

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT: Local governments in South Africa have experienced leadership challenges in the democratic South Africa. Poor leadership ethics have badly contributed in the leadership challenges in the South African local government system. The objective of the study was to identify the factors that contribute in the poor leadership ethics in local government and the consequences of bad behavior by local government leadership and employees. Mixed research methodology was applied in the study. Primary data was collected through self-administered questionnaires that were personally administered by the researchers to 10 portfolio managers, 333 Employees and interviewed 9 executive managers. The study found that the poor systems to fight against corruption and unethical activities compromise public service delivery and paint all public sector officials as corrupt people. The idea of getting into government institutions for the purposes of self-benefit is dominant amongst many people who are in government institutions.

KEYWORDS: Leadership challenges, Local government, Ethics, Corruption, Democracy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

South African local government has many challenges. The biggest challenge affecting public service delivery is the lack of effective leadership ethics. According to Modumo (2015: 154), the government of South Africa has tried to lay more emphasis on local government economic development, despite the challenges. The progress made by democratic government is seldom noticed because of the many challenges facing local governments in South Africa. According to Sebola (2015: 9), the dominant challenge across local governments in South Africa is mal-administration and corruption. Local governments in South Africa are struggling to change the dilemma that was created by the apartheid government because of the local government systems. Dilemmas such as generating government wealth to benefit the many, mainly designed to benefit whites only, geographical spread of the population; and inferior public services to black people are common.

The biggest dilemma created by the apartheid government in agreement with the freedom fighters during the transition from apartheid to the democratic government was the sunset clause. The sunset clause consists of negotiations and the agreement between the apartheid government and the freedom fighters. The Apartheid government surrendered political power to black people but did not surrender economic power, which then contributed to unethical leadership in the current democratic government. The democratic government made many sacrifices in terms of public services and those who assume power did not have enough resources to provide public services. These dilemmas badly affect public service delivery at all government levels, but the local government level is mainly affected (Takhar, 2017: 301).

Wegner (2018: 51) is of the view that the dominant party system in South Africa does not assist the poor people and do not address the issues of holding unethical leaders accountable. Leaders are not accountable to people because the general population does not participate in the political electoral processes. The community dilutes democracy in terms of the processes of electing preferred leaders. The ideal approach to elect leaders will be allowing everyone to participate in electing the leaders of political parties. The system of electing representatives at the local government level does not give power to the citizens to recall those who were misbehaving or failing to advance the interests of the people (De Kadt and Larreguy, 2018: 383). Community members would always be compelled or forced to be represented by a person who is no longer needed by the community until his or term is finished. Koma (2010: 118) argued that pragmatism related to the application of a segregated structure of local

government must be deliberated in line with global and central best practices and the unique background within which South African municipalities were situated. Municipalities in South Africa have different types of communities and the challenges are informed by the needs of the people and the attempt by the government to address those needs. Lack of proper consultations by the municipalities makes it difficult for municipalities to accept challenges faced by the citizenry.

Poverty and high rates of unemployment, especially in graduates, has remained the bigger challenge in communities. Nepotism, money laundering, tampering with the tendering system in local government institutions, have frustrated more people in the communities and resulted in public protests. Muller, Davids and Roberts (2016: 4) have argued that South Africa faced many inequalities because of its colonial and unjust past. The oppression of black people by the apartheid government affected all black South Africans. The geographical segregation of people based on their race still affects the country. The infrastructure that was developed to service black people and white people were not the same. The democratic government has opened the doors for those who were previously oppressed by the apartheid government. The modern and better infrastructure developed during the apartheid regime was not developed to cater to many people. The most practical example is the capacity of ESKOM, which is now facing challenges to supply electricity to all citizens of South Africa because it was mainly developed to supply power to whites only.

The Converstion (2018: 2) reported that South Africa's 257 municipalities are in a catastrophic financial position. At the center of the challenges is unethical leadership. The South African Auditor General discovered that only 33 (13%) municipalities fully complied with the expected legalities in the financial year 2017/2018. The report further indicated that 31% of the municipalities in the country were not financially feasible (BUSINESSSTECH, 2018b: 02). Most municipalities that obtained a qualified audit report did not apply relevant knowledge in the management of finances. Political interference and political fights within the ruling party in the form of different groupings or factions affected the daily operations of municipalities. Political deployments to key positions in the municipalities played a major role in their failure. The lack of responsibility and accountability by those found to be contravening the policies of the municipalities have found to be another factor to obtaining the qualified audit. The Auditor General's report showed that the lack of leadership ethics and moral behavior in local governments is still dominant in South African municipalities (Brand, 2018: 2).

