




Integrated development plan strategies for service delivery in Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality

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Background: Following the end of apartheid in 1994, the democratic government recognised the importance of local government as a key vehicle for service delivery.

Aim: This article examined the effectiveness of the integrated development plan (IDP) strategies of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality (NMMM) as a public service delivery tool.

Setting: In South Africa, poor service delivery has remained a challenge. This has been attributed to the challenge of transparency and accountability. Thus, the lack of access to basic needs is more profound at the local government level. While urban centres have access to certain basic facilities, rural communities such as Walmer and Motherwell townships remain underdeveloped.

Methods: The study used a qualitative research design for data collection and analysis. Thirty participants were purposively selected among municipal officials, ward councillors and community members for semi-structured interviews. Thematic data analysis was used for the analysis of data.

Results: Despite the IDP's well-structured strategic framework, various challenges, such as insufficient community participation, inadequate resource allocation and a lack of essential planning skills among officials hindered its effective implementation.

Conclusion: The study concluded that for the IDP to achieve its aims, its implementation should be evidence-based and responsive to community needs. Effective service delivery requires a fundamental transformation in municipal leadership and public participation.

Contribution: The article presents the challenge of public service delivery within the context of the IDP strategies in a specific municipality. It serves as a signpost for understanding the implementation of the IDP as a public service delivery strategy.

Keywords: IDP strategies; inadequate funding; constituency services; corruption; bureaucratic obstacles; effective governance structures; strong leadership; community participation; infrastructural need; mismanagement; political disagreement.

Introduction

Post-apartheid South Africa has passed through different phases of development but with recurring public service delivery challenges. Public service protest has remained a defining character of the country dubbed as possibly 'the protest capital of the world' (Alexander 2015). Between 2004 and 2017, there were 1377 public service protests in South Africa (Botes 2018). In the first 5 months of 2018, South Africa recorded 144 public service protests (Makhafola 2018). In its 2023 report, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED 2023) indicated that South Africa experienced more than 550 public service delivery-related protests, 'showing high levels of public frustration often directed towards local government'.

Constitutionally, local governments in South Africa are at the centre of the provision of basic services. Section 152 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 as amended, mandated local government to:

[P]rovide democratic and accountable government for local communities; ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner; promote social and economic development; promote a safe and healthy environment; and encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.

This is with a proviso, in section 152(2) that 'A municipality must strive, within its financial and administrative capacity, to achieve the objects (sic) set out in subsection (1)'. Section 195 (1 d and e) of the Constitution reinforced these objects, mandating at all levels of the government, as parts of the basic values and principle of public administration, the provision of public services 'impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias', and that 'People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making'.

Successive governments have since undertaken a series of measures to improve municipal services for inclusive development (Mamokhere & Meyer 2023a; Munzhedzi 2020). Requisite legislative frameworks such as the *Municipal Systems Act 2000*, *Structures Act*, *Demarcation Act* and *Municipal Finance Management Act* were policy thrusts enacted to significantly improve the operations of municipal governments for effective service delivery (Du Plessis 2017; Mokgopo 2017; Ndevu & Muller 2017). A major component of the *Municipal System Act of 2000* is the integrated development plan (IDP). According to Mamokhere and Meyer (2023a:9), 'the IDP is an example of a local government tool that intends community participation to address community needs'.

Section 25 1 (a–c) of the *Municipal Systems Act 2000* mandated municipal governments to:

[A] of the municipality which – (a) links, integrates and coordinates plans and takes into account proposals for the development of the municipality; (b) aligns the resources and capacity of the municipality with the implementation of the plan; (c) forms the policy framework and general basis on which the annual budget must be based.

The import of this legislation is to ensure uninterrupted development through effective planning with public participation for adequate provision of basic municipal services (Mamokhere & Meyer 2023a). The IDP is a development and performance tool that municipal governments rarely use in their strategic planning.

The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality (NMMM) is one of the municipalities in South Africa that has faced significant service delivery challenges, including inadequate infrastructure and insufficient access to basic services (Nzewi, Nomarwayi, & Bradshaw 2019). These challenges have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of residents and have resulted in service delivery protests and dissatisfaction. To address these challenges, the NMMM has adopted Integrated Development Plan (IDP) strategies. However, the effectiveness of the IDP in addressing service delivery challenges in the NMMM remains unclear. Therefore, this study seeks to assess the effectiveness of IDP strategies in addressing service delivery challenges in the NMMM. It aims to provide insights into the IDP's competence as a tool to address service delivery challenges in the NMMM.

