



INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS ENHANCING AND AFFECTING SERVICE DELIVERY IN LEKWA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis report titled 'Institutional factors enhancing and affecting service delivery in Lekwa Local Municipality' is my own work, completed with the guidance and support of Dr Nedson Pophiwa as the academic supervisor. I have acknowledged and referenced all sources that I have used and quoted. I hereby submit it in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Management in Governance (Public Policy) in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I have not submitted this report before for any other degree or examination to any other institution.

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1 Chronicles 16:34 “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to every girl or boy, young and old, may you find the inspiration to achieve your dreams and reach even greater heights.

ABSTRACT

The discourse surrounding South African local governments often highlights deficiencies in the efficient and effective delivery of basic social services. This study was motivated by the absence of viable solutions to the persistent challenges facing service delivery in local municipalities, and the Lekwa Local Municipality was no exception. Situated in the Mpumalanga Province, the Lekwa Local Municipality serves as a compelling case study to explore the institutional challenges that both enhance and hinder service delivery.

The municipality has grappled with significant administrative instability and a lack of political oversight. Consequently, its capacity to deliver services has been severely compromised. These institutional challenges have manifested in various forms, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate resource allocation, and a lack of strategic planning and implementation. As a result, the municipality has struggled to meet the needs of its residents and address pressing socio-economic issues within its jurisdiction.

By examining the institutional factors contributing to these challenges, this study seeks to provide valuable insights into the complexities of service delivery in local government settings. By understanding the root causes of these issues, policymakers, stakeholders, and community members can work towards implementing targeted interventions to improve governance processes, enhance accountability mechanisms, and ultimately, strengthen the capacity of local municipalities to deliver essential services to their constituents. The Lekwa Local Municipality has witnessed unrest and protest, due to poor service delivery.

The research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing a non-probability purposive sampling technique to select fourteen participants. This method was chosen deliberately to ensure that participants possessed relevant insights and experiences related to the research topic. Data collection was conducted through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences, and opinions.

The study's findings shed light on persistent challenges within the Lekwa Local Municipality despite the introduction of new leadership initiatives aimed at enhancing service delivery. A critical issue identified is the dire lack of leadership at both the political and administrative levels, resulting in a vacuum of oversight and accountability. This lack of effective leadership

has allowed self-interest and expediency to prevail, undermining the municipality's ability to fulfil its mandate.

The study concludes by stating findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms within the Lekwa Local Municipality to address the root causes of poor service delivery. This includes strengthening leadership and accountability mechanisms, implementing transparent and accountable governance practices, and mobilizing resources effectively to ensure the delivery of quality services to residents. Only through concerted efforts to address these challenges can the municipality begin to regain the trust and confidence of its constituents and achieve meaningful improvements in service delivery outcomes.

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CHAPTER 1

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

As the Republic of South Africa transitioned to a constitutional democracy, the government described its policies as articulations and guidelines for building a society that prioritises and protects the rights of women and men, regardless of race, status, or cultural differences. The adoption of the Republic of South Africa's Constitution in 1996 marked a significant milestone in this transformation process. As this new dispensation took hold, local government became essential to the country's transformation and development aspirations. The Constitution of together with all the related policies and legislations outlined the functions of local government as an assortment of basic services that primarily include the provision of water, sanitation, electricity, land use building, waste management and stormwater drainage (Pierterse, Parnell, Swiling and Van Donk, 2008; Nicholas, 2018:1). In the same vein, local government is responsible for driving the development agenda within that specific sphere of government to create sustainable and integrated human settlements that are complex in coordination and that advance sustainable local economies through local economic development.

Decades later since 94, many municipalities in South Africa face a huge challenge in governance and service delivery. Swilling (1997:213) argues that the political response to apartheid significantly influenced the way municipal service delivery was done in post-apartheid South Africa. As much as the local government has been mandated to deliver services to the community, it is quite evident that what is expected is beyond their capacity to deliver. There is growing realisation that the basic services that are provided by municipalities are critically important to the citizens but more, so a critical aspect of policy implementations aimed at alleviating unemployment and inequality (Pieterse and Van Donk, 2008:51; Scheepers, 2015:16). Mothae (2008:822) convincingly argues that the performance of the local government is related to tackling poverty alleviation, as its role in the sphere of

government is most directed to the rendering of services to communities and most importantly the implementation of the mandated developmental agenda (Scheeper, 2004:2; Asmah-Andoh, 2009:104).