Many towns in South Africa were intended for a few people, particularly whites, but due to the democratic dispensation and the increase of the population, the government extended access to sanitation and water to more people. Therefore, the infrastructure is not coping. The Harry Gwala District Municipality is one of the municipalities that do not have a high number of people who received basic services such as water, electricity, and proper sanitation. Leaders in many municipalities in South Africa shifted the blame to the sins of the apartheid. A lack of leadership ethics in local government leadership is mostly found in municipalities that have illiterate communities. Local government leaders take advantage of the people and abuse their power. For example, in eThekweni Municipality, the mayor paid R208 million to companies for services that were not rendered (Ntuli, 2019: 2).

Local government is a politically contested terrain by different political parties. The political party that wins power to govern the local government often identified the enemies within. Political fighting and factions within the local government have crippled public service delivery. Daniel (2018: 2) states that the challenges of political fights have been experienced in many municipalities in the country, such as the City of Cape Town where the political fights led to the removal of the city mayor. Similarly, the Richmond Municipality has experienced political fights where unknown people assassinated a city manager. Every time there is a political fight in a municipality, public servants and the daily operations of the municipality were affected and service delivery compromised (Reddy, 2016: 2).

South Africa has good policies, but the process of implementing such policies is questionable and some policies are not implemented at all. The Municipal Systems Act (MSA) 32 of 2000 clearly stipulates the roles and responsibilities of councilors and the city manager. There is a clear contradiction between the MSA and the policies of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). The process of electing ward councilors facilitated by the IEC does not address the requirements of the MSA. The MSA gives effect to the formation of municipalities in line with the requirements relating to classifications and types of municipality in South Africa. These include the determination of the criteria for deciding about the category of municipality to be established in a specific area and the description of the types of municipality that may be established in each category. Others include the determination of relevant division of functions and authorities between different categories of municipality, provision, and constitution of the internal systems and political structures. In addition, political and government office-bearers of municipalities should emphasize on the appropriate electoral systems. The elected people to govern municipalities were elected by community members who also do not understand the MSA and its

requirements. The elected council members serve as the governing body for the municipalities, which has powers to hold public officials accountable and to appoint officials. The competency and ethics of those who contest political power are not taken into consideration. It is therefore difficult to have completely clean and ethical municipalities because of the system that is followed in electing the leadership (Govender and Reddy, 2015: 15).

II. CONSEQUENCES OF UNETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

A lack of ethics in local government leads people to behave in a manner that is not acceptable, affecting the public service delivery. Leadership has to be accountable at all times, whether the leadership was aware of the unethical conduct or not (Berman, Bowman, West and Van Wart, 2016: 21). Moral individuals have a reputation for being fair and ethical. Moral persons are seen as regularly moral in both their personal and professional lives. The moral manager dimension refers to how the leader uses the tools of the position of leadership to promote ethical conduct at work to improve public service delivery. Ethical managers see themselves as role models in the workplace, as managers make ethics noticeable by modelling ethical conduct to their employees.

Ethical managers set and transfer ethical standards and use rewards and punishments to ensure that those standards are charted. In sum, leaders who are moral and ethical managers "walk the talk" and "talk the walk," Msunduzi local government is highly exposed to unethical conduct like any other local municipalities. It is therefore, incumbent upon the ethics of leaders to safeguard municipal resources and strengthen the relationship between municipal employees and the public, which will then directly improve public service delivery (Brown and Mitchell, 2010: 584).

Local government is associated with the stigma of leadership who receives bribes, is involved in employing relatives, and is highly involved in corruption. Most popular unethical activities in local government are false promises to the people. The executive management controls Service delivery in local government. The executive management might not be involved, directly, in service delivery, but through guidance and leadership influence the executive management, hence the service delivery will be effective or ineffective. Cherry (2012: 2) states that transactional theories, also known as management theories, focus on the role of supervision, organization and group performance and the exchanges that take place between leaders and followers. These theories base leadership on a system of rewards and punishments.