The article has four sections. Firstly, it reviews existing literature by examining the difficulties that local governments face while delivering their services, explores the IDP as a possible solution to these challenges and evaluates its effectiveness. Secondly, the article critically reviews selected theories that support this article. Thirdly, the article presents the methodology employed to present and discuss the results. Lastly, this study concludes with policy suggestions aimed at enhancing service delivery in selected townships within NMMM.

An overview of service delivery challenges in local government

Local governments worldwide face various challenges in delivering essential services to their citizens (Masiya, Davids & Mangai 2019). Masuku and Jili (2019) and Ngigi and Busolo (2019) share the same view, suggesting that local governments struggle with delivering essential services to their citizens because of various factors such as inadequate resources, corruption and political instability. Mngomezulu (2020) identifies political interference as a major obstacle to effective service delivery at the municipal level of the government. These challenges are not unique to any specific region and require a variety of solutions to address them. For instance, African local governments face challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure and a lack of skilled personnel (Ndevu & Muller 2018; Sibanda, Obange & Awuor 2017). In some cases, poor governance and corruption are the root causes of these challenges (Mamokhere & Meyer 2023a, 2023b).

Studies by Tan and Taeihagh (2020) have shown that 71% of municipalities in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique have reported inadequate funding as a major barrier. Inadequate funding has been shown to negatively impact infrastructure such as roads, water and sanitation systems limiting their ability to effectively deliver services. Unfortunately, such challenges have a detrimental effect on the citizens' living standards, especially the poor, and can trigger social unrest and protests (Masiya et al. 2019). Other scholars such as Tashu (2022), Shongwe (2018) have analysed municipalities in Zimbabwe and revealed corruption was prevalent and has diverted funds from development projects.

In South Africa, local governments are facing challenges such as inadequate resources, a lack of capacity and political interference, which frustrates the ability of municipalities to deliver services effectively and meet the needs of their communities (Kanayo, Ndlovu & Agholor 2021; Mashamaite & Lethoko 2018). Similarly, Sadik-Zada, Gatto and Niftiyev (2022), Kalonda and Govender (2021), and Shongwe and Meyer (2023) found corruption to have contributed to poor service delivery and infrastructure backlogs in 70% of South African municipalities. These barriers significantly impede the local government's capacity to offer critical services

such as healthcare, education and infrastructure. The problems stemming from such challenges can have serious consequences, thereby worsening the existing socio-economic disparities. This has implications for the daily lives of South Africans. To tackle these issues, comprehensive reforms and improved local government governance are imperative to ensure the country's overall progress and the well-being of its citizens.

Integrated development plan as a tool to address service delivery challenges

Municipalities are expected to explore the IDP to address their service delivery challenges. For instance, IDPs are strategic plans that guide development and service delivery at the local level. They are meant to be inclusive and participatory, involving communities, civil society organisations and other stakeholders in the planning and implementation process (Mamokhere & Meyer 2023a). Integrated development plans provide a framework for coordinating and prioritising development efforts, improving resource allocation and enhancing service delivery in health, water and sanitation (Molale & Fourie 2022).

Studies have highlighted the impact of IDPs in addressing service delivery challenges in Africa (Enaifoghe 2022; Lindvall et al. 2020; Nnadi, Ezeani & Nnadi 2020). Atangana and Oberholster (2023), Rogerson (2018) and Zungu (2016) have noticed that more than 75% of municipalities in countries such as Namibia, Uganda and Mozambique have improved access to basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity through their IDPs. Mamokhere and Meyer (2023a) and Yende (2023) found that IDPs have improved access to basic services, promoted community participation in decision-making processes and improved intergovernmental relations, leading to better service delivery in South Africa. Additionally, Matyana and Mthethwa (2022) and Masiya, Mazenda and Gwabeni (2021) found that IDPs should promote participatory planning and enhance transparency to improve local government service delivery accountability. In addition, study by Thabethe (2023) found that IDPs played a huge role in enhancing intergovernmental cooperation, coordination of resources and reduction of bureaucratic obstacles to enable improved service delivery.

These studies demonstrate that IDPs can help municipalities allocate resources and prioritise service delivery strategies based on community needs and development objectives. Its citizens' input should allow for services that better align with their needs. Integrated development plans also promote intergovernmental relations by facilitating cooperation and coordination between different levels of government, aligning policies and resources for more efficient service delivery, and reducing bureaucratic obstacles that can hinder progress. By doing so, IDPs create a more streamlined process for delivering services that meet the needs of citizens. While IDPs are an essential instrument, their effectiveness can vary depending on local contexts, implementation practices and the commitment of government officials.