According to Scheepers (2015), there is an increasing realisation that South Africa is faced with dire challenges concerning the capacity of skills, the ability to manage complex systems and the ability to deliver on their mandate. In most cases, it then becomes difficult for local governments to deliver on their mandate as they lack financial stability, the right skills, and the capacity. Cameron and Mike (2013) emphasize that many local governments do not resemble the role portrayed in The White Paper on Local Government (1998) and that many municipal failures are due to institutional failures plagued by challenges. The major concerns to the dysfunction in the municipalities as mentioned in the Department of Cooperative Governance Report (2009) attributed to: (i) The massive service delivery and challenges in backlog; (ii) Inadequate municipal capacity due to scarce skills; (iii) Poor communication between the municipality and communities; and (iv) Political issues play a negative role in service delivery.

Providing quality basic services to any local community, does not only contribute to poverty alleviation and economic growth, but it directly impacts citizens' social and political status (Goldstein, 2008: 01; Shah, 2005: 40). Malefane (2010:1) echoes similar sentiments by indicating that, effective public service delivery is essential in achieving government's objective to improving the quality of life for its citizens. In recent years local municipalities have been facing several institutional challenges that hinder the success of delivering services to the communities. These include mismanagement of finances, human resources, infrastructural challenges, corrupt practices, and maladministration (Mdlongwa, 2014).

The Lekwa Local Municipality, situated in the southwest of the Gert Sibande District Municipality, in the Mpumalanga province, is no different from the other dysfunctional municipalities in South Africa. The inability of the municipality to deliver services to the

community does not only reflect on the lack of resources but rather it reflects on the institutional challenges afflicting the municipality. This Chapter will establish the background problem which is to explore institutional factor that hinders service delivery and the effect the institutional challenges have on service delivery by looking at the Lekwa Local Municipality. In addition, the chapter will establish the objectives of the research and the research questions that will guide the research.

1.2 Study Context: South Africa's ailing local government sector

Since the beginning of the democratic era, strategies for poverty alleviation have been at the forefront of the South African government led by the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC-led government implemented several pieces of legislation and policies designed to promote economic growth, and development, and improve local government performance, intending to reduce unemployment, poverty, and inequality.

While there had been development in accessing education, healthcare, and housing unfortunately the majority of the citizens in rural areas still suffered from the lack of basic services like water, electricity, and sanitation. The majority of the poor people, estimated at 32.15%, still live in rural areas where the lack of service delivery is a major issue (World Bank, 2021). This stipulates that even after twenty years of the establishment of democracy, there is still uncertainty about the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of local government. Jolobe (2014) contends that local government has fallen short of its constitutional mandate.

The state of local government is often characterized as dismal, and the capacity to deliver and the political commitment needed to drive these imperatives represents the main challenges (Booyesen, 2015). The national government acknowledge that there are serious problems at the local government level. A number of issues have been highlighted as affecting governance at the local government level, including tension within the political interface, unstable administrative leadership, skills deficiencies, poor organizational design, low staff morale, and limited accountability. Several apparent capacity shortages exist in most municipalities, according to Madumo & Koma (2019), including a shortage of professionals, mismanagement

of municipal assets, a lack of consequence management, an absence of internal controls, inadequate revenue collection, and an enormous Eskom debt.

Lekwa Local Municipality (LLM), which is of interest to this study, is constitutionally mandated to deliver basic services to the communities. The most significant basic services are water, provision of sanitation, supply of electricity, refuse removal, municipal roads and stormwater drainage. But unfortunately, the municipality has been caught up in some serious service delivery debacles. The LLM is faced with challenges that include, corruption, inadequate housing, lack of reliable water, lack of skilled workers, poor financial management and poor policy implementation (Mashini, 2018; Majova, 2018). Even more unfortunate is that most of the people living in these rural communities are unemployed, and lack basic services, proper health care and education facilities (Mashini, 2018). The poor service delivery by the local authorities has frustrated communities, resulting in frequent protests about the standard and quality of the service delivery, leadership, and lack of good governance (Shai 2017). To prove that the municipality has challenges, on the 12th of July 2022 the residents of Lekwa embarked on a service delivery protest, where a memorandum was handed over to the municipal officials demanding water, sanitation, electricity, and road infrastructure (Monareng, 2022).

It could be suggested that the poor service delivery at the LLM is due to the combination of institutional, political, administrative, and financial challenges. According to a financial recovery plan that was published by the National Treasury, the Municipality has no capacity to provide services to the community due to financial constraints, infrastructure challenges and the lack of governance. The report further revealed that the Lekwa Local Municipality has a debt exceeding R1.6 billion as of September 2022 towards Eskom and a credit amounting to R1.7 billion, for the financial period ending in 2019/2020 (Dludla, 2021; Standerton Advertiser, 2022). The municipality's performance continuously demonstrates the magnitude of flaws and weaknesses in meeting its constitutional and statutory duties. The deterioration of the municipality's performance had prompted the provincial government, with the support of the National government to implement an intervention in accordance with Section 139(1) of the

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. This study aimed to investigate the institutional challenges which hinder the ability of the Lekwa Local Municipality to deliver services.