When ethical leaders demonstrate and promote ethical conduct, they risk being perceived as too strict in their enactment of moral rules and principles. Ethical leaders sometimes communicate such a strong ethical principle that it becomes a threat to employees' own moral values (Babalola, Stouten, Camps and Euwema, 2017: 2). Leaders who promote ethical behaviors to subordinates and hold a strong and absolute ethical mentality are likely to appear intolerant, thereby limiting their effectiveness as a leader. The extent to which workers are able to air their view about anything in the workplace and have control over the way things are done in the workplace plays a crucial role in determining their flexible behavior. When a leader holds strong ethical beliefs, that leader portrays a strong ethical image to employees about how things should be done. Employees working for a leader with strong ethical beliefs might actually feel that they have little say in or control over the way things go at work, which limits the effectiveness of ethical leaders with regard to employees' flexible behavior (Van Dooren, Bouckaert and Halligan, 2015: 4).

The suspension of unethical leaders in South African municipalities is not a solution because no matter how many leaders or employees are suspended; unethical cases are still reported in many municipalities in South Africa. Suspending unethical leaders with full payment is not setting an example of how the government is dealing with unethical leaders. According to Bole (2014: 01), the suspension of the Ngaka Modiri Molema Municipal Manager in November 2014 pending a disciplinary hearing of eight charges is a mechanism to combat unethical conduct.

The municipal manager was suspended for a long period and during the suspension, an administrator was appointed as the Accounting officer. The suspension of corrupt or unethical leaders in government institutions and local government in particular is not an effective solution to end unethical behavior. In the interim, the administrator is appointed while the municipal managers are suspended and in the case of other positions, an acting person must be appointed while the permanent official is suspended. The administrators are paid while the suspended officials are also paid, which is over expenditure because the municipality does not budget for the administrators. Another case reported by Tandwa (2019: 01) is the deputy manager in the Midvaal Municipality who was placed under special leave after a whistleblower reported irregular appointments. The unethical behavior of the suspended municipal manager includes the appointment of people who did not qualify for the jobs they were employed for. The suspension of the manager does not reverse the actions he took and the

municipality will suffer, even if he is dismissed. Strict measures are needed in local government institutions whereby all wrong actions made by any official must be reversed and those implicated must be brought to book.

Another similar unethical incident was reported in the Public Eye (2018: 01) about Msunduzi Municipality. Msunduzi Municipality is facing many challenges, mainly created by leaders. In many cases, the senior government employees that are suspended and suspected of unethical behavior are politically connected and their cases normally do not have effective consequences. Malpractice, maladministration, unethical conduct, and corrupt activities are the main reasons that many local government employees and political leaders are suspended. The courts and political party structures or any government structures cannot enforce ethical behavior. Effective realization of ethical behavior is possible if the selection of leaders follows the acceptable ethical principles and process in the society. Unethical behavior and misconduct are societal problems and in order to display good government employees, attention must be paid to citizens. Unethical behavior start in communities, this means that communities that is involved in corruption with government officials makes it difficult to end corruption. An ethical society will also produce ethical leaders and those elected and appointed to lead government structures must be reminded more often about the importance of ethical conduct and codes of conduct.

SABC NEWS ONLINE (2018: 01) reported unethical activities that took place in Elias Motsoaledi Municipality. Unethical activities by the municipal manager and the chief financial officer (CFO) in relation to investment led to their precautionary suspension. The municipal manager and the CFO of the municipality invested millions of rands in the Venda Building Society Mutual Bank, known as VBS. The investment was highly criticized by the council but both the municipal manager and the CFO continued with the investment, despite the challenges indicated by the council. The council was not happy with the investment because the team that was delegated to analyze a need for the investment reported that the municipality was not ready for the investment. A similar case was reported by Stander (2017: 01) where senior municipal officials in Bitou local municipality were suspended pending investigation. Maladministration, misconduct, and unethical behavior by senior municipal officials led to the forensic investigation, which resulted in senior officials being suspended.

The municipal manager and head of corporate services were precautionary suspended for misconduct and unethical behavior. The misconduct mentioned by the council includes reckless use of municipal funds, interference with municipal employees' appointments and tender processes. McGluwa (2019: 02) states that the suspension of the municipal manager of Mamusa Local Municipality with the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) is just an example of unethical behavior in the South African government. Unethical activities in South Africa are affecting public service delivery and the community loses trust in public servants. Political interference in government administration affects public service delivery. Government officials who are in senior positions and report directly to politicians are in many cases given instructions that are against government policy. Politicians who give unethical instructions to government employees are not held accountable because government officials are responsible and sign documents. Unethical activities in most cases include financial mismanagement.

III. PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY PROTESTS AS A RESULT OF UNETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Local government is in a mess due to the unethical behavior of local leadership, which focuses on political party battles and failure to hold those responsible for corruption accountable. Communities in many parts of South Africa decided to resolve public service delivery matters through public protests. Local government leadership hardly prioritises issues related to public service delivery and those who are found guilty by the law authorities are not totally rejected by the ruling party but redeployed to other strategic positions (Figure 4.1) (Merten, 2018: 1).

After 25 years of democracy, people still live in unpleasant conditions and do not enjoy any fruits of democracy. Political leaders and government employees who lack the willingness to end unethical behavior flood the South African government. The lack of effective political leadership, ineffective consequences for wrongdoing, and inadequate internal controls, especially in procurement, do motivate communities to breach the law in the process of their demand for accountability.

According to South African History Online (2014: 01), public protests before 1994 were about inequalities and the fight against apartheid in South Africa. Public protests in the democratic government in South Africa are about public service delivery. South Africa has had six democratic elections but until today, many communities still live under unsatisfactory conditions. Most communities in South Africa do not have access to basic services such as water and electricity. People are promised basic services every time there is a government election, local or provincial and national elections. Empty promises by politicians and poor public service delivery lead to public protests. The abuse of public resources and misuse of public funds is what frustrates the public the most.

Unethical activities committed by municipal officials are reported in newspapers daily, showing that the resources to provide public services are available, but that political will is lacking.

Savides (2019: 01) reported that in 2018 South Africa experienced many public service delivery protests in various municipalities. The year 2018 alone recorded 237 public service delivery protests against municipalities in the country. The previous highest record of public service delivery protests was in 2014 with 191 public service delivery protests. The change of political leaders had an impact on the reduction of public protests after 2014. However, in 2018 the challenges and problems caused an increase in public protests. The rise of unemployment and corruption in government institutions is the contributing factors to many public protests. The following data (Figure 4.2) shows that 2018 had more public service delivery protests since 2005.

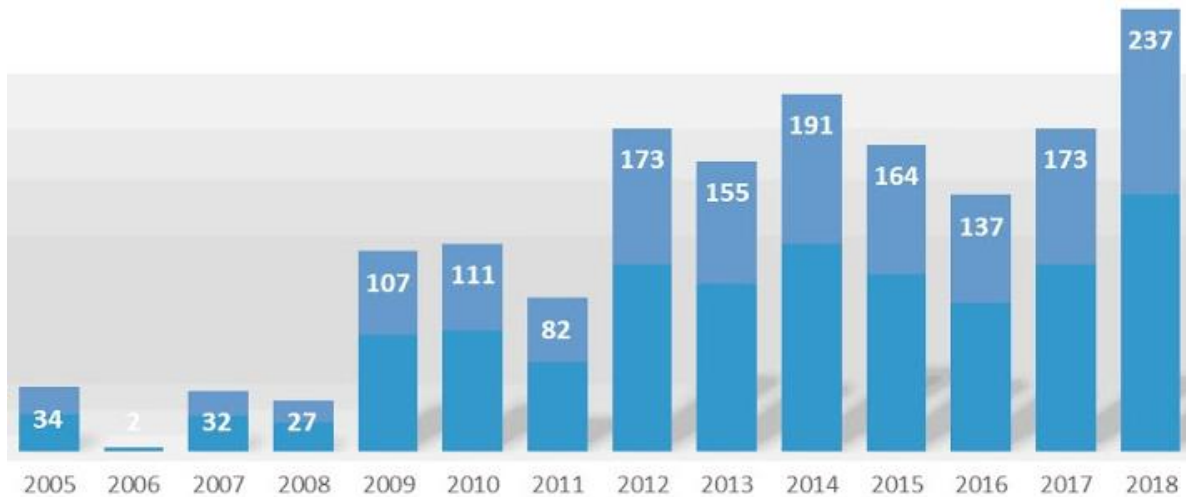


Figure 1: Number of public service delivery protests between 2005 and 2018

Source: Municipal IQ (2019)

Another critical strike reported by Mitchley (2019: 01) took place in the city of Tshwane by municipal workers and members of the community. Poor leadership ethics unfolded when senior municipal officials authorized an 18 percent increase in the bonuses of senior municipal employees. The increase in bonuses caused a disruption in the municipality and municipal leaders failed to explain how the money would be generated to pay the bonuses. Senior managers in the municipality did not have enough money to pay the money requested by the unions and the negotiations ended up in a deadlock. Negotiations between the municipal management and unions were based on the increase in bonuses of senior managers, which indicated that the municipality had money to pay the employees.

