Factors Contributing to Poor Service Delivery in South African Rural Communities

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Abstract: The lives of the South Africans citizens in most rural communities are currently being impacted by the poor level of services delivery. South Africa has been a democratic country since 1994, however, after 26 years of freedom, citizens are still struggling to meet the basic needs, such as water and sanitation, transport, good roads and technological infrastructures and education. The level of service delivery in rural communities is less than compared to urban areas and furthermore, there is no sign of improvement. There is a need to improve the level of service delivery in rural areas as the pace of service delivery has been slow and poor. Though the local municipalities are mandated to provide good quality services to the rural areas, however, most municipalities also face infrastructure challenges. The paper aims to analyse the factors contributing to poor service delivery in South African rural communities.

Keywords: Basic needs, Economic development, Local municipalities, Service delivery, Rural communities

1. Introduction

The paper investigates the factors contributing to poor service delivery in South African rural communities. The trust of the South Africans on their government is gradually dropping, and this is negatively impacting the country's economic development (Macanda, 2014:01). Unsatisfied rural citizens all over the country have gradually complained about poor service delivery in all of the 283 local municipalities and there seems to be no hope that the level of service delivery will ever improve (Noruwana, 2015:18). A lack of good quality life in rural areas has contributed to the creation of unhealthy and unsafe numerous strikes. These unrests are creating repeatedly nationwide incidents reported throughout by the media. The police are always being called to maintain order and to execute the law, however the answer does not lie in policing but rather in prompting solutions to the socio-economic situations that happen in most rural communities (Noruwana, 2015:19). "South Africa is a constitutional democratic country with a three-tier system of government and an independent judiciary" (South Africa Yearbook, 2018/19). The local government, provincial and national level, have all their jurisdictive and executive authority in their individual domains. Government as well as the respective departments are committed to building a free, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, united and successful country.

In terms of the South African constitutional framework, service delivery sits with local government; they are at the forefront in understanding citizen's needs and they are the 'delivery arm' of government (Republic of South Africa, 1996). This task calls for strong leadership and clear vision in terms of promoting service delivery. The challenge faced by rural communities is that the amount of reliable and usable information that reaches these areas is almost negligible, yet they constitute the backbone of the bigger part of the country in terms of development and industrialisation. To begin with, many rural areas lag behind in terms of health care, education, agriculture or even home affairs information (Mkhomazi, 2013:127).

Prior to 1994, South Africa was under the apartheid government regime, which encouraged racial separation among people of all races. However, the situation took a turn after the democratic election in 1994. To strengthen the relationship between people of all the races, the South African Government introduced the Batho Pele (people first) principle. The essence of Batho Pele is to transform the way in which people across the country including rural areas communicate and access government information and services in a more convenient way. Unlike in the apartheid regime where citizens could not get hold of public service information or services (Visser & Twinomurinzi, 2015:36), democratic government took an initiative

of taking government services from the government offices to the people. Batho Pele is a transparent mechanism that allows South African citizens to hold public servants accountable for the service they deliver (Department of Public Service and Administration, DPSA, 2010:1). The core of Batho Pele is about understanding that the needs and the expectations of citizens are met, respecting the dignity of South Africans as well as acknowledging their rights. It will be preferable for the Batho Pele principle to form part of performance agreements for all government employees.

2. An Overview of the South African Government

South Africa has three tiers, which is national, provincial and local government, sometimes called municipalities. They all have their executives and legislative. Local government is viewed as a public management. It exists as a lowest tier of administration. Local government acts within powers delegated to them by legislation or directives of the higher level of management. Local government is anticipated to play a massive role in terms of community development.

Local government in South Africa is in crisis; 257 local municipalities in South Africa are in a very devastating financial position (City Press, 2018:01). According to the report presented by the Auditor General, the late Mr Kimi Makwetu on the 30th of May 2018, 31 percent of the municipalities are not financially stable. Among other factors, the Auditor General indicated that lack of accountability, mismanagement, lack of financial skills and politics are some of the key factors contributing to these municipalities' failures (Auditor General Report, 2018). At the moment local government (municipalities) are unable to deliver proper service delivery to people in rural communities, such as clean water, transportation, health care services and accessibility to technology. The rising number of strikes by angry citizens serves as proof that local government is failing to provide good service delivery to the citizens. This is a national crisis that calls all bodies to work together to improve the efficiency of service delivery. Accountability is one of the important values of the country's constitutional democracy (Tuke, Karunakaran & Huka, 2017:65), As a result, it is very important that all spheres of government understand the roles that they are expected to play to cure the existing problems.

