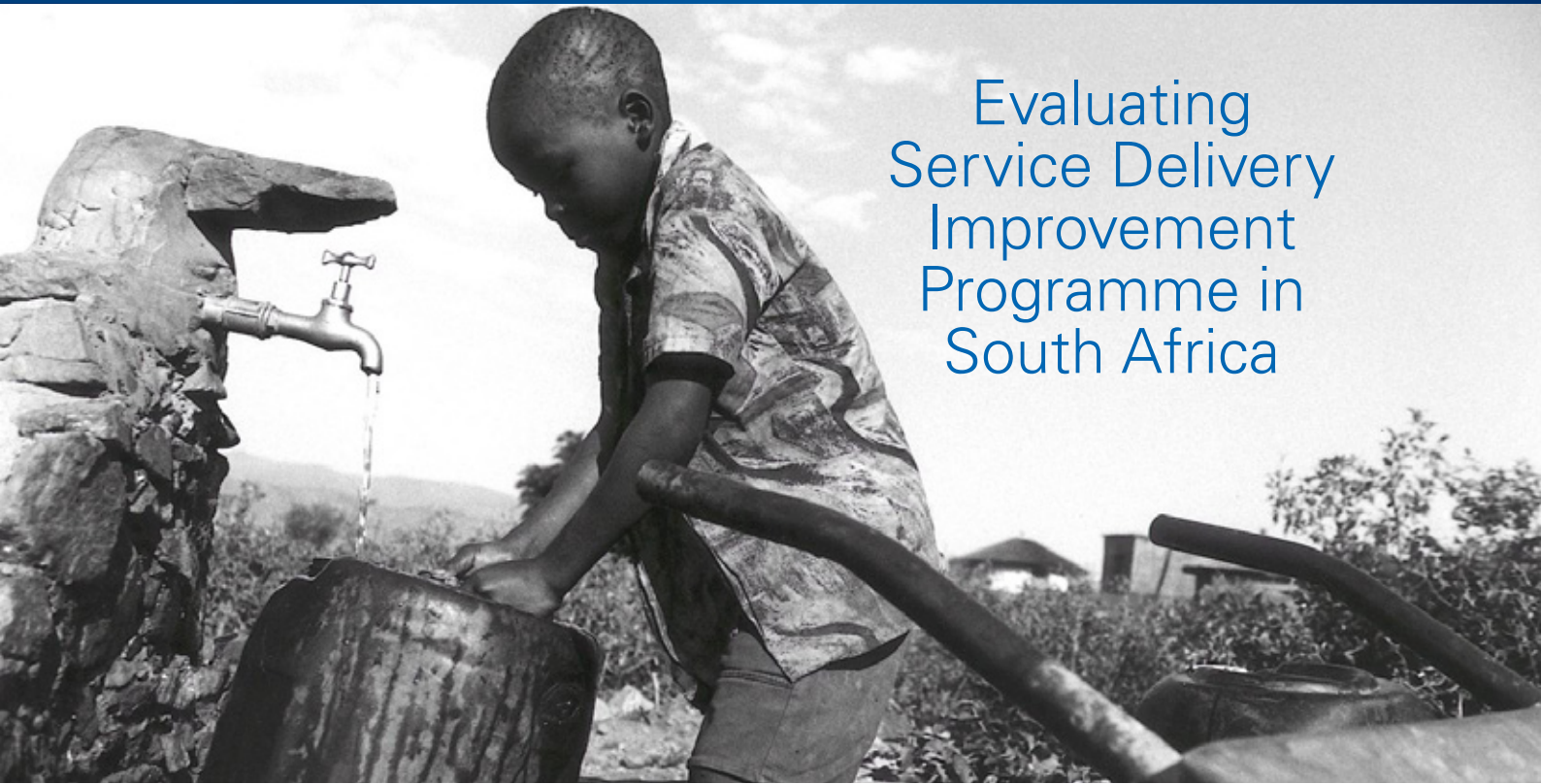


P O L I C Y B R I E F

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Evaluating Service Delivery Improvement Programme in South Africa