Effectiveness of integrated development plan strategies

Various studies have explored the potential of IDPs to address service delivery issues in local governments. However, these came with inconsistent results. Some authors acknowledge that the implementation of IDPs has improved local service delivery (Mamokhere & Meyer 2023a; Masilo 2020). Others report that local governments encounter difficulties in implementing IDPs and delivering services because of inadequate funding, poor intergovernmental relations and a lack of community participation (Msenge & Nzewu 2021; Ndevu & Muller 2017). In their study of the implementation of IDP in Greater Tzaneen Municipality, Mamokhere and Meyer (2023b) discovered that public participation was a rarity with mounting public service delivery backlogs. Citizens could not hold municipal officials accountable. A majority of the respondents indicated that there was no evidence to show that the implementation of IDP was successful because of the prevalence of 'poor service delivery' (Mamokhere & Meyer (2023b:16).

However, the City of Johannesburg has recorded effective IDP implementation, a feat attributed to a combination of factors such as strong political will and community participation (Abrahams & Everatt 2019; McKay & Tantoh 2021). Studies by Phala (2019) and Ntshwanti (2020) have shown that the City of Johannesburg has actively engaged with its residents through various participatory mechanisms, including public consultations, Ward Committees and stakeholder engagement sessions. This approach has allowed the municipality to align community needs and priorities with the IDP, leading to a more responsive service delivery approach.

Also, the eThekweni Municipality has made significant strides in implementing its IDP, resulting in improved service delivery. Majola (2021) and Ndlovu (2021) attribute the success of the eThekweni Municipality to a combination of factors, including strong leadership, effective governance structures and a focus on community participation. The municipality has created platforms for engagement, such as public meetings and ward committees, to ensure that the IDP reflects the needs and aspirations of its residents. Furthermore, eThekweni Municipality has demonstrated effective strategic planning, ensuring that adequate funding is allocated to priority service delivery projects identified in the IDP (Mnembe 2022; Nyawo & Mubangizi 2021).

One other significant obstacle that IDPs face in South Africa is political interference. Political dynamics at the local government level can impact decision-making processes and priorities, sometimes contradicting the needs of IDPs. Studies by Sibanda and Lues (2021) and Auriacombe and Sithomola (2020) highlight the influence of political interests, power struggles and negative practices on decision-making processes. These factors can divert resources away from IDP priorities and compromise

the alignment between political agendas and community needs. Such interference significantly hinders the effectiveness of IDPs, diverting resources from the community's most urgent needs. Although IDPs can improve service delivery, political considerations dominating objective development planning can pose significant challenges to their success.

Community participation and collaboration in the planning and implementation of service delivery strategies

Community participation and collaboration are crucial for the planning and implementation of service delivery interventions in South Africa. Abrahams (2018) highlights the importance of community participation in identifying local needs and promoting ownership and sustainability of service delivery interventions.

The NMMM has implemented several successful community-driven development programmes, such as the participatory budgeting processes (Bungane 2018). This process involved consultation with communities, including women and youth, in developing the municipality's IDP (Fourie & Van der Waldt 2021). However, challenges such as community apathy and a lack of trust in local government officials, as highlighted by studies by Msenge and Nzewu (2021), Adom and Simathele (2022) and the competing interests of different stakeholder groups, as noted by Turnhout et al. (2020), can hinder effective collaboration. Studies by Jakoet-Salie, Draai and Taylor (2020) and Adom and Simatele (2022) found that only 35% of municipalities had high levels of community trust.

In line with the aforementioned, municipalities can adopt strategies such as using technology to improve communication and engagement, capacity-building programmes to promote community empowerment and leadership, and participatory planning processes to engage with communities meaningfully (Zwane & Matsiliza 2022). Successful implementation of service delivery interventions requires active community participation and collaboration to ensure that development interventions are responsive to community needs and priorities.

Theoretical framework

Two theories anchor the analysis of the study. These are the institutional and participatory development theories.

Institutional theory

Institutional theory has been used extensively in public administration and management to understand the behaviour and decision-making processes of organisations such as local governments. This theory assists in revealing the adoption and dissemination of formal and informal organisational structures, ranging from established policies and practices to groundbreaking organisational structures. To effectively tackle the numerous service delivery challenges, local governments must comprehend the fundamental principles of institutional theory (Altayar 2018; Xing, Liu & Cooper

2018). As formal planning documents, IDP is an institutional framework that outlines the development priorities and strategies of local governments and is typically prepared through a participatory process involving various stakeholders (Fourie & Van der Waldt 2021; Mamokhere & Meyer 2023a).

In the case of the NMMM, institutional theory can explain how a range of formal and informal factors have influenced the adoption and implementation of IDPs. The political structure of the municipality is a core formal institution that shapes the implementation of IDP. A coalition government structure governs the NMMM, which can affect decision-making processes regarding allocating resources for service delivery. For example, in the African National Congress (ANC), the ruling party may prioritise service delivery interventions that align with their political agenda, while opposition parties may push for different priorities (Collord 2021).

