

Challenges in implementing monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

The case of the Mfolozi Municipality

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ABSTRACT

Globally, citizens want better and more services to maintain or improve their livelihoods. In South Africa, local government is responsible for delivering basic services (e.g. access to potable water, proper sanitation, a sustainable electricity supply, and regular waste removal), in collaboration with other spheres of government, to enhance quality of life and local democracy. To improve service delivery, municipalities must design and implement comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems to facilitate continuous assessment, M&E of municipal structures, systems and processes, in line with municipalities' integrated development plans (IDPs), service delivery outcomes, and operational plans to implement the budget. This case study on challenges hampering successful implementation of M&E in the Mfolozi municipality found that shortage of skills and lack of financial resources contribute to the ineffectiveness of M&E. The article concludes by recommending remedial actions to address the identified challenges, namely employing and retaining highly skilled workers from an increasingly diverse and mobile labour market. In addition, the municipality should involve the local community in the planning and execution of projects to ensure their success.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, people are demanding better and more services from national and local governments to maintain or improve the quality of people's lives. South Africa is no



exception. Local government has an important role to play in improving communities' lives by providing and delivering basic services, including providing access to potable water, proper sanitation, a sustainable electricity supply, and regular waste removal. It is thus vital that different spheres of government work together to improve service delivery by municipalities, safeguarding livelihoods and enhancing local democracy. To keep track of how successful they are in improving service delivery, municipalities must design and implement comprehensive M&E systems.

The national government in South Africa expects strong, innovative, responsive and vibrant local governments to deliver the quality of local leadership and public services that their communities need. Policy frameworks suggest that the government believes that all residents, regardless of their geographic location, are entitled to good quality public services. Local government has a key role to play in enabling people to receive what they are entitled, through arrangements that reflect local circumstances and empower local communities. However, since the inception of South Africa's democratic dispensation in 1994, local government has not achieved the goals set for the country by the ruling party, to overcome inequalities that are a legacy of the apartheid government's discriminatory system, based on race and gender, leaving a dysfunctional local government system with ineffective service delivery in many communities.

Local government is often the first point of contact between an individual and a government institution. Therefore, it is often argued that local government is the form of government closest to the people (Thornhill 2008:491). The often violent service delivery protests since 2005, if left to continue unabated, could pose a major threat to South Africa's fledgling democracy (Shaid, Taylor and Raga 2014:103). It is important for municipalities to design and implement a comprehensive M&E system. Such a system should facilitate the continuous assessment, M&E of municipal structures, systems and processes. This should be done in alignment with each municipality's IDP and service delivery outcomes, as well as operational plans for implementing the budget. This article looks at the case of the Mfolozi municipality to identify and analyse challenges that hamper successful implementation of M&E. It also discusses the legal framework of local government and the state of local government in South Africa. The article concludes by recommending remedial actions to address the challenges identified.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 requires local government to be developmental. This simple assertion has far-reaching implications for the organisation and operation of municipalities throughout the country. Understanding and grappling with the concept of developmental local government is not easy. Different individuals and groups in support of several different objectives have used the phrase in different ways. Developmental local government is a vision for the future form of local government in South Africa. According to the Development Bank of South Africa's (DBSA's) *Development Report*, it points to a system of democratic local government in which the needs of all, but especially those of poor and vulnerable communities, are met by efficient and effective municipalities (DBSA 2000:3 and Koma 2012:109).

The *White Paper on Local Government* (RSA 1998:17) defines developmental local government as local government committed to working with citizens and groups in a community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs, and eventually improve their quality of life. Bagchi (2000:398) defines developmental local government as one that makes economic development its top priority and is able to design effective instruments to promote such an objective. The instruments identified include, forging new formal institutions; the weaving of formal and informal networks of collaboration between citizens and officials; and using new opportunities for trade and profitable production. Developmental local government is not constrained by ideology, but is able to switch gears effortlessly from market to government directed growth, or *vice versa* depending on the circumstances. Often, it combines both market and state direction synergistically when opportunity beckons (Bagchi 2000:398; Mogale 2003:229; Koma 2010:112 and UNECA 2011:95).

DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT

South Africa is defined and regarded as a developmental state, a concept that originated in East Asia in the 20th century. In East Asia, countries created mechanisms that enabled the state to intervene in the affairs of the private sector. The mechanisms include creating an economic planning commission, implementing market-defying selective industrial policies and total state control of the banking sector (Chang 2010:83). After 1950, the Scandinavian countries (including Denmark, Norway and Sweden) were broadly associated with the characteristics of a developmental state. Chang (2010:84) contends that the Scandinavian countries focused on selective industrial policies and promoting research and development. In the context of the social sciences, development in its broadest sense is a form of social change. The change agent – the state – plays a pivotal role in promoting developmental intervention in society (Theron 2008:3). A developmental state normally strives to generate and maintain the economy of a country, through institutions established to promote a developmental state. Netshitenzhe (2011:6) claims that different paradigms can be followed in creating a developmental state “it depends on the path states choose to achieve the developmental objectives, as well as the instruments such states use to this end”.

In the case of a democratic South Africa, the idea of a developmental state emerged during the tenure of President Mbeki (1999 to 2004), in addition to prior developmental policies, such as the RDP, which was initiated in 1994. It was as a reaction to the alarming increase in inequality and poverty levels in the country. In 2011, the National Planning Commission (NPC 2011) of South Africa noted that the Gini co-efficient was at its highest in the country since democratisation in 1994. Despite being a constitutional democracy, inequality among South Africans is gradually increasing. As the *National Development Plan: vision 2030* points out, the Gini co-efficient increased from 0.64 in 1995 to 0.7 in 2011 (NPC 2011:3). Against this background it is clear that establishing a developmental state is imperative to reduce the Gini co-efficient by implementing progressive policies to improve and maintain people’s quality of life.

Castells (1992:56) argues as follows: “A state is developmental when it establishes as its principle of legitimacy its ability to promote and sustain development, understanding by



development the combination of steady high rates of growth and structural change in the productive system, both domestically and in its relationship to the international economy ... Thus ultimately for the developmental state, economic development is not a goal but a means”.

Mkandawire (2001:291) defines a developmental state as one “whose ideological underpinnings are developmental and one that seriously attempts to deploy its administrative and political resources to the task of economic development”. Edigheji (2010:4) defines a developmental state as one that: “authoritatively, credibly, legitimately and in a binding manner is able to formulate and implement its policies and programmes. This entails possessing a developmentalist ideology that privileges industrialisation, economic growth and expansion of human capabilities. Such a state also has to be able to construct and deploy the institutional architecture within the state and mobilise society towards the realisation of its developmentalist project”.

According to Madumo (2012:43), “a developmental state is identified as a state that uses all the necessary mechanisms and institutions at its disposal to achieve successful economic intervention in a specific country”. In the South African context, a developmental state implies equity, justice, enabling a rapidly growing economy and improving the quality of life for all citizens (Edigheji 2007:3). This should lead to successful economic activity that will stimulate employment opportunities and subsequently alleviate poverty among the country’s citizens. Section 153 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* requires all municipalities to promote developmental duties to ensure the effective and efficient management of its administration, budgeting and planning, in order to facilitate socio-economic development (RSA 1996). Meeting these objectives is imperative to satisfy the basic needs of the people.

Mogale (2003:229) states that in order to assist municipalities to meet developmental requirements and speed up service delivery to the poor, extensive resource acquisition in terms of funding, human resources, appropriate responses to local needs, and most importantly the adoption of key and enabling legislative measures; has become essential to realise developmental local government objectives.

Local government is defined as a sphere of government located within communities and well placed to respond appropriately to local needs, interests and the expectations of communities. Van der Waldt (2006) explains that local government is at the coalface of public service delivery. Local government can also be described as public organisations authorised to manage and govern the affairs of a given territory or area of jurisdiction. It is important to note that local government refers to a sphere of government, and not an individual municipality. All the individual municipalities in South Africa make up the collective sphere known as local government (Roux 2005:64).

Being the government closest to the people, it is to be expected that a core function of each municipality is rendering a variety of basic and essential services to the community in its jurisdiction (Roux 2005:69). Service provision by municipalities is a constitutional obligation. Part B of Schedule 5 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* concerning units, identifies the following services that fall in the ambit of local government and its municipalities: water, electricity, town and city planning, road and storm water drainage, waste management, emergency services, (for example, fire fighting), licenses, fresh produce market, parks and recreation, security, libraries, and economic planning. Part B of

Schedule 4 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* identifies the following matters that are also the responsibility of municipalities as functions in the exclusive domain of provincial government: managing air pollution, applying building regulations, regulating childcare facilities, electricity and gas reticulation, local tourism, municipal airports, municipal planning, municipal health services, municipal public transport and municipal public works.