1.3 Problem Statement

The interest in this study stemmed from an observation that the lack of service delivery in rural areas is still prevalent and is thus far from improving in South Africa despite policies that have been implemented over the past few decades. It is noted that some programmes and policies are currently in place, yet they are unable to eradicate all the problems besides that experiences between urban and rural communities widely differ (South Africa, 2018). Regardless of all the effort that has been made by the South African government in cooperation with local municipalities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and traditional leaders, the lives of the marginalised, remain in distress. In this regard, the study is therefore an attempt to investigate the institutional challenges that hinder the municipality in delivering its mandate. Aspects such as administrative structures, political oversight and all the other structures of the municipality play a very pivotal in the administration as well as the functioning of local government. According to a CoGTA report issued to the cabinet, the Lekwa Local Municipality was rated among the 64 municipalities within South Africa that are considered to be dysfunctional and under serious governance challenges (Schoonbase, 2022).

Due to serious governance and institutional challenges, Lekwa Local Municipality was placed under administration on the 11th of October 2018 in terms of section 139 of the Constitution by the Mpumalanga Provincial Executive Council. The executive council found that Lekwa Local municipality is in financial distress that prevents them from delivering on their Constitutional mandate. The National Treasury drafted a recovery plan as mandated by section 139 of the Constitution, which would assist the municipality to meet its obligations in providing basic services or its financial commitments (Monareng 2022). The estimated number of households in the Lekwa local municipality for 2021 was 44 629 and the National Treasury estimated that at least 21 476 of those households will be living in the poor rural areas of Lekwa municipality (Lekwa, IDP, 2022). According to the Lekwa LM Draft IDP (2022), the share of residents in Lekwa below the lower-bound poverty line deteriorated from 38.7%

in 2016 to 44% in 2020. While youth unemployment in 2020 was at a staggering 38.8%, which is much higher than the national unemployment average. Interventions will be required through rural upliftment initiatives (Lekwa, IDP, 2022). The Lekwa local community are affected tremendously due to the service delivery backlogs within the municipalities. Some of these service delivery challenges include uncollected garbage, unsecured dumping sites for many that have caused air pollution, potholes in-town roads, and most frustratingly, the shortage of water supply and poor management systems caused by the poor public relationship with the key stakeholders and lack of community involvement in the affairs of the councils (Routh 2018).

A review report from the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) released in early 2019 explained in detail the challenges affecting the municipality. Among other reasons for challenges affecting municipalities, the review found that there is endemic corruption, dysfunctional councils, no structured community engagement and participation, poor infrastructure, the collapse of governance and poor financial management leading to continuous negative audit outcomes (COGTA, 2019). The MEC for COGTA in Mpumalanga in a media statement indicated that the municipality was no longer able to discharge its responsibility of providing its communities with services as required in terms of its constitutional mandate. The deputy minister of finance David Maseko stated in his address that the Lekwa Local municipality has failed the constitutional and developmental mandate, 25 years into the new local government dispensation (Mashego, 2021).

While the inability to deliver services is common in many municipalities, the LLM situation is made dire by the fact that the municipality is failing to provide services to some of the biggest corporations in the country which create employment and stimulate value chain development among small businesses. In 2017, two entities namely Eskom and Rand waters threatened to cut off electricity and water to the residents of Lekwa as this was due to the municipality's inability to provide steady water and electricity to its residents. Astral Operations Limited (Astral), a major employer and business in the Lekwa Local Municipality approached the North Gauteng High court in Pretoria to request the national government to intervene in the

litigations between the municipality and Eskom, as well as Rand Water and the Municipality. The intervention of Astral in litigating between Eskom and Rand Water became a success as the High court propelled the national government to intervene in matters concerning the municipality (Chonco 2021). The service delivery challenges that the municipality is currently facing are just a mere drop in the ocean, among the major problems faced within the municipality. There is thus a need to conduct this study to contribute to the body of knowledge and to assist the concerned town under review.

The research study aims to fill the gap in studies of institutional and governance challenges faced by municipalities such as LLM. The study further hopes to fill this gap by giving policymakers access to the findings of this research so that it enables them to understand the current situation in the municipality so that the community of Lekwa is aware and can partake in community engagements within the newly elected council and in so doing create an activate public participation.

1.4 Research Questions

The research study has been guided by the primary research question and the supporting secondary questions that aim to gain a better understanding of the institutional challenges affecting service delivery, and the strategies implemented by the Lekwa Local Municipality to enable service delivery. From the detailed problem statement, the following research questions arise:

Primary Research Question

- I. In what ways do institutional challenges hinder Lekwa Local Municipality from delivering services to the community?**

Secondary Research Questions

- I. What led to the institutional challenges that Lekwa Local Municipality is currently facing?
- II. How do these challenges affect service delivery at the local municipality?