In addition, informal factors such as administrative traditions and cultural norms can influence IDP adoption and implementation in the municipality. For example, a culture of bureaucracy and red tape may hinder the implementation of IDPs. Moreover, cultural norms may prioritise certain development interventions over others, which can impact the allocation of resources for service delivery (Shapiro-Garza et al. 2020).

Furthermore, stakeholder interests can also shape IDP adoption and implementation in the municipality. For instance, civil society organisations may advocate for certain development interventions that align with their interests. At the same time, local businesses may prioritise service delivery initiatives that support economic growth and job creation (Abrahams 2018). The institutional theory sheds light on how municipalities can deal with service delivery challenges. It also acknowledges that the success of IDPs is contingent upon the institutional context to improve overall service delivery outcomes of the community.

Participatory development theory

Participatory development theory is another essential theory widely applied in various contexts, including community development (Anyidoho 2010). The theory emphasises the importance of community participation in decision-making processes, as it can lead to more effective and sustainable development outcomes (Campbell & Vainio-Mattila 2003). This theory is relevant to the NMMM, where community participation in planning and implementing service delivery interventions is essential to address the municipality's service delivery challenges.

In the context of IDPs, participatory development theory analyses how community participation can enhance service delivery outcomes. The IDP process is designed to be participatory, involving various stakeholders, including government officials, community members and civil society organisations to ensure that development priorities and

strategies reflect the needs and priorities of local communities (Fourie & Van de Waldt 2021). By involving local communities in the planning and implementation of service delivery interventions, IDPs can help to build trust and cooperation between local governments and communities and ensure that development initiatives are tailored to the needs and priorities of local communities.

Furthermore, implementing participatory development theory in the context of IDPs empowers local communities, promotes ownership and accountability, and fosters transparency in development initiatives (Auriacombe & Sithomola 2020). When local communities are involved in decision-making processes, they are more likely to take ownership of development initiatives, as they are aware of the local context and have a stake in the outcome. The theory ensures that development initiatives are tailored to the needs and priorities of the local communities, promoting accountability, transparency and ownership. This approach enables local communities and civil society organisations to scrutinise development initiatives carefully, thereby encouraging greater involvement in the development process.

Research methods and design

The article uses a qualitative research design to answer the research problem. The qualitative research approach constitutes an iterative process where researchers improve their understanding through cycles by making useful distinctions that allow them to grasp better what they are studying, generating valuable insights that can contribute to knowledge in the scientific community (Creswell & Poth 2018). This approach is helpful in this article to deeply understand the challenge of service delivery in NMMM and the effectiveness of IDP as a solution to improving service delivery outcomes.

The study adopted a qualitative methodology using individual interviews. The data were analysed thematically using NVivo software. The sample consisted of a minimum of 30 people: 10 representatives from Motherwell township and 10 from Walmer Township, five municipal officials and five ward councillors. The study was intended to bring about service delivery strategies and provide policy recommendations to alleviate or overcome challenges in improving service delivery in the NMMM.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Research and Ethics Committee (IREC) of the Durban University of Technology (reference no.: IREC 301/21) issued on 01 June 2022. The data of the study were derived from semi-structured interviews of participants who volunteered and consented, in writing, to participate in the study. All the participants filled out and signed the letter of consent presented to each of them before the commencement of the interview. All data collected from the participants were treated with utmost confidentiality.

Responses of the participants were treated anonymously. The participants include municipal officials, Ward Councillors and community members. Table 1 shows the demographic descriptions of participants.

Results

The study assessed the effectiveness of IDP strategies in addressing service delivery challenges in the NMMM. The IDP is a key planning tool intended to promote integrated development and coordination between local plans and those of other spheres of government (Munzhedzi, Phago & Mubangizi 2022). The ability of the IDP to achieve its objectives depends on how well the strategies contained therein address the most pressing service delivery challenges facing the municipality (Asha & Makalela 2020).

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the five municipal officials (MO), with MO1 to MO5 representing municipal officials 1 to 5 interviewed for this article. The officials included one female and four males, ranging in age from 37 years to 48 years. The positions of the officials included director of IDP, director of constituency services, manager of public participation, manager of IDP and practitioner of IDP.

The data in Table 1 further suggest that the council had a mix of ages and genders among its members. Three men and two women serve as ward councillors, ranging in age from 35 years to 57 years. These ward councillors were coded as WC1 to WC5.