Poor leadership ethics in the municipality was identified by a task team delegated to investigate the disruptions in the municipality. In a similar incident, poor leadership ethics have disrupted public services in Bojanala Platinum District Municipality in North West. MONTSHO (2019: 01) explains that the public service delivery protests, merged with the employees’ strike in the municipality, led to the closure of all roads leading to big towns in North West. The strike by municipal employees was about a salary increase and the public protests were in response to the non-delivery of public services. The municipality was bankrupt and did not have enough money to pay the salaries of employees and to provide public services. An amount of R134 million was erroneously transferred to the municipality and no one was accountable for the use of this amount of money. The provincial government identified poor leadership ethics and decided to place the municipality under provincial administration.

Singh (2019: 02) reported that the damage to the infrastructure during the strike in eThekweni municipality cost the municipality R3.5 million. Poor leadership ethics in eThekweni is also the main cause of public protests and the striking of municipal employees. Public protests and the municipal employees’ strike did not only have negative impacts on infrastructure development, but also on the entire economy of eThekweni. Appointing ethical leaders with expected skills is necessary for this municipality to ensure a stable situation and good decisions have being made. Problems in local government are not only for a certain province as all provinces are affected. Nkosi (2019: 02) argues that Barberton is historically known for mining contributions in the Mpumalanga province and the municipality has contributed much into job creation and the tourist destination.

Public protests and employee strikes in this municipality affected the way in which people view the municipality. Public protests affected the economy of the municipality and the relationship between senior and junior employees. Those who had grievances about the leadership of this municipality mainly highlighted poor leadership ethics in the municipality. Senior managers in the municipality paid overtime to themselves with no record that they performed the work.

IV. PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYEES REGARDING LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government employees perceive local government leaders as an important ingredient to the success or failure of public service delivery. Local government leadership must guide local government employee performance. Effective local government results in effective service delivery in local government (Collins and Jackson, 2015: 386). Local government employees believe that the lack of proper service delivery and any destruction in local government is a sign of poor and unethical leadership. May, Wesche, Heinitz and Kerschreiter (2015: 1) indicate that destructive leadership is mostly leader-centric, often reducing followers to passive subordinates.

Constructive leadership is defined by Lee and Jensen (2014: 420) as a type of leadership that focuses leaders and followers on achieving “high standards of ethical and moral conduct” through idealized influence. Constructive leadership does not always mean good leadership because constructive leadership has to be associated with an adequate capacity to deliver expected public services. Employees in local government perceive constructive leadership as the relevant type of leadership. Skogstad, Aasland, Nielsen, Hetland, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2015: 221) argued that there is an assumption by employees that productive and vicious forms of leadership constitute opposite poles from good-to-bad, suggesting that good leadership rejects bad leadership and vice versa. However, a mixture of supportive as well as undermining behaviors frequently characterizes social interactions.

According to February (2018: 1), weak oversight; overly complex legislation which municipalities are unable to get to grips with; corruption; skills deficits and tensions between the political and administrative interface bedevil local governments’ efficacy. Leadership styles and destructive leadership styles affect the performance of municipalities.

Msunduzi Municipality is facing many challenges, such as poor management skills of the leadership, characterized by poor leadership ethics, and affects service delivery. The suspension of Msunduzi Municipal employees with full pay and appointing other officials without following due processes is regarded as an unethical decision because public funds were abused. Leaders who use emotions and feelings when making decisions are at risk of making decisions that can be challenged and reversed by a court of law as the suspended employees were ordered to report to work by the court of law at Msunduzi Municipality. It is therefore important that the municipal leadership is more equipped with knowledge on dealing with staff issues and the ethical conduct of staff without being destructive, using rationality and following all processes (Magubane, 2018b: 1). The study investigated the perceptions of employees regarding the leadership of Msunduzi Municipality and the impact of this leadership on public service delivery.

V. ROLE OF LEADERSHIP ETHICS IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ECONOMY

Local government leadership safeguards the economy of the local government. Unemployment and the high number of citizens who are not economically active in local governments affect the local government economy. Unethical behavior shown by government officials has serious consequences. An example is the arrests made in the case regarding the fabricated quotations and fronting enterprises to defraud millions of Rands that were diverted to one enterprise. The provincial government leadership of Limpopo allowed government officials to abuse government resources and sell tenders to their friends.

