

Guidelines for Improving Infrastructure Development in the Rural Communities of Bushbuckridge

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ABSTRACT The primary aim of this study was to explore the role of the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality in promoting service delivery to rural communities. The areas surrounding Bushbuckridge Local Municipality formed part of the focus area. Service delivery challenges in these areas include an inadequate water supply, gravel roads, a lack of health facilities, a lack of electricity in some communities, and inadequate sanitation. The study focused on four main stakeholders, namely, councillors, traditional leaders, officials working for the municipality, and local citizens. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyse the data. It is recommended that the role that traditional leaders play as watchdogs of service delivery be recognised, as this would help to address service delivery imbalances and inequality in the rural, disadvantaged communities of Bushbuckridge. Furthermore, traditional leaders noted the communication gap between councillors and officials, as well as ordinary citizens. It is, therefore, recommended that the municipality improve the way in which it communicates with all stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the protests by poor communities was dissatisfaction with the delivery of basic municipal services such as running water, electricity and sanitation in the Bushbuckridge communities. A lack of proper housing adds to growing dissatisfaction in poor communities (Dajani et al. 2016). Rural development is about enabling rural people to control their destiny, thereby effectively addressing rural poverty through the optimal use and management of resources. Infrastructure development plays a significant role in economic development through job creation, thereby reducing poverty, particularly in rural areas. It is essential in creating the conditions for successful and sustainable economic integration (Erasmus et al. 2016). Bushbuckridge Local Municipality is a presidential nodal point in the north-eastern part of Mpumalanga Province. The development gap between urban and rural settlements in South Africa is highly visible. While urban areas have well-kept roads,

sports grounds and recreation spaces, and everybody has clean water and electricity as well as proper sanitation, the opposite is the case in many black townships and rural communities (Chimtenge et al. 2017). There is a need for additional funding for rural development, not only in Bushbuckridge communities but in all rural communities in South Africa, and this can be achieved through local government initiatives. Infrastructure policies have had an uneven impact on different groups of beneficiaries. Thus, infrastructure policy should focus on transformation relating to water, health, land, electricity, roads, housing and transport. It is important to establish infrastructure policy for these sectors as they are crucial for the development of rural communities. This requires concerted capacity development (Candido and Santos 2015).

Purpose of the Study

South Africa is facing many challenges in improving infrastructure for economic development and municipal service delivery (Alam and Islam 2017). This study investigates ways of redressing the imbalances of the past. The South African government has earmarked R840 billion for infrastructure development, which is crucial for the development of rural communities. Local government should be concerned at the lack of health, clean water, sanitation, and educational facilities as well as the conditions of roads in

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rural communities. The aim of the study is to establish the reasons for the poor state of infrastructure in the rural communities of Bushbuckridge (Burke 2016). Municipal councillors, officials, traditional leaders and other relevant stakeholders were interviewed to establish their perceptions of service delivery in these communities. The significance of this research is that it explores ways of developing these communities in order to enable every person to have access to clean water, electricity, health facilities and proper sanitation (Ogaja and Kimiti 2016). An outsider may gain the impression that Bushbuckridge is not part of South Africa as it lacks the basic services taken for granted in other parts of the country. The study also seeks to explore the role of members of Bushbuckridge rural communities in promoting service delivery (Bromiley and Rau 2016; Osanloo and Grant 2016).

Problem Investigated

Bushbuckridge communities are faced with several service delivery challenges including water shortages, and a lack of sanitation, health facilities, basic education and roads. This calls for the formulation of guidelines for the improvement of infrastructure in these rural communities (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality 2010). This study therefore aimed to firstly, establish the reasons for this situation by soliciting the opinions of various stakeholders, and secondly, to design guidelines to promote enhanced delivery of infrastructure in the rural areas of Bushbuckridge (Ladner 2016). It is imperative for municipal councillors and officials to develop a strategic plan of action in order to assign roles and responsibilities in addressing the lack of service delivery in these communities (Ospina 2016). Therefore the objectives of this study were to (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality 2010):

- ♦ Investigate the effects of poor service delivery on Bushbuckridge communities.
- ♦ Provide a theoretical conceptualisation of infrastructure development.
- ♦ Describe the services rendered in Bushbuckridge communities and identify areas for improvement (Yuliansyah et al. 2017).
- ♦ Conduct participatory observation research on the condition of road infrastructure and the effect of such infrastructure on the mobility of Bushbuckridge communities.