Similarly, the demographic information of the community members who participated in the study in both townships shows that there were six males and four females in Walmer, ranging in age from 25 years to 50 years old. These community members in Walmer were coded as CMW1 to CMW10, with CMW1 representing the first community member interviewed in Walmer and CMW10 representing the 10th community member interviewed. In Motherwell, there were seven males and three females, ranging in age from 25 years to 45 years. These community members in Motherwell were coded as CMM1 to CMM10, with CMM1 representing the first community member interviewed in Motherwell and CMM10 representing the 10th community member interviewed.

Discussion

Thematic analysis was employed in the research article to ascertain participants' viewpoints on the effectiveness of IDP strategies in the municipality. Through data reduction, the researchers sorted and organised the data so that conclusions could be drawn and verified (Miles 1979:593; Namey et al. 2008). Using thematic analysis, we first engaged in open coding to identify potential codes and label data excerpts. We then compared codes, noted emerging patterns and categorised the data using focussed, axial and theoretical coding techniques. In the second analysis stage, we sorted, sifted and searched the data for keywords, types, sequences,

TABLE 1: Demographic descriptions of participants.

Participants	Some demographics characteristics			Total		Frequency (%)		Total frequency (%)
	Position/Ward/Townships	Age (years)	Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Municipal officials (MO)								
MO1	Director: IDP	48	Male	1	-	5	-	-
MO2	Director: Constituency Services	45	Male	1	-	5	-	-
MO3	Manager: Public Participation	42	Male	1	-	5	-	-
MO4	Manager: IDP	40	Male	1	-	5	-	-
MO5	Practitioner: IDP	37	Female	-	1	-	5	-
-	-	-	-	4	1	20	5	25
Ward councillors (WC)								
WC1	4	55	Female	-	1	-	5	-
WC2	60	57	Male	1	-	5	-	-
WC3	21	45	Male	1	-	5	-	-
WC4	44	35	Female	-	1	-	5	-
WC5	58	37	Male	1	-	5	-	-
-	-	-	-	3	2	15	10	25
Community members (CM)								
CMW1	Walmer	25	Male	1	-	5	-	-
CMW2	Walmer	32	Female	-	1	-	5	-
CMW3	Walmer	40	Female	-	1	-	5	-
CMW4	Walmer	40	Male	1	-	5	-	-
CMW5	Walmer	28	Male	1	-	5	-	-
CMW6	Walmer	38	Female	-	1	-	5	-
CMW7	Walmer	45	Male	1	-	5	-	-
CMW8	Walmer	43	Male	1	-	5	-	-
CMW9	Walmer	28	Female	-	1	-	5	-
CMW10	Walmer	50	Male	1	-	5	-	-
Total	-	-	-	6	4	30	20	50
CMM1	Motherwell	33	Female	-	1	-	5	-
CMM2	Motherwell	35	Male	1	-	5	-	-
CMM3	Motherwell	29	Male	1	-	5	-	-
CMM4	Motherwell	25	Female	-	1	-	5	-
CMM5	Motherwell	30	Female	-	1	-	5	-
CMM6	Motherwell	45	Male	1	-	5	-	-
CMM7	Motherwell	40	Male	1	-	5	-	-
CMM8	Motherwell	38	Male	1	-	5	-	-
CMM9	Motherwell	35	Male	1	-	5	-	-
CMM10	Motherwell	40	Male	1	-	5	-	-
Total	-	-	-	7	3	35	15	50
Total participants				20	10			100

IDP, integrated development plan.

patterns and relationships. We labelled and categorised the data to identify key themes that capture important information related to the research questions. Through this iterative coding and categorisation process, we developed a thematic map of the data that synthesised the various concepts and insights arising from the article (Bowen 2009).

The last stage of data analysis involved bringing similar categories together, resulting in seven main themes: (1) complex infrastructure and resource management in Walmer and Motherwell; (2) main causes of service delivery problems and challenges; (3) proposed solutions and recommendations for improving service delivery; (4) potential challenges impacting the municipalities' IDP; (5) the IDP impact on service delivery; (6) views on IDPs strategies for alleviating service delivery challenges in NMMM and (7) effective or ineffective IDP strategies in addressing service delivery problems in Walmer and Motherwell townships. These themes are discussed in the next section.

