

Service Delivery Issues and Opinion Problems using UMzimkhulu Municipality as Case Study

Paul Kiyotha (Ph.D)

Management College of Southern Africa
Durban
South Africa

&

Frank O. Juahui (Ph.D)

Management College of Southern Africa
Durban
South Africa

ABSTRACT

Service delivery issues have dominated the South African political discourse for a long time. There have been strong negative perceptions by members of the public about the nature of service delivery which many view as unsatisfactory. This motivated this research. The purpose of this research was to determine the perceptions of residents of uMzimkhulu municipality, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa regarding service delivery issues. The other focus of the research was on investigating the factors affecting service delivery in this particular municipality. Recommendations for the improvement of service delivery at uMzimkhulu formed one of the purposes of this research. The central finding of this research was that though there are challenges facing many municipalities, there was a strong perception among respondents that the management at uMzimkhulu municipality are; exercising tight control of resources, resulting in allocation of scarce resources to priority service delivery projects. Poverty, unemployment and growing population as a result of inward migration were found to be the main challenges bedevilling the uMzimkhulu municipality. In conclusion this research recommended that the municipality should create more investment and employment opportunities in order to alleviate poverty and unemployment so as to capacitate residents to be able to pay for municipality services with the eventual improvement of service delivery.

Introduction

Service delivery challenges affecting municipalities have existed for decades if not centuries. However in the South African context, these challenges have recently become acute as witnessed by the surge in service delivery protests across many parts of the country from the years 2013 to late 2014. The protests were mainly about poor service delivery being rolled out by municipalities to their residents. This therefore makes it imperative for both central and local government to introspect and to thoroughly

investigate the source of the problems bedevilling municipalities and to find long lasting solutions that will bring an end to these challenges. This will further lead to the improvement of the living standards of the people and put South African development index. It is hoped that this article will turn up to be of significance to the government of South Africa, municipal administrators and other interested parties including academics. It is hoped that this article will also provide some valuable lessons and insights into municipal management and the betterment of service delivery initiatives for communities in South Africa.

Background to the Problem

Issues relating to service delivery used to start from one region and roll over to other regions as soon as the media shares the news to the whole nation regarding one part of the country. The roles and responsibilities of different spheres of government differ and the community conception in this regard is not clear hence the need for the research to establish their stand point. The local municipality has its own roles and parameters on service delivery that might not be clearly understood by the community. The communication process to the community has also been ear marked for factors contributing to service delivery impediment. The community normally report some issues to the local municipality but this takes either too long to be addressed or not at all, sparking the outrage by the communities. The earlier the identification of the root cause to the service delivery problem, the more property can be spared, since the vandalism incurs costs to restore the damage.

Research Problem

Service delivery protests have increased in the uMzimkhulu area and this normally resulted in further damage to property by the community members. There is need to address the root cause of this challenge and the ageing infrastructure is playing a role on the service delivery. Most infrastructures related to water and sanitation services are now too old to the extent that operational maintenance costs are becoming unsustainable. Some of the services demanded by the community are not actually provided by the local municipality, nevertheless the blame is directed towards the local municipality hence the need involve the local community in this research. The core problem which this paper addresses revolves around the scarcity of adequate financial resources in municipalities to implement service delivery programmes related to water provisioning, sewage and sanitation services in the uMzimkhulu area. This has arisen due to the heavy dependence on a central government support for most programmes and operations. The central government is also overwhelmed by competing needs and is faced with a growing budget deficit further limiting its ability to adequately fund municipal needs. It is this problem that needs to be analysed and solutions to the problem of scarcity of financial resources that needs to be addressed through research and empirical research and study.

Purpose and Objective

The main purpose of this paper is to develop an understanding of how uMzimkhulu municipality can develop their resource capacity towards the improvement of service delivery provisions in the uMzimkhulu area.

Within this context, the major objectives were identified as follows:

- To determine perceptions of service quality at uMzimkhulu municipality;
- To develop a theoretical framework to improve service delivery;
- To determine the factors affecting service delivery uMzimkhulu municipality; and
- To make recommendations on how to improve service delivery at the municipality.