Executive summary

There is no doubt that nearly three decades since the first democratic election South Africa's democratic government has made significant progress in extending basic services to areas that were previously excluded. However, the unpredictable delivery and upkeep of these utilities greatly inconvenience and endanger the communities and therefore overshadows the accomplishments made. This is evidenced by the increasing number of service delivery protests across most municipalities in various provinces. As a result, there are growing calls for the government to improve service delivery as the public service delivery system is regarded as one of the most significant ways of reducing poverty and inequality. Service Delivery Improvement Plans (SDIPs) were developed to assist government departments to identify inefficiencies and challenges in delivering services and find solutions to these challenges. A study by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) from January 2019 to March 2020, evaluated Service Delivery Improvement Plans (SDIPs) that were implemented between 2012–2015 and 2015–2018. The study evaluated four focal areas of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of SDIPs. There is consensus that Public Service Regulations (PSR) (as amended in 2016), White Paper on Service Delivery (i.e. Batho Pele), and SDIPs are clear and coherent, however, at a practical level, they are not very clear. Secondly, SDIPs are not aligned with other important government frameworks such as Strategic Plans (SP) and Annual Performance Plans (APPs).

Factors hindering the effective implementation of the SDIPs include a silo approach, inadequate human resources, and ineffective supply chain processes. Based on the findings, we recommend that SDIP priorities should be based on the needs of the beneficiaries, and monitored on an annual basis to make sure that they are still aligned with the needs of beneficiaries. An integrated approach between government, stakeholders, and beneficiaries is encouraged for SDIPs to succeed.

Introduction

According to section 152 of the South African Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, municipalities are obliged to i) provide democratic and accountable government to local municipalities, ii) ensure the provision of service to communities in a sustainable manner, iii) promote social and economic development, iv) promote a safe and healthy environment and v) encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matter of local government. Thus, South African municipalities are constitutionally obliged to provide basic services such as water, sanitation, housing and refuse removals municipal roads, stormwater, primary health care, childcare facilities, local tourism, municipal planning, and municipal by-laws (Moosa and Gordhan, 2016). Also included in the responsibilities of the municipalities is the construction, maintenance, and development of the infrastructure used to provide basic services.

Research evidence shows that since 1994, the democratic government extended basic services to previously marginalized areas (Nkomo, 2017). However, municipalities in South Africa have in recent years come under heavy criticism for poor service delivery (Kalonda and Govender, 2021). This is demonstrated by the high number of service delivery protests in South Africa which has been dubbed the protest capital of the world (Ndinga-Kanga, Van der Merwe and Hartford, 2020). Numerous studies have been conducted in South Africa to better understand the factors that contribute to the local government's poor service performance. Factors contributing to poor service delivery include financial irregularities, corruption, and maladministration (Managa, 2012). Besides the above-mentioned factors, poor service delivery in South Africa skills shortages, and unwillingness to enforce relevant rules (Koelble and LiPuma, 2010).

As part of its effort towards improving service delivery, the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) established Service Delivery Improvement Plans (SDIPs) to assist state departments in their commitment to identifying challenges and inefficiencies in service delivery and then committing to finding solutions. An SDIP has two facets: the first focuses on enhancing the quality of the service the departments' offer, such as health care, while the second is concerned with enhancing how the departments deliver the services. Thus, the government should provide services in a caring, friendly, and compassionate manner. Since 1999, all national and provincial government departments have been mandated by the Public Service Regulations to create and implement Service Delivery Improvement Plans (SDIPs) (DPSA, 2013). SDIPs provide a framework for service delivery for continuous improvement in service delivery. SDIPs are expected to be in line with the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) (2019-2021), which is in line with the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) (2019-2021). The policy brief is based on evidence from a study on evaluating Service Delivery Improvement Plans (SDIPs) implemented between 2012-2015 and 2015-2018 conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (2019-2020).

Methodology

The study used mixed methods which included qualitative, quantitative and cross-referencing (triangulation) to evaluate the SDIPs. The evaluation of SDIPs included developing a Theory of Change (ToC) model, reviewing international SDIPs, reviewing SDIPs from different departments for the 2012-2015 and 2015-2018 periods.

Primary data was collected using structured interviews and a consultative FGD with public servants.