Theme 1: Complex infrastructure and resource management in Walmer and Motherwell

The findings from the participants confirm that infrastructure and resource management are major issues in the two townships. Under this theme, four sub-themes explaining the main challenges to service delivery in the selected townships emerged. These sub-themes include inadequate revenue collection and limited budget allocation, residents' reluctance to participate during budget meetings, inadequate and unmaintained basic infrastructure, that is, housing, electricity, water and sanitation and the issue of corruption in awarding of tenders. Here are some selected responses from the participants:

'They are falling out of their yearly budgeting approach because when these dwellings happen ... they are not budgeted for within the municipality. There's no revenue collection, so the number of what it is planned for by the municipality has doubled over the years to what the municipality expects to get in return. (CMM2)

'People feel that the municipality in their planning and decision making they do not consider those areas when taking decisions.' (CMW5)

'The first challenge that we are facing is political interference. Secondly, SMMEs are also a problem. Every company that gets a tender demands 30% of whatever they are going to do in the ward.' (WC2)

It is evident from the findings that service delivery in Walmer and Motherwell faces significant challenges. Such a finding aligns with the evidence presented in the literature (Pradeep 2011). The municipality lacks the necessary funds and budgeting procedures to address the township's infrastructure needs. Residents feel excluded from and uninvolved in planning decisions. The finding suggests that the township's infrastructure needs are not being addressed because of the municipality's lack of financial resources and proper budgeting procedures. Also, it indicates a disinterest and estrangement among residents from the planning process. The outcome is a lack of or poor condition of basic services such as shelter, water and electricity. Funds that may be utilised to improve the situation are further wasted through corruption in government contracts.

Most importantly, the municipality must try to communicate directly with communities, listen to their problems and involve them in decision-making. When people feel heard and included in the process, they are more likely to take responsibility and even pay taxes to support improved services. There is hope that cooperation between communities and local government may improve and satisfy basic infrastructural needs. However, as suggested in the literature review, it will necessitate transparency, accountability and, most importantly, meaningful involvement of people at every stage of the process.

Theme 2: Main causes of service delivery problems and challenges

Findings from respondents have shown that corruption by politicians and officials, growing informal settlements and unplanned population growth in the area, poor communication between municipalities and their communities, and political conflicts within the ANC leadership in municipalities are the main causes of service delivery problems and challenges in the selected townships. Here are some selected responses from the participants:

'This can be attributed to mismanagement of funds and corruption by politicians and officials.' (CMW4)

'Informal settlements in these wards are forced in the sense of land grab, whereby, you have a huge growing number of informal settlements that do not have electricity, don't have water, do not have a refuse removal and sanitation.' (CMW6)

'During municipal planning, we only plan for a specific number of people in terms of the registered population in those areas. But with inward migration from various areas to these areas our planning is skewed and we end up under-planning and ... because we do not know how many people reside in those areas because some of them reside in informal settlements.' (WC5)

Based on the participants' responses supporting theme 2, several factors cause inadequate service delivery in Walmer and Motherwell townships. Corruption and mismanagement of funds by local officials and politicians squander resources and prevent them from going where they are most needed. It is also the view of several scholars in the literature (Majola 2021; Tshishonga 2019). The fast expansion of informal settlements strains the municipality's already limited infrastructure, as it struggles to deliver even basic services to these groups. Municipal planning is carried out without considering actual township population growth, resulting in under-provision of services and infrastructure. While political disagreements within the ANC leadership were referenced, no specifics were offered.

These challenges show the need for the municipality to increase openness, responsibility and community participation. Proactively fighting corruption would guarantee that resources are used effectively and for their intended purposes. Resources could be distributed according to actual needs if more precise population statistics were obtained, and township communities were included in the planning process. Infrastructure spending for informal settlements, beginning with the most critical services, could help to ease the misery.

However, change will require the leadership, effort and sacrifice of all stakeholders involved. Municipal officials must prioritise residents' needs over political benefit. Politicians will be forced to make difficult decisions that may not be popular, and townships will be asked to be patient while progress is made in small steps. While substantial changes may take time, tiny actions in the right direction, such as increasing openness, fostering community participation and cracking down on corruption can help to generate momentum, trust and optimism that conditions will eventually improve.

Theme 3: Proposed solutions and recommendations for improving service delivery

Respondents have recommended solutions for the improvement of service delivery in NMMM. Respondents explicitly identified major areas that need to be improved. Here are some selected responses from the participants:

'If the municipal administrators could find a way of limiting the supply chain processes to shorten the time that they take for the speedy delivery of services.' (CMM1)

'If the municipality can stop politicising awarding of tenders and award them to suitably qualified companies instead of comrades and friends.' (CMM6)

'As community members, we need to be informed about what is happening in our area and what steps the municipality is taking to address issues such as the lack of basic services like water, sanitation, and housing.' (CW8)

The findings of this article show that changes in key areas could help overcome service delivery challenges in NMMM. Simplifying procurement processes to accelerate

projects, awarding contracts based on merit rather than political connections, and enhancing community communication and engagement were all suggestions made by the respondents.

These recommendations address the root causes of the problems, including corruption that diverts monies intended for services, wasteful expenditures, and a lack of transparency and community engagement. Operational and governance reforms have the potential to improve municipal operations, guarantee funds are used wisely and foster community support for solutions.

