

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE Local Government Turnaround Strategy

After a decade of significant advancement in the provision of services to all communities, the Policy Review on Provincial and Local Government (COGTA 2009) and other research demonstrated that confidence in government at the local level has begun to decline sharply. Service delivery protests and dissatisfaction with local government have increased over the past few years, with growing evidence that faltering service provision, poor capacity and weak administration have driven many municipalities into 'distress' mode.

As municipalities falter in the performance of their core functions, the social distance between citizens and the state deepens, creating mistrust, frustration and a loss of confidence in government in the most seriously affected areas.

In an effort to turn the tide in local government, the Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) was initiated by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) in early 2009, and from its inception set out to find the root causes of municipal dysfunctionality. The key question in mind during the process has been: what needs to be achieved before all 283 municipalities are fully functional, efficient and sustainable?

Identifying the fault lines

The first initiative of the LGTAS process was a series of province-wide assessments to investigate municipal performance from March to September 2009. The outcome of these assessments was a comprehensive report, *The State of Local Government in South Africa*. This report was discussed at the

National Indaba on Local Government held at Ekurhuleni on 21 and 22 October 2009. The outcome of the indaba was the approval of the report, a conference declaration and an endorsement of the creation of a practical turnaround strategy for local government. This would address the key issues identified as constraining fully functional municipalities, prepare the ground for implementation and demand a whole-of-government response to the turnaround proposed.

The report identified a number of factors contributing to municipal distress:

- practice on the ground not matching policy intent (for example, poor service delivery);
- uneven appreciation of the role and needs of local government (for example, poor intergovernmental cooperation and onerous reporting and compliance burdens);
- weak support and oversight of local government (poor provincial capacity to support and monitor, and an inadequate range of strategic coalitions and systems to foster sustainable support mechanisms); and
- differentiation between municipalities not being adequately defined or addressed (an asymmetry that needs policies to address the fact that 'one size does *not* fit all').

Recommendations intended to strengthen the local sphere and rebuild the confidence of both local government and its citizens include a number of policy and legislative reforms, the adoption of a differentiated approach to allow better government and support of socio-economically vulnerable municipalities, improved intergovernmental monitoring and supervision, and improved facilitation of interventions and hands-on support.

In summary, COGTA believes that the baseline for effective and responsive service delivery depends on:

- clear and realistic policies;
- the appropriate allocation of powers and functions and financial resources;

- the performance and accountability of organs of state to implement policies;
- coordination between organs of state;
- public participation and involvement; and
- the level of self-reliance of communities.

The LGTAS was approved by the Cabinet on 2 December 2009.

Institutional arrangements for implementing the LGTAS

Municipalities and provinces, supported by COGTA teams, were tasked with developing municipal turnaround strategies (MTASs) in every province by the end of March 2010. To direct and support MTAS implementation, the department is establishing a national Command Centre. It will become the 'single window of coordination' for improved support to government until 2014. Its key units are responsible for rapid response, monitoring and evaluation, intelligence and intergovernmental coordination.

The **Rapid Response Unit** will be critical in the turnaround, especially before 2011. The unit will send skilled technicians to resolve service delivery problems, such as broken sewage works, dry standpipes and water management, before they escalate into more serious and costly problems for municipalities and communities. The **Intelligence Unit** will create a knowledge management system to analyse the MTASs and direct the action elements accordingly, disseminating information and recording the processes adopted. This unit, together with the **Unit for Intergovernmental Coordination**, will be responsible for managing a close evidence-based interface with policy, research

and legislative work within the department, in order to create a cohesive response to adjustments in the structural and institutional environments of government. The Command Centre will report to the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and the President.

At provincial level, there will also be a command centre, managed by the heads of department (HODs) of local government departments and with oversight provided by an MECs' task team, which will ensure that the provincial role in the MTAS is monitored, guided and supported. MECs for local government and sector portfolios and the directors-general in the offices of the premiers will also ensure that sector commitments to the MTASs are implemented. The provincial MEC and HOD MTAS teams will report to the provincial cabinets and to MinMEC.