2.1 National Government

The national government is made up of three "inter-connected divisions", which is parliamentary, legislative including the national assembly and the national council of provinces. Legislative and Parliamentary contain the national assembly and the national council (Parliamentary of the Republic of South Africa, 2018). Then there is Executive, which is led by the president who is also the head of state and head of government. Lastly, Judicial, the constitutional court, the supreme court of appeal and the high court. All the bodies of the South African government are subjected to the rule of the Constitution, which is the supreme law in South Africa (Parliamentary of the Republic of South Africa, 2018). National governments are accountable for the maintenance of internal and external security and firmness. This level of government designs and develops national laws and enforces them, and trains a military and sets international policy. Government, as well as respective departments, is committed to ensure alignment of government-wide priorities, government departments facilitate and monitor the implementation of priority programmes by providing a consultative platform on cross-cutting priorities (The Department of Public Service and Administration, 2014:05).

2.2 The Provincial Government

The provincial governments are structured in line with the parliamentary system in which the executive is reliant on accountable legislature. In each sphere, the provincial legislature is directly nominated by proportionate representation and the administration in turn elects one of its members as Premier to head the executive. In accordance with the Constitution, each province has its own legislature, consisting of between 30 and 80 members of the provincial legislature (MPLs). The provincial constitution corresponds with the national Constitution. The authorities of the provincial governments are bounded by the national constitution, which restricts them to some registered "functional areas".

Provincial and local governments play a complementary and critical role in eradicating poverty and inequality (South Africa Yearbook, 2018/19). Both provincial and municipalities manage general public road networks, and support public transport services. Furthermore, they also manage aspects

of planning and regulatory systems that control land use, influence infrastructure rollout and facilitate economic activity. Provincial government is expected to effectively attain its mandatory mission of delivering services that are adequate and responsive to the needs of the community. There is huge backlog of service delivery in both provincial and local government. This sphere of government should successfully shift from weakness to excellence in as far as service delivery is concerned (Moyo, 2016:01). Locally, the term service delivery is a popular phrase that is used to signify the delivery of basic common needs and services, particularly housing, water and sanitation, land, electricity and infrastructure, which local communities have taken for granted and become dependent on for their daily survival. The delivery and continuing maintenance of these basic services have proved to be unreliable at times and significantly disrupting and jeopardizing local community's health and life style.

2.3 Rural Communities of South Africa

Rural areas are those communities that are located outside towns and cities, In general, it is the population and housing that is not included in the urban areas (Mkhomazi & Lyamu, 2013:27). People in rural areas have few choices in the social and economic terms as compared to people living in the urban areas. People in the rural areas are facing a lot of challenges such as unemployment, low income and quality of social services. Therefore, a lack of accessibility to e-government infrastructure has contributed to the high level of unemployment and poor good quality life in the country's rural areas (villages). These have led to the majority of people in rural communities migrating to urban areas to gain accessibility to better government services (Mkhomazi & Lyamu, 2013:27).

Another challenge faced by rural communities is that the amount of reliable and usable information that reaches these areas is almost negligible, yet they constitute the backbone of the bigger part of the country in terms of development and industrialisation (Noruwana, 2015:18). To begin with, many rural areas lack behind in terms of health care, education, agriculture and telecommunication infrastructure (Mkhomazi & Lyamu, 2013:127). As a result, many rural areas in the country do not have telecommunication network coverage. Without telecommunication, no current market information is available for promoting economic growth and

development in these areas (Mkhomazi & Lyamu, 2013:27). The poor economy limits job opportunities for residents especially those in rural areas due to a lack of various skills and technological infrastructures such as e-government.

The National Treasury, in their article, confirmed that 69% of South Africans are living in poverty and these people are likely to be from the rural communities (National Treasury, 2011:01). People in rural communities rely on farming as their source of living because they get food from it. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (2002:01) mentioned that globally the demand for agricultural products is expected to slow down in the year 2030, from an average of 2.2 percent annually. This literally means that farming in some areas will no longer be productive which will affect the country's economic growth negatively, as well as unemployment and poverty will increase in these communities.

The challenges of poverty and unemployment are compounded by limited access to e-government services (Trusler, 2003:504). The statement was further supported by The Global Agenda Council on the Future of Cities (2002:01) by pointing out that the top ten inventions implemented in South Africa are only benefiting urban areas and not rural communities. Accessibility to e-government services could encourage youth in rural areas to participate in socio economic activities and give their contributions to the country's economy (Venkatesh, Sykes & Venkatraman, 2013:249). In essence government needs to deploy these technological innovations in rural areas to close this existing gap between rural and urban areas to be able to meet the objective of the Batho Pele principle.