Political will is required to put the needs of under-serviced communities first for significant change to happen. Municipal officials will need to move beyond the rigidity of long-standing structures and change their perspectives from protecting the status quo to supporting alternatives. Communities must also continue to be actively involved, patient and persistent to hold leaders responsible.

While these recommendations provide a way forward, a real implementation that offers community members genuine advantages will demand more than simply checking boxes. It will require leadership devoted to openness, responsible management and moral resource control. To ensure that community needs continue to be prioritised, communities must stay aware, engaged and vocal.

Theme 4: Challenges of the implementation of the integrated development plan in the municipalities

The findings of this article reveal several challenges impacting IDP in NMMM. Respondents have identified the politicisation of the Budget review process, politics of coalitions, the collaboration of municipality and sector departments, budget constraints and lack of public participation by the communities and unqualified and inexperienced officials on municipal planning as setbacks to the municipality's IDP:

'One of them is politics in the council. The coalition also has a huge impact on the IDP. Conflicts between the councillors and officials and budget ... All of these impact IDP in a negative manner because first of all in the council we first have to fight about things that are even outside the IDP, those are coalition and politics.' (CMM10)

'Public participation is the major factor that affects IDP because the people whom we are supposed to bring these services to do not take public meetings seriously in the sense that they do not come or when discussing issues ... The budget is the secondary factor, by that I mean, IDPs cannot be implemented fully when there is not enough budget.' (CMM5)

'Some officials are not qualified and therefore do not have the necessary experience in municipal planning and service delivery, also participation of the community in the matters of local government. All of these do have an impact on the municipal IDP.' (CMW9)

The findings from participants reveal that the IDP process in NMMM is confronted by obstacles that reduce its success. The municipality's capacity to effectively plan and provide services is hindered by the politicisation of the IDP and budget review, a lack of cooperation, inadequate budget, a lack of public participation and officials who lack the necessary qualifications and experience. The finding supports the perspectives shared by Phala (2019) as well as Masuku and Jili (2019).

It will take strong leadership that prioritises the needs of communities to address these concerns. Political interference must be curbed, and intergovernmental relations must be strengthened. To prioritise the most pressing demands, trade-offs must be made within the limits of the budget. Residents must be genuinely involved for local knowledge and priorities to be incorporated into plans. In addition, officials need training to develop the skills necessary for efficient municipal planning.

Theme 5: The integrated development plan impact on service delivery

The findings from respondents corroborate evidence from the literature suggesting that IDP acts as a guide for resource allocation and service delivery initiatives by providing a comprehensive and strategic framework for development. Here are some selected responses from the participants:

'As the municipality, we use IDP to guide us towards the direction of community desires, so IDP positively affects service delivery.' (MO4)

'IDP informs service delivery. If it's not done properly in engagement with relevant stakeholders, it will impact service delivery negatively' (MO5)

'Budget and supply chain process does affect the budget because most of the time money will be allocated late and then when we go to the end of the financial year maybe national treasury will allocate funds and by then it will be late.' (WC2)

The findings show that the IDP process can lead to effective service delivery by connecting municipal planning with community needs. The IDP, when properly established and executed, has the potential to inform resource allocation and improve services. However, obstacles such as delayed budget allocations, procurement delays and a lack of significant public input hinder the IDP's ability to achieve this goal in practice. Delays in funding can interrupt initiatives and undermine the IDP's goals. Plans may not accurately reflect citizens' requirements if their priorities are not fully captured.

The successful implementation of an IDP requires prioritising the establishment of conditions that promote its effectiveness. This process can be accomplished through extensive engagement with the community, considering their perspectives, aligning budget and IDP cycles for timely funding and enhancing procurement procedures for faster implementation. When these factors are in place, the IDP can become a powerful strategic planning tool that

significantly improves service delivery and quality of life. Although immediate solutions may not be readily available, incremental progress is achievable. By involving more community groups or coordinating budgets earlier, preliminary outcomes can demonstrate the potential of a properly executed IDP. As tangible benefits become apparent, residents may become more supportive of broader reforms.

Finally, a leadership's dedication to achieving the IDP's objectives and letting it influence resource allocation and decision-making will determine whether it has any meaningful impact. Even little steps in the correct direction could eventually result in significant enhancements to the quality of life for township inhabitants if devotion and good faith efforts are made.

Theme 6: Integrated development plan strategies for alleviating service delivery challenges in Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality

The findings from respondents suggest that the IDP is critical in guiding service delivery in the municipality. By identifying the most pressing issues and outlining a roadmap for addressing them, the plan helps officials prioritise their efforts and allocate resources effectively.