Brief Literature Review

Throughout the world many national governments have experienced a surge in negative perceptions related to their quality and quantity of service delivery roll out especially when it comes to municipalities. Countless studies have been undertaken on the existence of perceptions related to service delivery provision by municipalities. However there has been no attempt by numerous researchers to examine whether the perceptions are justified or not. The researcher is particularly interested in the justification of the perceptions. This is mainly so because some perceptions are inherited from the past, some are informed by prejudices others are informed by experience, others emanates from bias or subjectivity. Perceptions arise from a variety of sources. This explains the reasons for the vast differences of perceptions among different people. Perceptions normally originate from a person „s prior experience say from similar institutions, they also originate from a perception’s expectations of what the particular person expected to experience of from certain beliefs, prejudices that a person was exposed to. Regarding municipalities, perceptions have been formed from people’s prior experiences with previous municipal administrators who were previously convicted of corruption. This has therefore fed into a perception that all municipalities are corrupt. Some perceptions are built from wrong information whilst others are premised on actual experiences.

However, according to McLeod (2007:1) one should also observed that not all perceptions are justified. It is therefore not true that a whole population or sub set of a population displays the same characteristics. It is equally not true that all municipalities are run in a corrupt and inefficient way. According to Poch (2013:1) perception is often more important than reality and they are sometimes not real. Literature has shown the importance of engaging the grassroots for the purposes of soliciting views and ideas for running an organisation. This calls upon municipalities to take public participation in municipal affairs and decision making seriously. Local authorities have therefore more to gain in engaging its residents in relation to its own decision making practises. One such benefit is the fact that views from the grassroots that is people affected by municipal decisions helps municipalities in the proper and acceptable allocation of resources when preparing and implementing budgets. It is from these feedback meetings that municipal

authorities are able to determine the needs of the people and to prioritise fulfilment of those needs. As feedback meetings leads to the identification of people priorities, preparing and implementation of budgets linked to the solving of people's problems will go a long way towards reducing service delivery challenges, frequency of protests and restoring people's confidence in local government administration.

Community engagement helps to correct some misconceptions that people may have about a municipality or an organisation. This is because some perceptions as alluded to earlier emanate from wrong information. So bringing communities closer to municipal management will help reduce the gap between people and expectations and what the municipality can offer. It fosters understanding between the parties. A case in point is a situation when perceptions new of service delivery were formed during periods when there was an incompetent administration, and then a new competent and efficient administration takes over and improves things but people still hang on to the past perceptions. Psychologists have particularly discovered that once people have formed perceptions, it's not easy for them to let go of those perceptions. It is therefore important to note that some perceptions though justified at some point, are sometimes not justifiable under a certain dispensation. Correcting wrong perceptions that communities may have on an organisation must be a priority that any organisation should not ignore. According to Campbell (2009:1) 2/3 of respondents from a survey that was conducted expressed disappointment with service delivery by municipalities. The survey findings pointed to a general belief by respondents that municipalities are performing poorly and therefore falling far short of expectations when they are providing water, sanitation and refuse removal. Campbell's survey further pointed to 62% of respondents expressing disgust at the increasingly deteriorating environmental quality.

Cockroft et al (2002:34) came up with similar findings from his study of Acapulco Mexico city. The Mexicans in Mexico City had similar perceptions of poor service delivery by their municipal authorities. However the city of Acapulco's service delivery challenges were mainly exacerbated by the ever increasing migration of people from rural areas to the city which eventually overwhelmed the water and sewerage systems. These systems were initially designed for a population of one million but the influx of people from rural areas has led to excessive population growth which is making people to fail to cope with the demand of water & provision of proper sanitation. Therefore people perception of poor service delivery should be solved through proper engagement & implementation of people oriented programs that solves their real needs. Some people are of the view that the past was better than the present (Campbell, 2009:2). The truth behind this perception need to be further investigated. This is because the challenges faced by municipalities during the apartheid era and the ones currently being experienced may be different or they differ in both scope and scale. One notable problem is the fact that once a perception has formed it is difficult for people to let go of those perceptions. Perceptions may still stick despite the fact that they will still be some notable improvements. This is the same situation with service delivery issues because there are those who have positive perceptions and those who have negative perceptions.

For example the well to do have been found to have positive perceptions because their residential areas are normally given preferential treatment and also the top management of municipalities resides in those affluent residential areas. This will also be in contrasts with low income residential areas where service delivery is below the acceptable norm and perceptions are expected to be negative.

