 percent of the unemployed people are the youth. It is therefore, not surprising that it is an army of the unemployed youth that are usually found in the forefront of the violent protests against poor service delivery taking place across the country (Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) 2007; Chikulo 2013).

The high level of unemployment and poverty exacerbates dissatisfaction concerning poor service delivery, particularly in the informal settlements, where unemployment and poverty are endemic (Mananga 2012: 3). Thus most protests about poor service delivery are also rooted in the poverty, inequality and the unacceptably high youth unemployment. As the *Saturday Star* (2014:1) opined: “The hope for a better life for all has not happened quickly enough or reached as many people as the 1994 leaders had set out to do”. As Mc Lennan and Munslow (2009: 21) rightly point out, in a society of growing inequality and poverty, the use of protests against poor service delivery can be viewed as a means to secure the resources to meet the needs of the affected communities.

THE NATURE OF PROTESTS AGAINST POOR SERVICE DELIVERY

As a result of the increasing disaffection with service delivery, especially in informal settlements and black townships, protests have become a recurrent feature of South Africa’s political culture since 2004. The protests that began in the townships of Harrismith in 2004, have now engulfed the whole country and have become a permanent feature of the post-apartheid South Africa (Aitken 2007; Alexander 2010; Booysen 2007). The service delivery protests take the form of different activities such as the drafting of memoranda and petitions, organizing mass meetings, toyi-toying, stay-aways, election boycotts, the construction of barricades, burning of tyres, looting of shops, the throwing of rocks at passing traffic, the barricading of streets and roads, as well as burning the property of city officials and public infrastructure; and buildings such as clinics, community centres, libraries, halls and police stations; chasing of unpopular individuals from townships and increasingly, the looting of foreign-owned shops (CorM-SA 2010; Jolobe 2014; Star 2014). In recent years,

a new tactic has been to prevent school children from attending school. Thus from 2005 service delivery protests have become frequent, widespread and increasingly more violent.

Table 2: Service delivery protests by year

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of protests</i>
2004	10
2005	34
2006	2
2007	37
2008	27
2009	107
2010	111
2011	82
2012	173
2013	155
2014	191

Source: COGTA 2014: 5

Table 2 provides an indication of the magnitude of municipal protests against poor service delivery over the past eleven years and also reveals that the frequency of service delivery protests across South Africa has increased considerably over the past decade. According to the Municipal IQ’s Municipal Hotspots Monitor, in 2014, there were 48 major protests between January and the end of March 2014, occurring at a rate of roughly a protest every second day. Gauteng and the Eastern Cape continue to be the most affected, with the Eastern Cape slightly ahead in March. Thus the frequency with which protests have ensued across the country has increased considerably over the past decade thereby setting a new record. From 2007-2011 there was an average of 11.61 protests per month. Overall, protest activity has risen dramatically in the first 8 months of 2012, with 226 protests, or an average of 28.25 protests per month. The years 2009 and 2010 were the worst due to the number of violent protests recorded during this period.

According to Karamoko and Jain (2011: 24) between 2002 and 2011, Gauteng accounted for 31.46 percent of the service delivery protests, Western Cape accounted for 17.05 percent, while North West accounted for 11.09 percent (Chikulo 2013). Furthermore, the wave of violent protests tend to be predominant in metro areas (HSRC 2008). This means that protests do not necessarily occur in poor local authorities with the worst basic service delivery backlogs service (DoCOGTA 2009: 12). Gauteng and the West-

ern Cape are particularly susceptible to protests given their rapidly urbanizing populations. Since 2004, some 48 percent of service delivery protests that have taken place have been recorded in metro areas where service delivery has relatively been more effective as opposed to areas where service backlogs are more predominant.