Respondents identified intergovernmental relations, public participation, and the use of different communications platforms as strategies used by NMMM to alleviate service delivery challenges. Here are some selected responses from the participants:

'One of them is the issue of communication because what we have done after COVID-19, we have made use of several platforms for example remote sessions we have now become more virtual in the way we do things.' (WC2)

'Ward base plans is the first Strategic document that is developed at ward level that speaks directly to the issues of the ward.' (WC3)

Findings highlighted strategies implemented by the municipality to improve service delivery, including improved communication through multiple platforms and developing ward-based plans that target specific local issues. Based on the responses, the IDP plays a critical role in guiding service delivery in NMMM by identifying priorities and outlining a roadmap, which helps officials to allocate resources effectively to address the most pressing issues.

Although the IDP offers a crucial framework for planning and allocation, implementing it will involve overcoming obstacles such as delays, a lack of participation and limited implementation. For the IDP to have the greatest impact, officials must implement its priorities.

To lay the foundation for more radical change that eventually provides the services communities most need, it is crucial to focus on achieving early successes and

establishing trust initially. However, a leadership's ability to support the IDP's objectives and let it influence resource allocation and activities will ultimately determine whether a meaningful impact is achieved.

Theme 7: Effectiveness of the integrated development plan strategies in addressing service delivery problems in Walmer and Motherwell

Respondents had different perceptions about the effectiveness of IDP strategies in addressing service delivery problems. Some participants said IDPs were effective, and some argued otherwise. Here are some selected responses from the participants:

'They are effective, they assist us as councillors in terms of allowing communities to participate, it helps improve the quality of life of our communities and also reduces service delivery protests.' (WC5)

'I cannot conclude that they are working or not because they have recently been implemented.' (WC1)

'They are not effective because residents refuse to take part, so it makes it difficult for the municipality to plan.' (WC3)

According to the findings, participants had varying opinions about how effective IDP strategies work to address service delivery challenges. While some respondents believed the strategies successfully promoted participation and reduced service delivery protests, others questioned the authenticity of such engagement and the benefits thereof.

The participants provided several insights into why they consider IDP ineffective in practice. A major theme that emerged was the lack of meaningful public participation and engagement in the IDP process. Without input from residents on their needs and priorities, municipalities struggle to develop the right strategies through the IDP. Community involvement is essential for successful implementation but is lacking.

In addition, the findings revealed that poor planning and inadequate project implementation severely undermined the goals of the IDP. The large number of undocumented populations partly accounted for this. Thus, when citizens in this category are not considered, service delivery will remain uneven. The perceived ineffectiveness is attributable to weak community participation and a lack of inclusive planning. Without addressing these participation and representation barriers, the IDP will continue to face execution challenges rather than achieving its aim of integrated, strategic development for local communities.

To be effective, IDP strategies must demonstrate verifiable improvements in the quality of life for citizens. This view requires greater transparency on implementation and results. Better engagement with communities to set reasonable expectations and showcase successes. It is time for newly implemented initiatives to produce results and establish long-term trust. However, the basic measure of effectiveness

in IDP strategies is the impact on the lives of citizens. Outcomes must show that development is gradually providing the services that communities require. While IDP strategies are promising, leadership dedication, transparency and responsiveness are required to significantly benefit marginalised communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the article intended to assess the IDP strategies for service delivery in selected NMMM townships. The findings reveal that IDP initiatives in the NMMM do not address service delivery issues effectively. Despite being designed to provide a structured framework for development and coordination, the practical application of the IDP process is limited. Public input and community engagement are not considered, leading to plans that do not align with the needs and objectives of residents. Delays in budget allocations and resource allocation constraints also hinder the timely execution of IDPs. Furthermore, political interests often undermine genuine needs-based planning and resource allocation, while municipal authorities lack the necessary skills to create and implement IDPs.

To enhance the effectiveness of IDP strategies, the municipality needs to address four key concerns. Firstly, community participation must be increased to ensure community needs are incorporated into the planning process. Secondly, synchronisation between the IDP and budget cycles is vital to ensure timely funding and implementation. Thirdly, streamlining procurement procedures is necessary to expedite resource allocation and service delivery initiatives. Lastly, municipal officials' planning skills and abilities must be developed. Genuine development requires leadership that is committed to the IDP's goals and allows them to guide decision-making processes.

While the IDP holds promise as a strategic planning instrument, its full potential can only be realised through radical municipal transformation. Marginalised communities must be prioritised, and solutions must be pursued with absolute transparency and accountability. Significant improvements for the NMMM residents in selected townships can be achieved by taking even small steps in the right direction.

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Authors' contributions

The three authors were involved in the conceptualisation, methodology and analysis of the article. N.M. was the lead

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Data availability

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