Local government objectives include providing a democratic and accountable government, provision of services in a sustainable manner and promoting social and economic development by engaging communities (section 152 of the Constitution). To ascertain whether the developmental mandates are achieved, accountability, basic service delivery and local economic development initiatives should be monitored and evaluated. A municipality has the authority to undertake its designated functions, but underperformance of its legislative obligations may result in the province's intervention to undertake the municipal tasks (section 139 of the Constitution). It is incumbent on municipalities to maintain good governance practices so that they can achieve their developmental mandates. South African municipalities must adhere to the principles of good developmental local governance and comply with an inclusive statutory and regulatory framework that governs service delivery (Govender and Reddy 2014:162 and Van der Waldt 2014:132).

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION

M&E are powerful management tools that can assist a government and state institutions to improve the manner in which tasks are undertaken to achieve a country's vision and mission. The data and evidence that the government and state institutions needs to make decisions, implement policy and hold officials accountable should be derived from a results-based performance feedback system to ensure that it is possible to make strategic, tactical and operational decisions more relevant (Mackay 2007:v). However, the Public Service Commission (PSC) has reported that departments and organs of state do not yet undertake M&E seriously as a performance management mechanism, because of the absence of the necessary M&E systems to evaluate programmes (PSC 2008:90). The constructs are defined and discussed below, before being applied in the case study of the Mfolozi municipality.

Monitoring

Monitoring involves comparing actual performance with the planned performance (RSA 2008:3). According to the National Treasury (2007:1), monitoring reports on actual performance against what was planned by collecting, analysing and reporting data of all projects, programmes and policies to support effective management. Moreover, Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman (2004, cited in Kettner, Moroney and Martin 2008:255), define monitoring as an assessment of the extent to which a programme is implemented as designed and serves the intended target group. The emphasis in monitoring should be on controlling the process or procedure to align it with the achievement of an objective that is relevant to the beneficiaries. A good monitoring system provides early warning signals so that corrective



action can be taken timeously. Govender and Reddy (2014:164) define monitoring as tracking interventions, and using the data collected, to timeously fulfil or enhance the achievement of the set targets to the satisfaction of the targeted stakeholders.

Based on the above arguments, it can be deduced that monitoring is a tool that can be used to indicate whether or not a programme/system is going in the right direction, as previously planned. The process can have two possible outcomes: if the programme/system is on track there is no need for intervention, but if the programme/system is not doing well, intervention is necessary.

Evaluation

Fournier (2005:140) defines evaluation as an applied inquiry process for collecting and compiling evidence that highlights the effectiveness, efficiency and value of an intervention. According to Mark, Henry and Julnes (2000:3), the goal of evaluation is social betterment; evaluation can contribute to the reaching of this goal by assisting democratic institutions to better select, oversee, improve and understand the context of social programmes and policies. Mark *et al.*, (2000:19) add that “evaluation should be motivated by the goal of providing information that women and men as administrators; as legislators; and as citizens in a democracy can use to make better sense of the objectives, operations and effects of social policies and programmes”.

Conceptually, evaluation is also the systematic or critical assessment of the merit, worth or value of administration, the output and outcomes of government interventions which are intended to add value to the relevant beneficiaries (RSA 2008:6). Weiss (1972, cited in Schalock 1995:5) suggests that the purpose of evaluation is to measure the effects of an intervention against set objectives to improve the quality of decisions made in future interventions. In a similar vein, Wholey, Hatry and Newcomer (2010:xxxiv) consider evaluation to be a learning strategy to improve knowledge about the logic and outputs of an intervention. Govender and Reddy (2014:165) define evaluation as an assessment of the value of an intervention, in relation to its specific purpose to the relevant beneficiaries through the synergistic interactions and interrelations of the systems, environments and stakeholders to enhance the value of future interventions. Therefore, evaluation plays an important role in the improvement of services delivery.