The current status of service delivery in uMzimkhulu municipality is a mixed bag. There are significant improvements in the provision of clean tapped water in mainly the central Business District and low density areas where the well to do residents of the municipality resides. However the opposite is true for mainly rural areas and high density suburbs where the mainly poor people reside. Kanyane (2007:12) made the same observation in his discourse entitled “service delivery issue in question” whereby he observed similar trends in Johannesburg whereby service delivery roll out is near perfect in areas like Sandton and worse in areas like Alexandra and some parts of Soweto. Similar patterns have been observed in Cape Town where Khayelitsha experiences poor service delivery compared to Bay area. George etc. In well to do suburban areas refuse is collected twice daily while in poor areas it is collected once a week. The lack of services like access roads to areas like Mfulamhle, and Malenge, in uMzimkhulu remains a big challenge. In Malenge, White City and Mfulamhle to mention but a few, electricity connections to poor people’s households are taking place albeit slowly much to the chagrin of residents who are becoming increasingly agitated as evidenced by recent service delivery protestors waving placards inscribed with the words “we want electricity now” (the Tribune, 12 November 2013). The road that passes by Kentucky Fried Chicken turn off to the main street has no robots. In Lourdes there have been numerous water & sanitation complaints since 2010. In White City Township; some roads are in a state of disrepair for a very long time. Recently in early 2015 there were service delivery protests in Sisulu concerning neglect of burst sewer pipes & electricity. In the village of Jericho villagers have been demanding the tarring of their access roads for ages. The state of sanitation facilities is highly unsatisfactory. Burst sewer pipes takes too long to be repaired. This greatly angers residents.

Another bone of contention is the slow pace of housing delivery to the people. The municipality is sitting on a housing waiting list with thousands of names but only a few hundred are being delivered after a long period of time. This goes to confirm that service delivery by this municipality is far from being satisfactory. Though water and sanitation services are the responsibility of Harry Gwala District Municipality, but in terms of government relations, uMzimkhulu municipality is the main partner in rendering these services like technical support in the area of maintenance and repairs. In most cases housing, electricity, roads issues take too long to be attended to, which often frustrates residents and business people in town of UMzimkhulu. The above challenges are not only unique to uMzimkhulu local Municipality but manifest themselves at a national level, as evidenced by service delivery protests in other Municipalities in the country like Malamulele municipality in Limpopo province. All these challenges have led to frequent service delivery protests which in some cases have turned violent leading to destruction

of property worth millions. The municipality has been accused of discharging raw sewage into the environment. Service delivery in low income residential areas is also substandard when it comes to water quality. This is because chemicals used in the purification of water are not always available in sufficient quantities due to financial constraints. The main overriding factors affecting service delivery challenges in most South African Municipalities is insufficient resources in the form of finances and skills.

- **Insufficient Financial Resources and Overdependence on Central Government**

Infrastructure news on service delivery (2013:1) pointed out that in 2008 the (then) National Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) received a report from the Afrikaanse Handels Institute (AHI), alerting the department on service delivery problems in a number of municipalities throughout South Africa. One of their major highlights was insufficient financial resources by municipalities and this is crippling smaller municipalities" like uMzimkhulu's ability to provide world class service delivery amenities to their people. Most municipalities are over dependent on central government financing which in itself is unsustainable because so often government is overburdened by numerous competing needs. In most countries governments are often overstretched such that they are failing to fulfil the increasing needs of their people. Thus is folly for municipalities to rely on central government funding. The scarcity of financial resources is not solely to blame on the central government. The other causes is the absence of a paying culture by income earning residents of municipalities who expect the government to do everything for them instead of them paying for the services they get from the municipality so that the municipality is adequately resourced to improve service delivery. Also the financial resources of the municipalities are made worse by the growing proportion of the indigent population to the income earning residents of rural municipalities like uMzimkhulu.

The declining affordability of services may threaten payment levels. One of the major challenges facing municipality is the problem of poverty. Many households under the jurisdiction of smaller municipalities are poor, only a smaller percentage of the household members are gainfully employed. This has limited the capacity of households to pay for municipal services. This has got broader implications on service delivery because it incapacitates a municipality's ability to plough back the revenue into service delivery roll outs. The source of revenue for municipalities normally comes from residents. Thus their failure to pay will have serious adverse effects on a municipality's ability to provide service delivery at the right time and at the correct level of quality and quantity. This is mainly because municipalities are populated by mostly the unemployed poor people who cannot afford to pay for municipal services. The scarcity of adequate financial resources is the single most significant factor crippling municipalities" ability to roll out services in the quantity and quality that the people expect. Therefore a new model to capacitate the residents to be in a position to pay is required. Due to financial constraints, maintenance of service vehicles and construction equipment has been largely neglected. This has caused numerous breakdowns of both sewerage and water treatment