Rural communities travel long distances to government district headquarters to request copies of public records, submit applications, meet officials, or seek information. This also involves cost as well as transportation (Noruwana, 2015:18). The lack of, or the absence of e-government accessibility thereof, has resulted in many service deliveries protests across South Africa, leading to loss of human lives and destruction to property (Noruwana, 2015:18). As difficult as it is, of getting over the challenges that are encountered in the rural areas, getting access to e-government is only the battle. The victory lies in ensuring that the services of e-government are utilised by both rural and urban equally. According

to Mafunisa (2008:9), the needs of citizens living in rural areas are not met because of the unethical behaviour which often starts at the top of public service leadership, where public service values are not personified and promoted. This is mainly because of a lack of accountability for promoting quality public service. It can be argued that by placing greater accountability for adhering to rules and procedures, instead of a similar focus on quality public services, effectiveness and efficiency, the South African public service has been affected. The proper telecommunication infrastructures and good committed leadership is needed in South Africa so that true progress in this arena can become a reality.

2.3.1 Rural Communities' Development
Time has passed, yet many issues in South Africa remain unchanged. The rate of unemployment and poor service delivery continues to deepen, and the reality is that rural communities have social economic challenges. The lives of ordinary South Africans continue to be threatened by poor service delivery, diseases and poor health care issues. During the state of nation address on the 13th of February in 2020, the president of the Republic of South Africa outlined that 1200 medical doctors had graduated from Nelson Mandela Medical School. However, still today, the rural areas continue to suffer in terms of medical issues and with no more mobile clinics to attend to their medical needs, especially the elderly people with chronic diseases who are unable to walk themselves (National State Address, 2020).

Rural development is a fundamental task that requires good leadership. There were growing criticisms that rural communities are forever neglected and even the policies neglected the poor (Nkomo, 2017:01). South African rural communities' challenges should not be taken lightly and poor service delivery should not ignore. Rural community's lack of service delivery is not due to a lack of resources, but a management problem. The country is blessed with so many things yet its true essence is still missing. The issue of poverty, unemployment and a lack of e-government accessibility contribute heavily to the poor economy of the country. South Africa missed various opportunities due to its political unrest and continued mismanagement (Daily Maverick Newspaper, 2019:1). Community development consists of a sequence of actions and decisions that improve the conditions of a community. This includes ensuring the safety of the people in the rural community, ensuring that they are economically advanced and are a strong functioning community. The Health Resource and Service Administration of the United States Department of Health and Human Resource (2019:01) explained "rural" as the areas that "encompass" individuals and housing that are not included in the urban area. Rural areas have a low-density population and small settlement and they depend on agriculture for living.

The lack of e-government accessibility positions huge social economic challenges in rural communities. Modern technology such as e-government and know-how will promote high levels of youth participation in building the economy as well as creating employment. Citizens have the right to use government services including the online ones. This right is clearly stipulated in the Bill of Rights document; the right to freedom. It is the second chapter of the Constitution which was signed by the late President Nelson Mandela in 1996 as the highest law of the country. The Bill of Rights contains Section 7 to Section 39 of the Constitution and the human rights it protects are laid out in 27 sections, from Section 9 to Section 37 (South African Constitution, 2006). In simple term every citizen declared by the South African Department of Home of Affairs is entitled to accessibility to information technology use such as e-government to build future growth of the country. Critical action needs to be taken such as rolling out e-government and broadband in rural communities.

Technology is moving at a fast pace, and rural communities and schools are always left behind. Furthermore, during the state of nation address the president said that in decades to come the government will build a smart city where about 350, 000 to 500, 000 people will be housed, and that there will be the introduction of robotics as a subject in primary school. Yet the rural communities still struggle in terms of digital infrastructure due to the fact that they are costly (South African State of the Nation Address, 2020). This process will require Wi-Fi access which is still an ongoing challenge in the rural areas. Most free Wi-Fi is more accessible in urban areas and townships than in rural areas. One key question is how the country is going to ensure that all schools in South Africa are connected with free Wi-Fi and broadband. This is a fundamental task that calls for open-mindedness, determination and willingness. The route to successful and efficient service delivery is very

complicated, which requires accountability, proper infrastructure and proper funding from government and policy makers.