Over the past decade, protests against poor service delivery have become not only more frequent, but also more violent, usually marked by the destruction of public and private property. 42 percent of protests in 2007 were violent, 38 percent in 2008, 44 percent in 2009, 54 percent in 2010 (Jain and Powell 2010:14). As the Police commissioner General Riah Phiyega and the head of Public Order Policing (POP), General Elias Mawela, told the Parliamentary Police Committee, what seems to be of most concern to them was not that service delivery protests have doubled, from 971 in 2010-11 to 1,882 in 2012-2013 but rather, the fact that the protests have turned violent and entail confrontations between armed police and stone-throwing crowds. Consequently, the police are increasingly responding with lethal force. This has led President Zuma to condemn the heavy handed approach of the police in dealing with the wave of protests against poor service delivery but also criticized protestors for resorting to violence to express their anger over poor municipal governance (Brown 2014: 1). As a result, protests against service delivery in which the Police clash with violent protestors have become commonplace in South African towns and cities. The Star (2014: 1) aptly summed up the situation: “the police’s hands are full amid the service delivery rage”. The increasing use of excessive force by the police in managing protests was highlighted on 16 August 2012 when 34 striking mine workers were shot dead by police at the Lonmin Platinum Mine at Marikana in the North West Province. According to research conducted by the Social Change Research Unit of the University of Johannesburg, a total of 43 protesters have been reportedly killed by police between 2004 and 2014.

Furthermore, in the informal settlements and townships, the protests against poor service delivery degenerate into a spate of violent xenophobic attacks on foreign African nationals (or those perceived as foreign nationals) and the looting of foreign – owned shops. The shops are normally owned by Ethiopians, Somalis and Bangladesh nationals. Consequently, in some

instances, the xenophobic attacks have caused havoc by creating a humanitarian crisis which resulted in the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of African foreign nationals living informal settlements and townships (Chikulo 2013). For instance, the year 2008, witnessed an eruption of concentrated xenophobic violence against foreign Africans over a two-week period in at least 135 locations across the country. This resulted in at least 61 people killed and 100,000 people displaced and rendered homeless. The violent xenophobic attacks have been attributed mainly to competition between locals and foreign nationals for employment and business opportunities, and services such as housing, water, and sanitation in poor communities (Alexander 2010; Citizenship Rights in South Africa Initiative (CRAI) 2008; HSRC 2008: 7). The xenophobic violence has been identified in the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC 2010) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM 2010) Country Review Report (CRR) as one of the most serious challenges to good governance.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND THE “SMOKE THAT CALLS”

Since 1994 local government in South Africa has been restructured and democratized in order to address the inherited service delivery backlogs, poverty and inequality, as well as facilitate community participation (Chikulo 2004). The resultant developmental local governance system is viewed as the ‘best practice model’ in Africa in particular and the Third World in general. Chapter seven of the Constitution states that the mandate for local government is to provide democratic and accountable government. To this end, the Local Government: Structures, Act 117 of 1998, section 73(2) was enacted to facilitate communication channels between municipalities and communities.

The Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000), provides for community participation in developmental local governance through the Ward committees, which are established in terms of section 17 (1) of the Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998). Ward Committees are supposed to play a critical role in creating a democratic culture of local participation and accountability. The wards are supposed to be the main mechanisms through which communities

can effectively participate in the affairs of the municipality. To this end, 3790 Ward Development Committees were established (DoCOGTA 2009: 14). In addition, IDP Forums have also been established to facilitate community participation in the municipal integrated planning process. Legislation thus provides avenues for public involvement in municipal planning, budgeting, service delivery, and performance evaluation. Moreover, municipalities are obliged to report to and receive feedback from their communities annually, regarding the objectives set out in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). It is thus evident that the Constitution and legislation provides for democratic and accountable local government.

However, due to challenges of functionality, the critical local governance level, is for the most part, characterized by an institutional vacuum due to the fact that most of the legislated local committees, such as Ward Committees, IDP Forums and imbizos (community meetings) which are supposed to provide channels for public participation are either non-existent or where they do exist are dysfunctional (DoCOGTA 2009:9-10). As the 20 Years Review Report (Presidency 2014: 27) points out:

“The Act requires councillors and officials to play a key role in fostering community participation. However, while structures such as ward committees have been created to enable councillors and officials to engage with communities, these structures have not worked in the manner intended. Interactions are often formulaic and symbolic rather than meaningful and have generally not helped to strengthen links between communities and councillors. On the contrary, many councillors have become estranged from communities and their critical concerns. The link between councillors and citizens via the ward committee system needs to be improved”.

This means that despite the best intentions, and the duty placed on developmental local government, to elicit community involvement, the system has failed to live up to these expectations and as a result, public protests have increased in number and frequency since 1994. The increase in protests against poor service delivery reflects the fact that local governance is struggling to ensure that poor communities feel that they have “a voice” and are heard and further suggests the feeling of betrayal because their active participation in legislated spaces,

such as ward committees and IDP forums, has not been effective in increasing their “voice” in the municipalities in order to access to basic services promised in the Bill of Rights.