- ♦ Offer guidelines on how infrastructure can be improved in order to enhance service delivery in these communities.

Literature Review

Guidelines for Improving Infrastructure Development in the Rural Communities of Bushbuckridge

Bushbuckridge Local Municipality is a category B municipality and is one of five Local Municipalities in Enhlazeni District Municipality in the north-eastern part of Mpumalanga Province (Goromonzi 2016). The municipality accounts for thirty-four percent of the total population of the Enhlazeni District Municipality and is renowned for its agriculture and tourist attractions. It was declared a presidential nodal point in 2001 (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality 2010). Bushbuckridge is bordered by the Kruger National Park in the east and the Mbombela Local Municipality in the south. The municipality faces a number of challenges that are priorities for medium term and certainly long term development strategies. These include high levels of poverty, crime, and unemployment, huge service delivery backlogs, skills shortages, a high rate of illiteracy, the rural nature of the area, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and inadequate access to basic services such as health, education and sanitation. Poverty and unemployment are core development challenges (Hu et al. 2017). Therefore, Bushbuckridge Municipality has adopted a holistic approach to address the interrelated socio-economic factors that can improve the quality of life of local citizens. National development goals enable joint efforts between all levels of government to achieve these objectives (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality 2010).

Bushbuckridge Municipal Structure

Historically, policies were formulated by local government without consulting communities. The result was that implementation was not as effective as anticipated. The Municipal Systems Act No. 56 of 2003 gave effect to the vision of developmental local government set out in the White Paper on Local Government (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality 2010). The Act sets out the core principles, mechanisms and processes that are necessary to enable municipi-

palities to move progressively towards the social and economic upliftment of communities, and ensure universal access to quality, affordable services. According to the Department of Provincial and Local Government, the institutional structure of Bushbuckridge Local Municipality is designed to address the challenges of service delivery through delegating certain powers and functions. The current challenges facing Bushbuckridge Municipality include (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality 2010; Limpopo Department of Health 2014-2018):

- ♦ A poor road network. A good road network would enable easy movement and therefore facilitate economic development;
- ♦ The lack of a development strategy for the municipal area based on a proper land audit;
- ♦ Lack of sufficient bulk water supply, reservoirs and a reticulation system;
- ♦ The lack of a strategy to attract skilled labour and to retain personnel;
- ♦ Inadequate health facilities and the poor supply of medicine to clinics;
- ♦ Lack of a reliable and structured waste management plan.

Socio-demographic Profile of Rural Communities in Bushbuckridge

A socio-democratic profile reveals the key social, economic, physical and environmental features of the municipal area and their impact on spatial and sustainable development. According to Statistics South Africa's Community Survey of 2007, the population of the Bushbuckridge rural communities stands at 509,967, with 153,839 households, equating to an average household size of 3.84 persons. Young people aged 34 and less are in the majority, at 339,140 residents. There are more females (279 913: 54%) than males (230,052: 46%) (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality 2010; Kihara et al. 2017).

Health Services

Health is of paramount importance in ensuring improved quality of life (Limpopo Department of Health 2016-2017). The municipality has three hospitals, two health centres, 34 clinics and five mobile health teams. However, most clinics lack sufficient medication. Nonetheless, the Department of Health has upgraded the services delivered at some clinics in recent years. There

are sufficient programmes targeting the youth, women and disabled people (Kordnaej 2016).

Transport Infrastructure

Transport infrastructure in the Bushbuckridge area is very rudimentary, consisting of gravel roads despite its proximity to the Kruger National Park. It is imperative for the municipality to improve the road network to enable easy access to service delivery points. The existing network does not allow the mobility required for economic activities in the nodal area.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a critical perspective. This research tradition involves empirical studies that seek to understand society and bring about change where there is a need to do so. It is qualitative in nature and aims to provide an in-depth description of a group or group of communities (Kihara 2017; Strang 2015). This study will assist municipal councillors, traditional leaders and municipal officials to prioritise the basic needs of Bushbuckridge rural communities. Both qualitative and quantitative research designs were employed to investigate the identified problem. The research methodology comprised of the descriptive method; explanatory method; and contextual method (Leedy and Ormrod 2015).