Findings from the study

The quality and relevance of SDIPs were evaluated using four key thematic areas of relevance and appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. Findings reveal that the majority of public servants from the various departments were aware of the SDIP and what they intend to do.

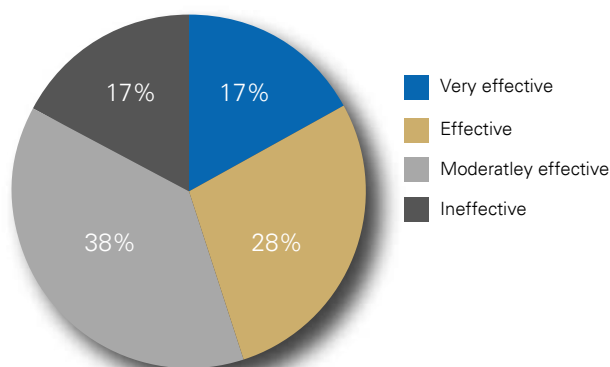
Relevance and appropriateness of SDIPs

The Service Delivery Improvement Programmes (SDIPs) was developed with the intention to ensure that the government at all levels provide adequate services to citizens, however, public servants stated that the SDIP approach is not relevant, and it is inappropriate to improve service delivery. Therefore, a number of issues which make SDIPs irrelevant and inappropriate were highlighted in the discussions. Participants indicated that the SDIPs approach was developed more as a desktop exercise for improving service delivery for citizens, thus there was a general consensus that for SDIPs to be relevant, they need to be developed and implemented at a local level since they serve communities directly. Another issue was capacity building – from the findings, it seemed only a few people within departments were trained on SDIP, thus there was a lack of understanding of SDIPs within departments, especially for those departments that never received training from the DPSA on how to develop SDIPs.

Effectiveness

Findings from the study show that (83%) and (78%) of respondents for the 2012/2015 and 2015/2018 SDIP cycles respectively indicated that they got support from the DPSA to develop their SDIPs. The support included drafting SDIP plans and reviewing their plans. Eighty-one per cent (81%) of participants thought that SDIPs were implemented according to SDIPs guidelines, but only (24%) thought that SDIPs were implemented consistently across national and provincial departments. There were variations in the effectiveness of SDIP as portrayed in Figure 1 below. A high proportion (38%) of respondents indicated that the implementation of SDIP was moderately effective, (28%) indicated that the implementation was effective, (17%) said they were very effective while another (17%) thought the SDIP was ineffective. On the other hand, views from participants indicated that departments did not always effectively implement SDIPs, stating that SDIPs were merely developed for compliance. Participants also indicated that DPSA did not provide feedback on plans and reports submitted to them which does not offer departments the platform to engage with DPSA on what worked or did not work.

Figure 1: effectiveness of SDIP implementation



Several internal and external factors were mentioned that influence the implementation of SDIPs. These included budget, Human Resources, training, capacity, and other factors.

Efficiency

Key findings from the study showed that departments use Operational Management Framework (OMF) to promote efficiency in developing, implementing, and reporting SDIPs. However, DPSA introduced the OMF without guiding departments on how to implement it, and which division should be responsible for it. Consequently, departments indicated that there was no clear indication where OMF belonged, leaving departments to allocate SDIPs to any division or to whoever was available to handle SDIPs.

Participants indicated there was a duplication of processes which affected efficiency in terms of planning, monitoring, and reporting on SDIPs. They felt that there was no coordination between the DPSA and DPME thus departments end up preparing and submitting two separate reports which waste departmental resources.

Sustainability

The key finding was that the current SDIP approach is not sustainable because there is a lack of clarity on the functions of SDIP. Participants indicated that for SDIPs to be sustainable need be an integral part of every planned programme within departments. In addition, participants felt that there was no evidence that SDIPs were leading to service delivery.

Recommendations

This policy brief recommends the following:

- Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) and collaboration with local government need to improve and prioritise collaborations between government departments, civil society and the private sector on issues of service delivery.
- SDIPs should be strictly tied to government's strategic plan and annual performance plan
- Government need to centralise SDIP and mobilise resources needed for the implementation thereof.
- Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) need to enhance capacity development for the personnel responsible for service delivery.

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