The result has been the creation of social distance between communities and local government, as well as the breakdown of channels of communication between civic officials, councillors and communities resulting in mutual distrust (DoCOGTA 2014: 27). In addition, the trust deficit is exacerbated by the alleged corruption, perceived enrichment and conspicuous consumption by councillors and local authority staff (Booyesen 2007). Moreover, this is aggravated by gross abuse of power and lack of accountability to the public by the latter (Manaanga 2012: 6). This has led to widespread disillusionment with the local councillors, local political leaders and municipal officials. In effect, while local government is supposed to be ‘closest to the people’, it is rather viewed as a ‘government that is far away’ (Pradza 2010: 19).

In order to overcome their lack of “voice” in local government, communities are resorting to violent protests as a means of getting the government’s attention. The common perception is that the government only reacts or responds when communities resort to violent protests. Consequently, protesters always take to the streets as they believe that, that is the best way to get the government’s attention (Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Ideas) 2010: 2). As one activist aptly put it: “We have realized [that] when we talk, nothing happens, but as soon as we protest something happens”. Protests have thus increasingly become violent because communities had purportedly tried every legitimate avenue to express their grievances, and had doors slammed in their faces (Doggs 2014: 15). Community members now believe that peaceful forms of protest are ineffective, as a means of drawing an appropriate government response.

Violent protests against poor service delivery have thus become the norm. As the research titled “The Smoke that Calls” (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CVR) and Society, Working and Development Institute (SWOP) 2011) suggests, protestors believe that it is only the smoke that can call government officials to pay attention and attend to their problems. In other words, communities actually believe that when they protest violently officials actually pay attention and respond to demands.

The following quote sums up the prevailing political culture (Dlamini 2011: 44):

“The violence had generated a response from distant and uncaring officials and, in this sense, the burning of property and the ‘thick, black smoke which billowed over the township’ was ‘the smoke that calls’. The experience in Voortrekker suggests that collective violence is a means of forcing the powerful to acknowledge the dignity and legitimacy of the powerless and to hear their collective demands.”

Thus, the increase in violent protest action is an indication that protests have become a more efficient political tool for communities to express grievances and make demands instead of following the provision of the formal local governance structures established in terms of section 17 (1) of the Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998) and the Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000). In short, the escalation in violent protests should thus be viewed as a sign of the broad based anger and frustration with the unfulfilled promises made by politicians concerning the socio-economic rights that people are in need of, which are made worse by the inaccessibility to local politicians and councillors (Jolobe 2014; Evans 2014). Thus, the increasing tendency to engage in violent protests is a manifestation of the existence of “institutional vacuum” at the critical local governance local level.

CONCLUSION

The Constitutional mandate of development local governance is to ensure the provision of basic services to communities, especially the previously disadvantaged black population in order to overcome the legacy of apartheid; and facilitate democratic participation. To this end, South Africa has made substantial progress in ensuring improved access to basic social services. However, backlogs still remain, and even in cases where access has been provided, the quality of the services delivered has suffered and the failure rate of facilities provided is unacceptably high. To exacerbate the problem in most instances, local authorities are unresponsive or dysfunctional, leaving the residents with no option but resort to violent protests against poor service delivery to register their demands and grievances. Almost all the protests occur in poor, mostly black communities. Their location is in-

dicative of the fact that the protests also stem from historical inequalities unemployment and poverty, and are thus, to some extent, driven by the social powerlessness experienced by poor black communities. The recurrent violent service delivery protests are a reflection of community frustration with the existing “institutional vacuum” at the critical local governance level. However, the protests are not only about service delivery, but also the dysfunctional political process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to stem the tide of violent service delivery protests, local government should be administered in a way that facilitates citizen participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the delivery of basic services, so that poor communities can have a sense of belonging and ownership. In order to address the crisis in local government it is recommended that: first, the government should effectively implement the recently adopted “Back to Basics” programme; second, there is an urgent need to improve the management of municipalities and make them accountable, inclusive, responsive to the needs and aspirations of local communities; and third, enforce effective engagement between local authorities and citizens in order to improve communication and the quality of service delivery.

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