3. Service Delivery in South Africa

Van Antwerpen and Ferreira (2016:81) highlighted that the poor levels of service delivery is influenced by lack of qualified officials in the government to do the essential maintenance work and to develop excellent strategies that could keep the communities running smoothly. The mandate of the governments is to ensure that all citizens are provided with services to satisfy their basic needs. It is only standard that people have access to basic services (South African Constitution, 2017:01). These include health services, education, employment, rural development and anticorruption. These services have a direct and immediate effect on individual quality of life in the country.

It is stated in the South African Constitution (2017:01) that all the people in South Africa are entitled to good quality service. A lack of good quality life in rural areas has contributed to the creation of unhealthy and unsafe numerous strikes. These unrest incidents are repeatedly reported nationwide throughout the media. Police are endlessly called to maintain order and to impose the law. However, the solution to the problem does not lie in policing but much rather in speedy solutions to the socio-economic conditions that prevail in many communities (Noruwana, 2015:18). Critical involvement of the government in relation to these conditions is mandatory for efficient and effective functioning and service delivery.
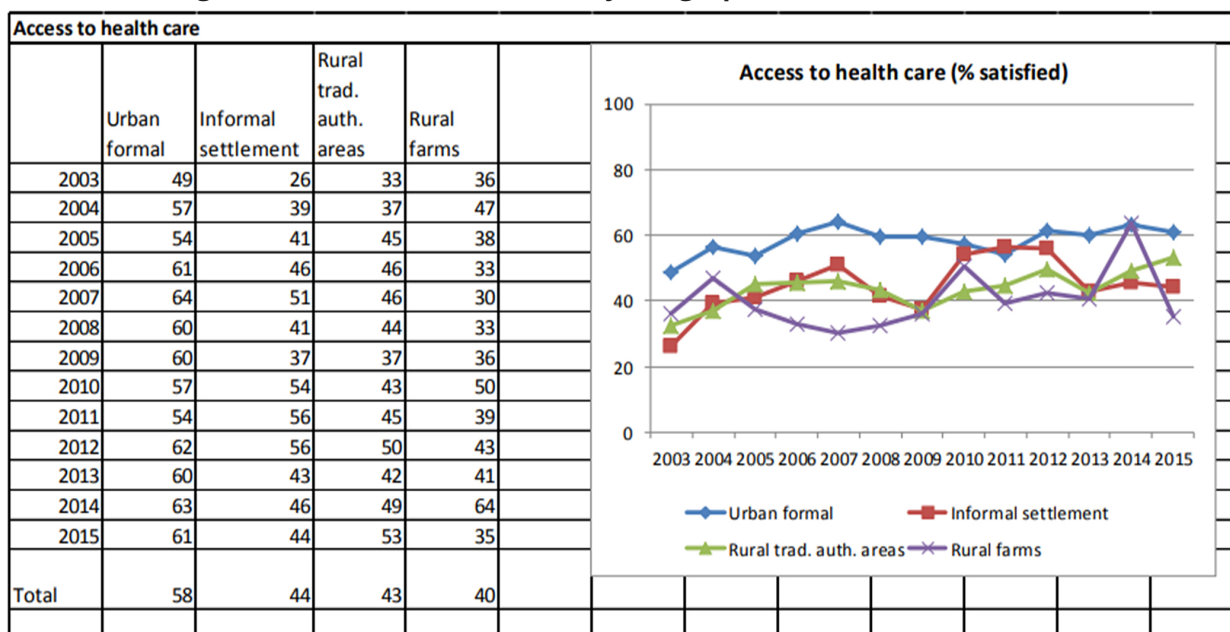
When comparing strike rates per month it is clear that South Africa is moving in the wrong direction and this is negatively affecting the economy of the country (City Press, 2018:01). Ongoing service delivery strikes paint South Africa with a negative picture. Although the South African government has made an important improvement with regard to creating more equality within society and building infrastructure in towns, the challenges of life such as poor service delivery is still an ongoing issue (Bohler-Muller, Davids & Roberts, 2016:03). The slow pace of service delivery has influenced a high rate of protests. The majority of South African citizens are becoming more impatient with the government as it fails to provide proper service delivery as outlined in the Constitution (City Press, 2018:01). South Africa has so far seen 144 service delivery strikes since

January 2018, of which most of them turn violent. Government's consistent failure to provide citizens with the basic needs sets as the core of the strike (Newsletter, 2010:01). However, government should be praised and accredited for major infrastructure development inventiveness. As indicated in the service delivery report of 2009, improvement has been roughly across the country with diverse matters facing different parts (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2009:10). The problem is that not all service delivery improvements match the needs of many citizens, especially those in rural communities.