Population and Sample of the Study

Bushbuckridge Local Municipality consists of 135 settlements and is divided into 34 wards. The researchers conducted research in 12 settlements including Lillydale, Somerset, Belfast, Huntington, Justicia, Kildare, Angincourt, Mkhulhu, Thulamashe, Rolle, Oakley and Ronaldseba. Relevant stakeholders that were consulted included councillors, municipal officials and traditional leaders (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality 2010; Hair et al. 2015). Traditional leaders were interviewed whereas a questionnaire was used to gather information from councillors and municipal officials. The following people were interviewed or completed a questionnaire (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality 2010; Limpopo Department of Health 2016-2017; Hair et al. 2015):

- ♦ **Lillydale:** Two councillors, six traditional leaders, and 11 municipal officials. Ordinary citizens were also interviewed.

- ♦ **Somerset:** One councillor, five officials, ordinary citizens and two traditional leaders were interviewed and completed questionnaires.
- ♦ **Belfast:** Seven ordinary citizens were interviewed, including men and women.
- ♦ **Huntington:** Four ordinary citizens were interviewed including one woman and three men.
- ♦ **Justicia:** Six ordinary citizens, both men and women, completed questionnaires.
- ♦ **Kildare:** Six individuals completed questionnaires and two were interviewed. All were men.
- ♦ **Mkhuhlu:** Four individuals completed questionnaires and five were interviewed, including men and women.
- ♦ **Thulamahashe:** Eight people completed questionnaires, including five men and three women.
- ♦ **Oakley:** Three individuals completed questionnaires and two were interviewed.
- ♦ **Rolle:** Four individuals were interviewed, including both men and women.
- ♦ **Agincourt:** Nine individuals were interviewed and two completed questionnaires; both men and women were approached.
- ♦ **Ronaldsea:** Three individuals were interviewed, one woman and two men.

A total number of 93 individuals completed questionnaires or were interviewed in Bushbuckridge's 12 settlements. Of these, 50 ordinary citizens were interviewed and 43 others completed questionnaires (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality 2010; Limpopo Department of Health 2016-2017; Erikson and Kovalainen 2016).

Methods of Data Collection

The study gathered both secondary and primary data. Articles and newspapers were consulted and first-hand information was obtained from councillors, ordinary citizens, officials and traditional leaders in the Bushbuckridge area. Some information was extracted from the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality's Integrated Development Plan (Bryman 2016).

RESULTS

All existing channels of communication should be used to disseminate information to members of the wider Bushbuckridge communi-

ty in order to promote dialogue and information-sharing between councillors, personnel, traditional leaders and community members (Bryman and Bell 2015). Communication channels could include radio stations and the media, such as Bushbuckridge Radio, *Mpumalanga News*, the *Lowvelder*, *Mpumalanga Sowetan* edition, Thobela FM, Munghana Lonene FM, and Ligwalagwala FM as well as posters, pamphlets, and flyers. The municipal newsletter should be used to encourage dialogue among community members. Councillors should be informed regularly on the progress of projects, and changes and activities initiated by personnel (Creswell and Poth 2018). Improved interaction amongst councillors and personnel will strengthen working relationships and enhance the council's effectiveness in delivering services. Interaction could be improved by involving ward councillors in meetings or discussions on ward-based projects, with personnel assisting councillors with their portfolio tasks. Departmental or community-based chat-boxes or suggestion boxes would enable both personnel and members of the public to submit queries and concerns to municipal councillors and traditional leaders (Cassell 2015). These concerns would then be addressed by management who would disseminate information on action taken, either via municipal notice boards, newsletters or the municipal website. This would encourage interaction between management and personnel, and the public. Traditional leaders pointed out that councillors engage communities on service delivery issues without consulting them. On the other hand, councillors raised concerns about the lack of community involvement in *Izimbizo*, a Zulu word, which refers to a community meeting to address citizens' concerns (Babin and Zikmund 2015). Most citizens in the Bushbuckridge area do not attend such meetings. Another challenge is that the needs of ordinary citizens are not being met because the municipality is failing to carry out identified projects due to financial constraints. This could increase the final cost of the projects. Councillors also suggested that broader consultation with relevant stakeholders could address infrastructure and service delivery challenges (Gunarish et al. 2016).