This development justifies the assertion that the state is being transformed into one big tender machine for raiding public funds in order to develop a few at the cost of service delivery to the majority. Apart from the arrests, the illegal wealth and property of those concerned must be seized to recover the money stolen from the government. The prosecution and imposition of heavy sentences for persons found guilty will serve as a warning to this plague. In the past, too many people ran away from justice by tabling their resignation instead of facing the penalties of their actions. However, those persons implicated are still innocent until proven otherwise by a court of law. As a result, there is no way of determining what the government has done in connection with fraud, corruption and mismanagement uncovered by the probe (IOL, 2018: 2).

A lack of leadership ethics in the South African government has been identified as the biggest challenge facing government leadership. Gillano (2016: 1) reported that fraud, totaling R19 million in the KwaZulu-Natal Social Development department's Empangeni office shows that unethical leaders abuse public sector institutions. The head of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Social Development decided to place 35 employees on forced leave of 60 days pending the investigation outcome. At the time of the report, 1 376 grants were administered for foster care children who did not exist. The internal investigations discovered that there were also foster care grants for children whose parents were alive and well and there were grants for people who did not exist. However, all court instructions for the grants were attained from one court, the Ngwelezane Magistrate's court. This report indicates that the South African government does not have ethical leaders.

The mother of all corruption activities in South Africa is the tendering system. Political parties, the ruling party in the main, will not introduce a new system because leaders, friends, and struggle veterans are direct beneficiaries of the tendering system. SAFLII (2016: 5) indicated that the judgment in the deceitful awarding of an R864 million tender to Western Aqueduct in the Pietermaritzburg High Court found eThekweni municipality guilty of gross negligence, sheer inability or a lack of capability. Having found that the officials were stubborn and that they acted in bad faith, they could not rule out unethical behavior. This judgment was a victory for the fight against corruption and unethical behavior in government. The case makes it clear that the granting of this tender was clearly prejudiced and diluted a number of procurement processes. Rather than waste ratepayers money on appealing the findings of the High Court, the eThekweni Metro should be scrutinizing why and how this happened and should be looking at ways to recover the legal costs of this case from the culprits. Instead, the municipality is trying to protect corrupt and unethical leaders.

The suitable action in this condition would have been to suspend all those officials identified in this judgment, awaiting a full investigation. The action of the eThekweni Metro to appeal the judgment generated the impression that eThekweni is more worried about shielding their officials instead of questioning the unethical and ineffectual conduct that led to the irregular awarding of a tender value of at hundreds of millions, apparently for individual gain. This shows that the lack of ethics in government leadership is pervasive and there is a strong need for a new type of leadership.

Leadership does not only have a responsibility to provide direction for public service delivery, but leaders must also attract investors to bring investments and generate employment opportunities for the people Msunduzi Municipality is not an exception. Government alone cannot generate employment opportunities for all people, but the private sector must also play a significant role to eradicate poverty. McDonald (2017: 01) states that investors are attracted to cities that create opportunities for them to start a business and a potential profit must also be identified. Private companies are mainly interested in making a profit; and employed people in the process of doing business and generating profit. Investors calculate the amount of profit they will make if given an opportunity to bring business into the country. Unethical activities in many South African municipalities and senior levels of government are primarily caused by the relationship between government officials (either leaders or public servants) and business stakeholders. Business associates pay a certain amount of money to secure their business interests; hence, the interests of the people are sometimes suppressed.

VI. CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO THE ETHICAL LEADERSHIP PROBLEM IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local political leadership interference affects the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery. The lack of effective ethics in local government leadership and employees also affects public service delivery. The inequality in local communities determines the type of public services necessary for the community. Inequalities have to be addressed through projects facilitated by the government in consideration of the needs of the people (Ali, Saleem, Bashir, Riaz and Sami, 2017: 254).

Poor leadership ethics in local government results in poor service delivery. Metropolitan municipalities have more resources compared to the district and local municipalities. Local municipalities are more exposed to corruption and experience poor service delivery due to the financial interventions made by provincial and national government to close the gap between the poor and the rich. However, leaders who are entrusted with the responsibility to lead and transform communities are mainly unethical and abuse public funds (Reddy, 2016: 1).

The classification of local government in South Africa aims at addressing the developmental predicaments created by former Apartheid rule. South Africa is an inter-governmental state, with some central elements of self-governance in municipalities and provincial government. For example, municipalities and provinces have their own limited autonomy as per the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). The Constitution

functions as the supreme law of the Republic and any other legislation, policies or conduct that is not consistent with it becomes unacceptable and invalid (Madumo, 2015: 155).