plants which have manifested itself through poor service delivery. There is a chronic shortage of capital finance available to fund service delivery municipal infrastructure. It is estimated that a total theoretical shortfall in funding for local service delivery infrastructure (the difference between required investments and likely available resources) of R178 billion exists over a 10-year period stretching from the year 2014 to 2015. The real capital funding gap is far greater because municipal borrowing is constrained and developer charges are not recovered. Of the R59.5 billion which was to be funded directly by the municipalities themselves (excluding grants and service provider funding), only R37.2 billion was budgeted for in the 2013/14 financial year, representing a real financing gap of R22.5% or 38%. This reinforces the service delivery challenges as a result of scarcity of financial resources. Figure 1 below refers to the different sources of capital finance for municipalities.

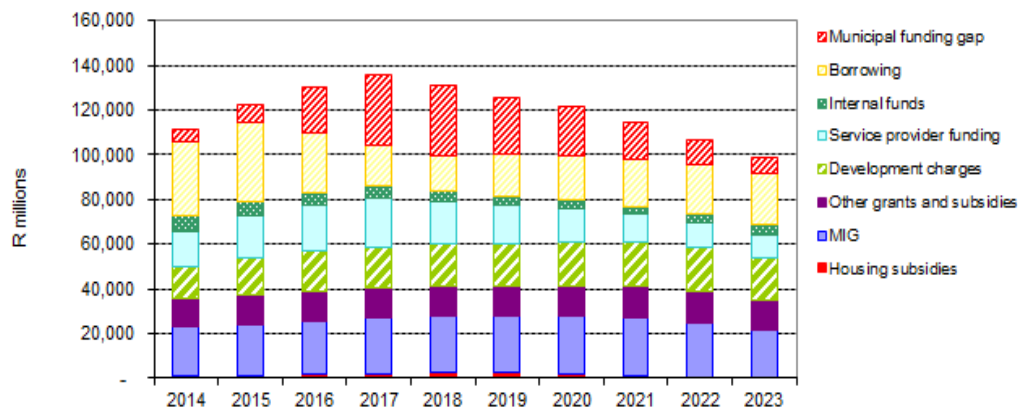


Figure 1 (Source: Infrastructure news (March 3, 2011:12))

As Figure 2 below shows all categories of municipalities have significant funding deficits which are negatively affecting their ability to adequately deal with service delivery challenges. Metropolitan cities have a financing gap of 12% while rural municipalities like uMzimkhulu have a 3% financing gap. (Infrastructure news; March 3, 2011:12) There is no doubt that limited financial resources hinder the performance of municipalities in as far as service delivery roll out is concerned (Campbell, 2009:1).

Municipal category	Total capital funding gap after 10 years (R billion)	Average gap as % of total capital required
A (Metros)	R 104,84	12%
B1 (Secondary Cities)	R 19,24	12%
B2 (Large Towns)	R 12,73	13%
B3 (Small towns)	R 35,15	18%
B4 (Rural)	R 6,43	3%

Figure 2: Capital financing gap by municipal category

Source: Infrastructure news (March 3, 2011:1)

- **Human Resource Challenges**

The budgetary constraints facing many rural municipalities have had a spill over effect into their human resources departments. Because of limited financial resources municipalities like uMzimkhulu are failing to attract suitably qualified mechanical and or technical staffs that are of importance in areas of water and sanitation engineering, housing, maintenance and management which are the main key performance areas in terms of service delivery. A lack of appropriate skills especially in technical and financial areas has negatively affected service delivery. Unattractive compensation packages have led to high turnover among senior qualified and competent staff in rural municipalities. Recent trends have pointed to the frequent resignations of technical staff such as civil engineers who are leaving municipalities for greener pastures (South African Institute of Civil Engineers (SAICE), 2011:24). The effect of this trend has been poor service delivery as people who have the requisite knowledge to deal with water & sanitation technical issues are not always available since it takes quite a bit of time to replace them. The often unsightly condition of water and sewer plants components is testimony to the shortage of critical skilled manpower.