At local level the municipal councils, MuniMECs and district intergovernmental forums will report on MTAS implementation to their respective provincial oversight bodies.

The coordinating framework for the LGTAS is therefore designed to ensure that a close interface with municipalities is maintained, while at the same time providing for clear lines of reporting and accountability within the governance environment.

Performance monitoring for the LGTAS

The LGTAS is the basis for the Ten-Point Plan for Local Government (2010–2014). This plan works in synergy with the pre-2011 and Vision 2014 goals for the LGTAS. The ultimate objective of the LGTAS and the Ten-Point Plan is the

The Ten Point Plan for Local Government

- 1 Improve the **quantity and quality of municipal basic services** to the people in the areas of access to water, sanitation, electricity, waste management, roads and disaster management.
- 2 Enhance the municipal contribution to job creation and sustainable livelihoods through **local economic development**.
- 3 Ensure the development and adoption of **reliable and credible integrated development plans (IDPs)**.
- 4 Deepen democracy through a **refined ward committee model**.
- 5 Build and **strengthen the administrative, institutional and financial capabilities** of municipalities.
- 6 Create a **single window of coordination** for support, monitoring and intervention in municipalities.
- 7 **Uproot fraud, corruption**, nepotism and all forms of maladministration affecting local government.
- 8 Develop a coherent and **cohesive system of governance** and a **more equitable intergovernmental fiscal system**.
- 9 Develop and strengthen a **politically and administratively stable system** of municipalities.
- 10 Restore the **institutional integrity** of municipalities.

achievement of a responsive, accountable, effective and efficient local government system. This objective is captured as outcome 9 of the medium-term strategic framework of government and will be progressively monitored through the government's programme of action.

Local government is everyone's business – be part of it!

The success of the LGTAS depends on a whole-of-government approach to supporting and strengthening municipal capacity and performance, together with nationwide mobilisation. A dedicated stakeholder management unit within the Command Centre will drive the coordination and deployment of skilled volunteers and supporters who can offer practical assistance to the LGTAS and its flagship programmes

Stakeholder support for the LGTAS

During the national Indaba on Local Government stakeholders completed forms detailing the main areas in which they could offer support. Soon associations, NGOs, CBOs, private-sector companies, statutory bodies and similar organisations will become part of the wider network of relationships and skills on offer to local government. One important element of the LGTAS is that it is a coalition-based approach. It is everyone's business, and outside of the roles and responsibilities of each sphere of government, there are numerous other stakeholders ready and willing to come on board.

The **Intergovernmental Working Group** was established in October 2009. It is a forum to monitor the implementation of sectoral intergovernmental agreements for the MTAS and has acted as an advisory body to COGTA within government

Comment

It is important to remember, as we go about our daily business, that we all live in a municipality, somewhere in the country: we are all residents of a ward, and we all have a ward councillor. Most of us receive our services from municipalities, who bill us for these: our water, electricity, refuse removal, sewerage and property rates. Either our local or district municipality, or our province, has various duties to create decent environments for residents in cities, towns and rural areas across South Africa.



Photo: COGTA

These duties include building roads and houses, and providing security, public transport, libraries and sports facilities. We can all assess how well our local municipality and province are doing by the quality of these services, the behaviour of our officials, what the local newspaper reports about the municipality and whether we feel we are important to our ward councillors and the administration.

The quality of life of residents is therefore often a starting point for judging the performance of a municipality and its satisfaction with, or confidence in, the government. The Good Citizenship campaign will be launched soon, its intention being to mobilise communities and municipalities to work together to rebuild the principles of ethical and democratic governance in the daily experience of citizens.

As citizens we need to play our part in mobilising support for the turnaround strategy in our municipal area. We need to help improve municipal capacity to communicate with communities. In so doing, let us take our responsibility for public participation in the IDP and MTAS adoption process seriously this June. Report-backs to communities on progress with implementation are scheduled for September this year. Let's be there!



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