Service delivery in rural areas is labelled as expensive when compared to urban areas. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2019:01), the challenges hindering service delivery in rural areas is the distance that is travelled by service providers to users and the issue of lower density populations. People shift from rural areas to urban areas in order to have access to telecommunication, health care service and better education. Access to healthcare service is critical to good health. According to the Rural Health Information and Hub (2019:10), the population from rural areas and farms experience poor health services as opposed to people living in urban areas. Affordability, proximity and quality are the main issues as compared to urban areas. Travelling costs are more expensive. The barriers to health care in those areas result in unmet health needs including lack of preventing and screening service and treatment for illness than to people who are living in the remote areas. According to Human Science Research Council survey conducted between the year 2003 to 2015, access to health care is sitting at 40% in rural farms, 43% in rural areas and 44% in informal settlement.

This serves as proof that poor health care services are below the national average rate. Various factors were indicated as contributing to the poor service delivery in rural areas. One factor, among others, is the shortages of physicians and other health care professionals. In areas where there is a disproportionate number of elderly patients', a shortage of qualified medical professional and lack of prescriptions is a major concern. This is due to the fact that these medical professionals have to travel long distances to rural hospitals which also costs them more. The second element is finance competition; apparently doctors practicing in rural areas are

Figure 1: Access to Health Care by Geographical Location 2003 – 2015

Access to health care					
	Urban formal	Informal settlement	Rural trad. auth. areas	Rural farms	
2003	49	26	33	36	
2004	57	39	37	47	
2005	54	41	45	38	
2006	61	46	46	33	
2007	64	51	46	30	
2008	60	41	44	33	
2009	60	37	37	36	
2010	57	54	43	50	
2011	54	56	45	39	
2012	62	56	50	43	
2013	60	43	42	41	
2014	63	46	49	64	
2015	61	44	53	35	
Total	58	44	43	40	

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitude Survey (2003 – 2015)

Figure 2: Job Creation by Geographical Location 2003 – 2015

Job creation					
	Urban formal	Informal settlement	Rural trad. auth. areas	Rural farms	
2003	10	6	4	13	
2004	12	9	8	20	
2005	9	11	7	13	
2006	9	6	5	13	
2007	10	5	4	11	
2008	11	5	7	7	
2009	12	11	4	9	
2010	15	9	6	13	
2011	16	14	8	20	
2012	8	8	6	9	
2013	9	10	9	15	
2014	12	11	8	14	
2015	8	11	8	8	
Total	11	9	6	13	
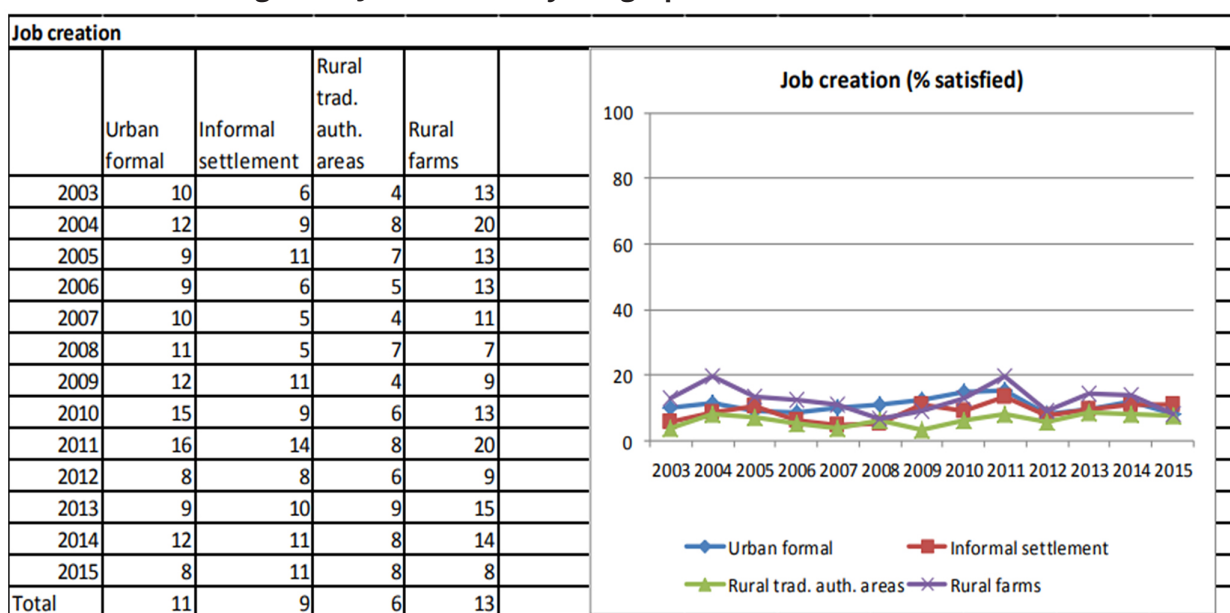
Source: HSRC South African Social Attitude Survey (2003 – 2015)