The National Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) in (2008:34) report pertaining to King Daliyebo Municipality pointed to the fact that the operations department has had four directors in a space of three years something which points to high turnover in some municipalities. The appointment of technical directors in this municipality, for a period of five years pointed to short-sightedness and absence of long term planning in municipalities. The (DPLG) in (2008:34) report lamented the absence of proper career and succession planning in municipalities particularly the rural ones. Succession & career planning often result in the proper mentoring of young inexperienced staff so as to prepare them for successful careers in municipalities for effective service delivery. The Development Bank of southern Africa has over the years attempted to address the problem of skills shortages in South African municipalities by seconding technical staff to help struggling municipalities. However this failed to solve the problem because the technical staff also proved to be incompetent and unfamiliar with the technical details of South African municipalities.

- **Political Interference**

Service delivery has in some municipalities been affected by serious political bickering and infighting that has diverted municipal management's attention from concentrating on service delivery to political electioneering and towards strategy aimed at power retention. The casualty has been service delivery.

- **Corruption**

There are numerous press reports about rampant corruption in the municipalities which has led to the misappropriation of funds which were supposed to be channelled to service delivery operations. The most amazing stories pertain to the missing basic equipment such as spanners, screw drivers, brooms, shovels, rakes and wheelbarrows necessary to perform routine service delivery tasks.

- **Poor Forecasting Techniques**

Some municipalities do fail to provide adequate services to their residents because they failed to forecast the effect of migration and population growth on service delivery. Thus this limited demand forecasting abilities have led to the municipalities becoming reactive rather being proactive. In the end they are seen failing to provide services in the manner expected of them.

Research Methodology

This research adopted an analytical descriptive quantitative research design. The analytical descriptive research design managed to establish a relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. In this research independent variables were taken to be resources, management style and professionalism, levels of poverty, migration, service delivery policy and others. This research had only one dependent variable namely; service delivery. A structured questionnaire was utilised for the purposes of gathering information from respondents. The rationale for utilising a questionnaire lies in the fact that it enables the collection of vast quantities of data from a variety of respondents unlike other forms of data collection (Wilkinson & Birmingham .2011:42).

Research Findings on Perceptions of Service Delivery Challenges at Umzimkhulu

Key Findings from the Literature Review

The key finding from the literature review was that most municipalities are facing financial challenges that are incapacitating on their ability to improve service delivery to such an extent that they have adopted the user pay principle as proposed by the new management theory in order to reduce reliance on central government financing.

Key Findings from the Primary Data

The findings from primary research confirmed that the majority of residents of uMzimkhulu municipality that the municipality has adequate financial resources that are being properly allocated to priority service delivery projects by the management. The perception that financial resources are adequate arises from the notion that government is largely funding municipalities. However the municipality is facing large human resources challenges and growing poverty levels arising from high unemployment levels.

Perceptions of service delivery ay uMzimkhulu municipality

One of the objectives of this research was to determine the perceptions of the people of uMzimkhulu municipality. The research findings confirm that 67% of respondents have a strong perception that management of uMzimkhulu municipality exercises tight control over financial resources. This was further confirmed by another 10% who confirmed the same perception. Thus the majority of respondents in this municipality have a favourable perception of management's ability to put in place and enforce internal controls that are promulgated in the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA). This finding can be interpreted to mean that the residents of uMzimkhulu municipality have faith in the resource control practices of the management at uMzimkhulu municipality.

Perceptions of Corruption

There was strong perception among respondents that corruption has a negative impact on service delivery challenges. This leads to the conclusion that the greater majority of the residents of uMzimkhulu municipality have a strong perception that corruption impacts negatively on service delivery. This inadvertently shows that the residents of this municipality are averse to corruption. This explains the reasons why the management re-perceived to exercise tight monetary control.

Perception on Management Competence

The survey it was depicted that in uMzimkhulu municipality there was a general perception that service delivery challenges was as a result of management incompetence.

Perception on Competencies and Skills of Umzimkhulu Municipality

Slightly above half of the respondents (52%) “Strongly agreed” that municipal employees have adequate skills required for service delivery. This research finding leads to the conclusion that on average there is a significant section that are of the perception that the employees of the uMzimkhulu municipality are adequately skilled. An almost equal percentage of respondents strongly disagreed showing that perceptions related to skills and competences of uMzimkhulu municipality are equally divided between negativism and positivism.