THE MFOLOZI MUNICIPALITY

The area on which this article focuses is the Mfolozi municipality, which is one of the municipalities that fall under the uThungulu district municipality. The Mfolozi municipality has an estimated population of 122 889, of which 52% are women (IDP 2014/2015). The Mfolozi municipality is adjacent to the Richards Bay and Empangeni Complex. Its borders are the Indian Ocean to the east, the Mfolozi River to the north, the Mhlana Tribal Authority to the west, and the UMhlathuze municipality to the south. The Mfolozi municipality is home to the poorest of the poor, since about 52 190 of the people in the municipality have no source of income (IDP 2014/2015). The Mfolozi municipality has a very youthful population: 71 930 (58.4%) of the members of the population are between

the ages of 0 to 24. These demographics have implications in terms of the types of services that might be needed to cater for the population, especially the young. There are 15 wards in this municipality, and three Traditional Authorities (TA) areas. The 2011 Census (Census 2011) divided the Mfolozi municipality into seven areas. These areas and their populations are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Areas in the Mfolozi municipality

Place	Population
Kwambonambi Forest Reserve	222
KwaMbonambi	1 894
Mapelane Nature Reserve	54
Mbonambi	22 984
Mhlana	64 527
Sokhulu	12 632
Remainder of the municipality	4 623

Source: (Census 2011)

The main challenges for the Mfolozi municipality, according to the analysis in the 2014/15 IDP, relate to a lack of and poor infrastructure services regarding the provision of water, electricity and roads, socio-economic spatial and housing issues, and issues around social facilities and services. Most of the wards have gravel roads which are very old and in a bad condition (2014/15 IDP 2014:19). There is a very urgent need to assess households’ needs and to provide social amenities that will improve people’s quality of life. There is a need for integrated rural road maintenance and the upgrading of the entire existing road infrastructure throughout the municipal area.

The provision of potable water has been identified as a pressing need for various rural communities, which include the Mfolozi municipality (2014/15 IDP 2014:20). The various challenges in terms of water provision have been discussed in many articles on water supply (Hemson and Galvin 2006; Nnadozie 2011; and Mathew 2005). In this regard, Smet and Van Wijk (2002:1) argue that the main challenges in supplying water arise as a result of social structures, unsuccessful organisational attempts and inefficient administrative agencies. These authors also suggest that the problem can be solved through participatory programmes involving a series of integrated activities to establish and continue the functioning and use of water supply services.

Therefore, it is important for water service agencies and partners to work together with communities as the users, and to plan their activities on the basis of a mutual agreement. Among other things, a lack of effective M&E of public projects in local government is a major challenge facing government officials, including the officials of the Mfolozi municipality. Most local government projects and programmes, including those of the Mfolozi municipality, do not meet their intended objectives, and have little or no impact, because there is no effective and efficient follow-up from the beginning, during and after the implementation process.



METHODOLOGY

Brynard and Hanekom (2006:35) and Mouton (2011) point out that research methodology refers to how data is collected and processed in the framework of the research process. Mouton (2011) also mentions the importance of the tools and procedures used in a study. Yin (1994) argues that case studies need not involve visiting the organisation under review, but data can be collected from secondary sources. The current study followed a qualitative research design to explore, describe and interpret perceptions of key role-players involved in M&E system implementation. It used desktop analyses, gathering data from different documents such as the Mfolozi municipality's IDP and annual reports. The research was exploratory, because the main aim of the study was to examine and to gain a better understanding of the challenges that arise in the implementation of M&E particularly in the Mfolozi municipality. Furthermore, descriptive research was used to describe the challenges in implementing an M&E system.

Research design

According to Babbie (2007:12), a research design can be regarded as a plan according to which a researcher intends to conduct a study. Such a design focuses on the end product of the study and the types of results a researcher aims to achieve. For the purposes of uncovering M&E system implementation challenges, a case study design was adopted. Stake (cited in Denzin and Lincoln 2008:237) argues that a case study is appropriate when detailed information on a particular case in a specific context is sought, and the goal of the researcher is to describe and understand human complexities within that context. This implies that a rich understanding can only be acquired through a "constructivist" case study, which ultimately allows implementation challenges to be interpreted (Fox and Bayat 2007:69).

CHALLENGES IN MONITORING AND EVALUATION AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL (MFOLOZI MUNICIPALITY)

Local governments are constitutionally mandated to carry out projects to improve the welfare and well-being of people in their jurisdiction. However, several constraints hamper projects at a local government level. For any project in the local government to be considered successful, criteria such as time, efficiency, effectiveness and quality delivery should be satisfied. Lawal and Onohaebi (2010) argue that it is essential and beneficial for the relevant bodies to monitor projects, because doing so improves insight concerning project completion status.