Local government in South Africa is overwhelmed with a range of encounters as well as a failure to facilitate and improve development in the communities under which the municipalities serve. Municipalities in South Africa play a vital role in driving the agenda of development of the national government and strengthening the democratic culture within municipalities. The core existence of the local sphere of government is to ensure the easy delivery of services and to further encourage the general well-being of the people living within the jurisdiction of a particular state (Warner and Sullivan, 2017: 8). Public service delivery at the local government level requires ethical leaders. Hence, the criteria to appoint public officials must have a specific ethical requirement. Msunduzi Municipality is a local government with a population that expects service delivery. Effective service delivery requires leaders who embrace good ethics.

The lack of leadership ethics in the South African government's public servants comes with many challenges, badly affecting the public service delivery. Basopu (2016: 1) argued that South Africa has been experiencing many challenges such as corruption, fraud and misappropriation of funds in the democratic dispensation. Municipalities are viewed as the most affected institutions, with the Eastern Cape Province identified as culprit number one for engaging in corrupt activities. Mainly municipal officials, councilors, and members of the public are involved in corrupt practices, in municipalities. Corruption in municipalities will not end if there are still leaders who are directly interfering with operational matters of different components of municipalities. For example, the human resource matters such as employing people in municipalities must be dealt with by municipal employees in the human resource section.

Corruption in South Africa reverses the gains of the democratic government. Misappropriation of public resources and corruption absorbed the nation as a whole into a greater challenge, instead of focusing on service delivery issues. There are circumstances within municipalities where the majority of senior officials who may be in possession of valuable information are always under suspension for wrongdoings. The majority of Municipalities in the Eastern Cape Province regularly obtain disclaimers or adverse reports from the Office of the Auditor-General (AG). Numerous attempts and interventions by the AG's office and the Provincial Treasury to rectify the situation have failed (Business-Report, 2017: 2).

Msunduzi Municipality also received an audit opinion over the past 5 years. The challenges of leadership crises in municipalities, both administratively and politically, have been critically examined and the lack of ethics is the main cause of such challenges (Dory, 2015: 5). The issue of corruption in municipalities is compromising and impacts negatively on service delivery. Msunduzi Municipality is not an exception. Municipalities are categorized by a number of instances of corruption perpetrated mainly by municipal officials, councilors, and members of society. Bribery, fraud, nepotism, and systematic corruption are some of the forms of corruption that take place in municipalities in South Africa.

There are structures and systems in place to fight corruption, but the truth is that they are very weak and unsuccessful (Goncalves and Santos, 2017: 168). The important question to be posed and address therefore is how best these challenges can be addressed and how to turn around service delivery to a solid and positive outcome. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides for the advancement and preservation of a high standard of professional ethics in the South African public service. Public resources are vulnerable to abuse by dishonest elements, both inside and outside government, and therefore require careful monitoring and control.

Leadership skills and the capacity of government employees and leaders play a significant role in how those entrusted with the responsibility to provide public service view the importance of the people. Meyer (2017: 04) states that the South African Board for People Practices (SABPP) has developed a national set of standards that guide the skills that must be aligned with government leaders and business leaders. Leaders are expected to have specific skills and the manner in which government employees are employed and leaders elected and deployed must be consistent. Before leaders are elected, specific goals must be drafted and be clearly be criticized and discussed by the people before leaders are elected in order to avoid public disputes, public protests, and unethical activities. Leadership standards assist with minimizing the high level of contestation and reduce the number in order to allow those who only have a passion and necessary skills to lead people. Human resource practices must be consistent and those who do not meet the necessary SABPP requirements must be removed or not be considered for senior posts at all. In order to avoid unethical behavior, a leadership framework must be developed and be in line with the SABPP at all government levels. Developing uniformity in the standard of leaders and government employees will reduce the under-performance in some government departments including municipalities, whilst improving public service delivery.

South African leaders are not paying enough attention to the expected standards of leadership and government employees. The focus of South African leaders is to provide public services. However, unethical leaders and poor leadership standards cannot equal effective public services. BUSINESSSTECH (2018a: 02) reported that the type of individuals that are in leadership positions determines the economic climate in South Africa. Highly skilled individuals assist in ensuring that the government has enough financial resources to provide goods and services for the people. Leadership style contributes to how investors see the government. Ethical leaders with positive ideas and emotional intelligence are likely to attract more investors to the country. On the other hand, Payle (2012: 03) states that the leadership practices of government leaders have an impact on the national economy.