Perceptions of Service Delivery Standards

Most of the respondents (71%) strongly agreed that service delivery in uMzimkhulu municipality is up to standard. Nearly a sixth (13%) of the respondents expressed no knowledge of whether service delivery is up to standard and a further (10%) strongly “disagrees” and oppose the assertion. This leads to the conclusion that almost three quarters of the respondents are of the perception that service delivery standards are up to standard. This finding and conclusion further confirms the conclusion that uMzimkhulu municipality management exercises tight control over resources and have greater competence to drive service delivery. There is greater appreciation and positive perceptions among the majority of residents of uMzimkhulu municipality that the management is competent and doing well in as far as making service delivery to be up to standard. About two-thirds of respondents are of the perception that management style contributes to service delivery performance. This means that the performance in terms of service delivery is perceived to be the result of the management style at the municipality. Since almost three quarters of respondents are of the perception that service delivery is up to standard at the municipality, the conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that the municipality management is doing its best despite some challenges that are facing South African municipalities.

Perceptions on the Contribution of Municipalities to Employment Creation

The most frequently occurring response was that respondents “strongly agree to the question that municipalities must contribute to employment creation to solve service

delivery challenges. This effectively means that above two thirds of respondents are of the strong perception that that the municipality has a role to play in alleviating poverty of the people so that they become empowered to contribute financially towards service delivery through paying rates.

A Theoretical Framework on Service Delivery

The second objective of the study was to examine the theoretical framework to improve service delivery. The theoretical related to service delivery was examined particularly the new public management theory and the user pay principle.

Factors affecting Service Delivery at uMzimkhulu Municipality

The third objective of the study was to determine the factors affecting service delivery uMzimkhulu municipality, which were:

a. Contribution of Resources to Service Delivery

Financial resources are one of the fundamental factors contributing to service delivery in municipalities. Thus it is ideally envisaged that adequate financial resources plays a significant role in contributing towards improved service delivery. However adequate financial resources alone can only bring improved service delivery only if there is proper financial management plus good leadership skills. 69.7% of those responding to the question were in strong agreement that financial resources are adequate to service delivery. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the larger majority of the residents of uMzimkhulu municipality are in strong agreement that resources for rolling out service delivery are adequate. An almost similar percentage were of the perception that management at the municipality exercises tight control over the financial resources and also the same percentage had the perception that service delivery is up to standard. The conclusion that can derived from these findings are that adequate financial resources plus financial good financial management plus good leadership at uMzimkhulu has contributed to positive perceptions among a majority of residents that service delivery is up to standard.

b. Allocation of resources to critical resources

As alluded to above adequate resources alone are not enough to bring about improved service delivery without efficient allocation of those resources to critical or priority areas. The majority of respondents (69%) were completely satisfied with prioritisation of resources towards service delivery.

c. Contribution of poverty to service delivery

A larger majority of respondents were completely satisfied with prioritisation of resources. This demonstrates that uMzimkhulu municipality management is spending money in accordance with community priorities.

d. Contribution of Inward Migration to Service Delivery

From the research findings it can be concluded that the majority of respondents strongly agree that inward migration is contributing to service delivery challenges at uMzimkhulu municipality

Recommendations on Strategies to Improve Service Delivery

The fourth objective of the study was to make recommendations on how to improve service delivery at the municipality. From the literature review and the empirical findings it is evident that specific attention should be paid to certain aspects that are impacting on service delivery. The following recommendations, informed by the literature review and empirical findings, are that;

- The municipality should engage in intensive investment promotion activities to boost investment and create jobs so that as many residents as possible can have disposable incomes to pay for municipal services.
- The municipality must adopt a zero tolerance on corruption by taking stern measures on culprits. This will act as a deterrence to would be potential fraudsters.
- More resources must be channelled to service delivery issues.
- Management must do more to curb corruption.

Conclusion

Smaller municipalities like the uMzimkhulu are struggling to operate and maintain their services infrastructure in a cost-effective and sustainable manner and grossly failing to provide services to their residents as per the required standards. Most municipalities including uMzimkhulu are experiencing service delivery challenges arising out of inadequate financial resources to adequately provide world class services to their residents. The provision of services like water and sanitation is enshrined in the constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Since 1994 the government has passed several laws in the mould of the Municipal systems Act section 117 of 1998, the Municipal finance Management act of 2003 all of which have policy prescriptions that deals with service delivery issues.

The central main finding from both the literature review and primary research was that the municipality should engage in income generating projects as a poverty alleviation measure. The uMzimkhulu municipality must develop their resource capacity towards the improvement of service delivery provisions in the uMzimkhulu area and they must create investment promotional activities to boost investment and create jobs so that as many residents as possible can have disposable incomes to pay for municipal services. Furthermore the municipality must adopt a zero tolerance on corruption by taking stern measures on culprits.

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