poorly compensated as compared to those practicing in remote areas (Weisgrau, 1995:01). Rural hospitals and clinics must continuously increase pay out for medical staff to contend with unfavourable economic conditions.

The Human Science Research Council further conducted a survey to understand the percentage of unemployment in rural areas between the year 2003 and 2015. According to Figure 2, people in rural areas are mostly unemployed, and those on farms are dependent on farming for a living. The graph below indicates the level of job satisfaction in rural communities and farms.

According to Nleya in Kanyane (2014:96), service delivery remains a central, symbolic part of the actualisation of meaningful life in poor areas. This is

because improved services are linked to increasing the dignity of the poor who were repeatedly denied legitimate space and decent living conditions under the apartheid government. It is therefore important to underscore that municipalities are obliged to deliver services to the satisfaction of the end-users. Local government all around the country are reported to be failing to provide good and quality service delivery to the citizens, hence communities raise their concerns through violent protest. Whether good or bad protests, this is an expression that people have reached unbearable impatience and panic levels.

Platforms such as e-government can be implemented in these areas to be a listening tool for the government. People in rural areas can use e-government to report poor service delivery in hospitals and also in municipalities. By allowing e-government accessibility in rural areas it will also enhance empowerment, especially for farming and cultivating. Although e-government is regarded as the best in terms of developing the communities, service delivery in rural communities is sitting with local government. It is the duty to the local municipalities to ensure that rural communities have access to e-government and government information, access to health care services and better education. In many cases, government services fail to reach the poor people in rural communities. Finally, a major challenge in the service delivery of rural communities is the lack of direct mechanisms for citizens to hold service providers accountable for the delivery of service. In order to improve the existing service delivery challenges, new strategies need to be formulated, such as placing the service provider at the community level. "Consolidation of services", consternating customers on a smaller number of service locations. The second strategy is "Geolocation" which facilitates matching between the supply and the demand for services (Saxena & Chauhan, 2016:02).

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The weaknesses or poor service delivery in South Africa's rural communities is caused by a number of issues. The first issue identified was political interference at local, provincial and national level, which greatly affects efficiency of service delivery as well as development. The study of Masuku and Jili (2019) has also pointed out that the current government system is spoiled by high political favours and political interferences and they hinder the progress of delivering

good service delivery to other citizens of the country. The slow pace of providing good services to rural communities in South Africa has formed a socio-political problem. The issue of service delivery is not the issue of local government alone, but has also escalated to be the national issue. On the other hand, the housing crisis issue as one important need of the citizens could not be resolved due to the fact that government does not have enough resources, which includes money. However, this issue was caused by maladministration starting from the local level going through to the national level. A lack of or poor financial management practices or record keeping has made corruption possible. The issue of maladministration was reported more often on news and media, where some of the municipalities and government departments from various provinces were put under administration. In addition to that, the literature review has revealed that a number of allegations were also made on nepotism in the government sector, and the allocation of government tenders to incompetent contactors who could not carry out the government duties as outlined in the tender document. This has left the lives of poor people stranded with no help. This issue was also reported in the media, which also left some government officials going to the Zondo commission. In some municipalities, mayors and councils were reported to be paid for the job that they did not perform. If the problem is not attended to, poor service delivery will probably continue which will result in cost increases, higher frustration levels of the community, and a decrease in foreign investment. People in rural areas have few choices in the social and economic terms as compared to people living in the urban areas. People in the rural areas are facing a lot of challenges such as unemployment, low income and low quality of social service like education, healthcare and tele-communication infrastructure. Critical involvement of the government in relation to these conditions is mandatory for efficient and effective functioning and service delivery. When comparing strike rates per month, it is clear that South Africa is moving in the wrong direction and this is negatively affecting the economy of the country.

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