Corrupt government officials suffocate the economy of the country. Managers who do not have proper leadership skills in government institutions must be trained in order to avoid exposure to unethical activities. The fight against favoritism and corruption in government institutions can be reduced if the government employs skilled and effective leaders. Nepotism and intimidation in the South African government remain a big challenge. In South Africa, there is confusion about the successful performance of duties and effective leadership. Successful performance of duties does not automatically mean that an individual is an effective leader. Employees who perform their duties effectively are mainly promoted to senior positions without displaying leadership abilities. Poor leadership ethics can be found even in those who are performing effectively in their assigned duties.

Individual personalities, more so than the training of an individual, determine poor leadership or good leadership. Silver (2018: 02) argued that the experiences of leaders contribute to how they make decisions and determine the ethical position of leaders. Leaders do not just find themselves in leadership positions. Many factors contribute to the emergence of leaders in different positions of power. There are various reasons why individuals want to lead to society or even government institutions. Government institutions have different types of leaders who have various interests and reasons for being in leadership positions. Government institutions have selfless leaders, selfish leaders, ethical leaders and unethical leaders. Some leaders decide to contest a leadership position because they want to contribute to the government.

VII. ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Municipalities who underperform and are corrupt do not only risk being placed under provincial administration, but the process of public service delivery and public accountability is affected. Magubane (2018a: 2) stated that Msunduzi Municipality is under threat of being placed under administration by the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta). The opposition parties believe that the reports issued by the auditor-general, Kimi Makwetu, issued the municipality with a disclaimer and the AG cannot form an audit view owing to inadequate documentation provided. This compromises public service delivery in the municipality and has broken the trust between the municipality and the citizens residing in this municipality.

In the report, the AG articulated negative opinions about the municipality's financial compliance and management. In December 2016, the AG also raised concerns about extravagant expenditure connected to people who were on suspension. The AG found that the municipality suffered irregular expenditure of about R150 million and about R11m in unproductive and wasteful expenditure. The municipality also had not properly accounted for its possessions or assets by failing to provide documentation. Msunduzi Municipality had written off more than R300m in consumer debt without a council resolution. This decision impacted badly on the financial conditions of the municipality. Msunduzi Municipality awarded tenders to providers who were in the service of the municipality and whose directors and principal shareholders were in the service of the municipality. Those individuals who benefited from those contracts had dismally failed to declare their interests. This shows that leaders in this municipality deliberately acted unethically for their own self-gain. Such type of leaders are unethical in nature and cannot claim not knowing their actions (Brand, 2018: 5).

Ethical challenges in local government directly affect public service delivery. Dlamini (2019: 05) reported that Msunduzi municipality is facing many ethical challenges and at the center of those challenges is the decisions made by the council and senior managers of the municipality. A mayor of Msunduzi and the executive committee was recalled but the decision to recall the committee does not reverse the decisions made by the committee. Unethical activities that lead to recalling the committee still exist and money that was meant to provide public services was wrongfully used (Ndou, 2019: 01).

Another municipality that is facing similar unethical challenges is the Vryheid municipality. According to Govender (2019: 02), the Vryheid municipality (well known as Abaqulusi Municipality) is facing unethical leadership challenges. Abaqulusi Municipality was placed under provincial administration following behavior of unethical allegations and the mismanagement of municipal funds. The level of nepotism and favoritism was

reported as the biggest problem in the municipality. The municipality mismanagement and poor ethical leadership had a bad impact on public services. Eskom switched off electricity in the municipality and many people were without electricity for many days, despite their municipal accounts being up to date. Non-payment of municipal accounts to Eskom by municipal officials affected the accounts of the municipality at Eskom. Municipality leaders and senior employees abused the finances of the municipality. Senior municipal employees manipulated the appointment processes, which gave instructions to human resource officials to appoint their close friends and family members.

The study found that the local government institutions are highly politicized. Leaders and employees in the local government institutions put their political interests first before addressing the public service delivery. The political deployments hinder the effective public service delivery.

VIII. CONCLUSION

South Africa is facing a dilemma of unethical leadership behavior by government officials. The lack of leadership ethics in government officials in South Africa does not only affect the public service delivery, but also influence citizens to lose trust in government. Misuse and maladministration of public funds delayed public service delivery and caused much anger amongst community members. Government leaders in South Africa behave as if they are the custodians of public funds and own the public funds, while they are only entrusted with the responsibility of controlling government funds. There is a need for ethical leaders in the South African government in order to improve public service delivery, which will reduce public service delivery protests. The following chapter will discuss ethics, Leadership and Public Service Delivery from a theoretical perspective.

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