The main challenge faced by the Mfolozi municipality is that the knowledge, skills and competence required for those aspiring and performing duties related to M&E of public projects is limited. Municipal officials fail to understand the importance of M&E at the local government level of the various projects. Therefore, they have failed to develop an institutional M&E system (including M&E plans, indicators and tools). This reveals that although much has been achieved in terms of providing services to the majority of South Africans, much still needs to be done in terms of training, workshops, dialogue on M&E and

how suitable systems can be implemented at local government level to enhance service delivery. The definition of an M&E system requires that such a system be established across provinces to attain effective and efficient service delivery.

The Mfolozi municipality needs to attract and retain highly skilled workers from an increasingly diverse and mobile labour market. It needs to ensure that it plans adequately to attract and retain a diverse and capable workforce for the benefit of the organisation. The municipality must ensure that the right people with the right skills are in the right place at the right time, and that they are able to perform their duties successfully to add value to the organisation, for example, by employing people with skills, knowledge and experience on monitoring and evaluating a project at local government level.

The Mfolozi municipality has thus far mostly focused on developing community halls, small playgrounds and crèches. As a result, other kinds of social facilities and basic needs have been excluded from plans, for example, clinics, ICT centres, the provision of clean water, and roads. A lack of proper prioritisation has been identified as another significant factor which can account for ineffective service delivery or project failure for this municipality. Projects are abandoned when revenue shortfalls occur, or the sources of funding dry up. They are also abandoned when a new management decides to embark on new projects rather than complete ongoing ones. Therefore, structures that have been built are poorly maintained, due to lack of planning, reprioritising and budgetary constraints.

The Mfolozi municipality is moving from a housing-only approach to a more holistic development of human settlements, which includes the provision of social and economic infrastructure. The proposed new human settlements plan is to construct a multipurpose cluster concept which will incorporate primary municipal facilities such as parks, playgrounds, community halls and informal trading facilities. In order for this approach to be successful, it needs to be monitored and evaluated so that basically the goals set for it can be achieved, come in on-schedule (meet the time criterion), come in on-budget and satisfy the needs of the people. A funding mechanism has been introduced to fund the development of the primary social/community facilities, which will focus on informal settlement upgrading projects, completed housing projects that still lack social facilities and new housing projects.

Inadequate finance is a perennial challenge facing project management in local governments, including the Mfolozi municipality. Many projects are abandoned in local government due to inadequate funds. The flow of funds cannot be fully guaranteed, especially because municipalities have to face a fluctuation in world oil prices, inflation, mismanagement, corruption, and a failure to explore internal sources of revenue and to use scarce resources. Mismanagement of funds and corruption hinder successful M&E and hinder the completion of projects at local government level, which in turn leads to dissatisfaction among citizens and sometimes to violent service delivery protests.

A municipality should involve the local community in the planning, initiation, formulation and execution of projects to ensure the success of projects. Local communities should be carried along at every stage of a project. They should be consulted first so that the municipality can deliver services according to the people's preferences and needs. The people's understanding of the environment and support for a project create a moral basis for its success. Project planning should take a bottom-up approach to bring the people directly into the process of running projects that will improve their quality of life. Community



participation introduces people to their government – when they get to know their government better, they are more interested in participating in the affairs of the government.

From the above discussion it is clear that one of the main obstacles to successful M&E of projects at the Mfolozi municipality is a lack of expertise. Clearly, knowledge is power: the standard or level of success in the completion of a project depends to a large extent on the amount of accurate information available to local government project managers.

CONCLUSION

To adhere to its statutory and regulatory obligations, the local sphere of government in South Africa must develop a comprehensive M&E system. Such a system must enable officials in municipalities to measure the performance of the total municipality (input, management, output and outcomes) to identify weaknesses in this value-chain. M&E thus becomes a way of considering all projects undertaken by a municipality to ensure continuous M&E. This should be done in alignment with a municipality's IDPs and service delivery outcomes, as well as operational plans for implementing the budget. It requires looking at environmental constraints, asset and resource management, working conditions, and numerous other aspects which could have either a positive or a negative impact on institutional performance. The development of such a comprehensive system is, however, not without challenges, and municipalities should consider key elements which should be incorporated in their particular systems.

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