DISCUSSION

A number of questionnaires were distributed in Bushbuckridge communities and interviews

were also conducted in these areas. The majority of ordinary citizens, councillors, municipal officials and traditional leaders indicated that roads, water, electricity, unemployment, health facilities and proper education present serious challenges in most communities in the area (Bushbuckridge Local Municipality 2010; Limpopo Department of Health 2016-2017; Erikson and Kovalainen 2016). Some indicated that these problems are the result of a breakdown in communication between councillors, traditional leaders and officials responsible for these areas. The majority identified a gap between traditional leaders and councillors on issues of service delivery (Holohan and McDonagh 2017). The study revealed that much remains to be done to improve the lives of ordinary citizens in Bushbuckridge's rural communities. The following are the main findings of the study: Councillors emphasized the need for increased budgets to expedite service delivery and that they engage with the community ten times a year in order to provide feedback (Kihara et al. 2016). There is a breakdown in communication between councillors and municipal officials. Furthermore, the role of traditional leaders needs to be addressed. A number of residents indicated that Bushbuckridge communities are faced with the following challenges: unemployment, poor maintenance of roads, a lack of water and sanitation, unsatisfactory health services, and a lack of quality education. Community members complained of a lack of feedback from councillors and traditional leaders on progress made by the Municipality in terms of service delivery (Kihara 2017). Broader consultation between all relevant stakeholders could offer solutions to improve infrastructure and service delivery. Tourism and agriculture as well as the retail industry make a very small contribution to job creation in the Bushbuckridge area, especially considering the size of the population. There is a need to involve the entire community in matters that affect them, such as clean water and sanitation, health facilities, quality education, and houses, as well as the upgrading of roads (Lussier and Achua 2016).

CONCLUSION

This study explored the way in which the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality could provide services to the entire community, and the role of traditional leaders in promoting service

delivery. It focused on the work of the municipality, undertaken by councillors, traditional leaders and municipal officials, and how they can contribute to more effective service delivery. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa mandates municipalities to provide services to communities in a sustainable manner; promote socio-economic development and involve communities and community organizations in matters of local government. Members of the Bushbuckridge community indicated that they are not involved in policy or decision-making processes and are not given any opportunity to voice their opinions. Whilst citizens are unable to participate in decision-making at council level, opportunities exist for their involvement in policy formulation and major projects. Through interaction at this level, councillors gain improved understanding of communities' needs and concerns. These can then be incorporated into policies, enabling the council to be more responsive and effective. It is widely accepted that participation facilitates implementation and inspires people to own policies or decisions, thereby encouraging support and commitment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the findings, the following recommendations are made: It is crucial that communities be involved in decisions relating to service delivery. Councillors and traditional leaders should provide feedback to the community. They should convene monthly or quarterly meetings to discuss matters that affect communities, and follow-up with feedback on progress made (or lack thereof) in fulfilling community members' requests. This could assist in enhancing service delivery in the area. Progress is hindered by a lack of support from the bureaucracy. It is essential that the relevant authorities, councillors and traditional leaders support the community's concerns and suggestions. The authorities should attend to the needs of the community at all times by way of engaging with them and providing feedback on the issues raised by community members. To ensure effective citizen participation in matters that affect them, the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality must improve the way it communicates with citizens. Both internal and external communication methods should be improved by affording all personnel the opportunity to contribute towards the transformation

and restructuring of the Municipality in order to meet the needs of citizens. Councillors can assist by communicating council decisions and policies to the community. They should liaise with citizens regarding council projects and initiatives. Personnel should provide councillors with the necessary support, be it administrative or technical, in preparation for such meetings. Moreover, personnel play an important role in assisting with communication and improving the council's accessibility. Attention should be paid to those personnel directly involved with citizens, such as front-line personnel, community liaison and relations officers and communication officers. These officials should be conscious of their fundamental role in the organization with a view to improving service delivery. Councillors need to identify additional ways in which to communicate with citizens. Although council matters are disseminated through various channels, for example, media reports, community news, radio talk shows, council agendas, pamphlets, posters and publicity campaigns, concerted efforts need to be made ensure that relevant information such as the achievements of councillors, projects and policies is shared in an efficient manner.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following limitations were identified: The questionnaires submitted to the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality did not elicit sufficient respondents due to the lack of information about specific questions raised in the questionnaire. Some officials did not respond to the questionnaires due to fear of victimization by their principals; they stated that providing information could lead to their suspension and ultimate dismissal. The questionnaires were only completed by council officials, traditional leaders and councillors. However, a few individuals from Lillydale village in Bushbuckridge also completed questionnaires. Service delivery is an important topic at both central and local government level. More stakeholders from a larger number of communities across the Limpopo Province could have been included. Time and resource constraints did not allow for this.

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