- III. What strategies have been put in place by the municipality to turn around these challenges and enable it to deliver on its mandate?
- IV. How are businesses, civil society and other stakeholders playing a role to restore service delivery in the Lekwa Local municipality?

1.5 Research Objectives

The primary objective of the dissertation is to explore the institutional challenges that hinder the ability of the Lekwa Local Municipality to deliver services. From the research questions that have been illustrated in the previous section of the study, flow several research objectives upon which the study will be based. This research intends to:

- Discuss how the institutional challenges hinder the Lekwa Local Municipality from delivering services to the community.
- Determine the reasons that led to the institutional challenges facing the Lekwa Local Municipality.
- Discuss the challenges that affect service delivery at the local municipality.
- Determine the strategies that have been put in place by the municipality to turn around these challenges and enable it to deliver on its mandate.
- Determine how the businesses, civil society and other stakeholders play a role to restore service delivery in the Lekwa Local municipality.

1.6 Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative, encompassing both a literature review and empirical research. The participants were selected through purposive sampling which involved Approaching the municipal officials, stakeholders, and civil society groups. Key informant interviews were conducted with the officials. The research methodology of the study will be to elaborate further in Chapter 3.

1.6.1 Literature review

The literature review of this study aims to analyse the institutional factors that are influencing and affecting service delivery in Lekwa Local Municipality. The literature review also discusses

developmental local government, the challenges around service delivery in local government and how the strategies implemented will assist in eradicating challenges faced by the Lekwa community members. Lastly the discussion will be centred around the public partnership assist local government in tackling the challenges. This literature review will include published scholarly books, academic articles, research reports, information retrieved from the internet sources and policy books. Chapter 2 will review this literature in greater detail.

1.6.2 Desktop Review

The literature review of the scholarly work that is focused on the institutional factors enhancing and affecting service delivery, in particular, the Lekwa Local Municipality forms the basis of an integral part of the discussion in this study. The literature review will focus on published scholarly books, academic journals, research reports, information retrieved from internet sources and policy briefs.

1.6.3 Legislation, government report and newspaper

Other sources of information will be adapted from the South African Legislations, Acts, government reports and newspapers. Government reports such as annual and quarterly reports will be used in this regard. The IDP document, LED documents of the Lekwa Local municipality and service delivery documents that apply to the study at hand.

1.6.4 Empirical Research

The vigorous use of the research method allows and enables the achievement of both the validity and reliability of the data. The research method used was qualitative in nature and allowed the use of a semi-structured interview that targeted the respondents.

1.6.3.1 Interviews

The semi-structured interviews conducted in this study aimed to gather data on the extent of institutional factors influencing service delivery within the municipality. This approach was chosen deliberately to afford respondents the flexibility to provide strategic insights and share any pertinent information they deemed important. By utilizing semi-structured interviews, participants were encouraged to express their perspectives openly, enabling the exploration of nuanced issues and facilitating a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play. This methodology fostered rich, qualitative data collection, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the institutional factors shaping service delivery within the municipality.

1.7 Overview of the chapters

This chapter is organised into six chapters:

Chapter One serves as a comprehensive introduction to the study, elucidating the problem statement at hand. It delves into the research questions and outlines the study's objectives, providing a clear framework for the investigation. Particular emphasis is placed on elucidating the chosen research methodology, offering insights into the approach adopted for this study. Additionally, the chapter lays the foundation for understanding the significance of the research within its respective field. Through a thorough examination of these elements, Chapter One sets the stage for a thorough exploration of the study's subject matter.

In Chapter Two, an extensive review of pertinent literature is undertaken, focusing on the institutional factors influencing service delivery within the context of the Lekwa Local Municipality. The chapter meticulously analyzes the challenges faced by local government entities, shedding light on the complexities inherent in ensuring effective service delivery. Furthermore, it critically examines the strategies that have been implemented to address these challenges, offering valuable insights into their efficacy and limitations. Of particular interest is the exploration of public-private partnerships and their role in augmenting service delivery efforts. Through a nuanced examination of these collaborative ventures, the chapter elucidates how such partnerships contribute to the enhancement of service delivery within municipalities like Lekwa. By synthesizing existing literature and identifying gaps in knowledge, Chapter Two lays a solid groundwork for understanding the multifaceted dynamics influencing service delivery within the municipality.

Chapter three provides a detailed description of the research methodology. It outlines the sampling procedures, including the criteria for inclusion, and elucidates the data collection process. Additionally, the chapter delineates the procedures for data analysis and explains ethical considerations.

In Chapter Four, the culmination of the research efforts is unveiled through a detailed presentation of the findings. This section provides a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the data collected during the study, offering insights into the various aspects explored. The chapter meticulously examines the results obtained from the research,

presenting them in a clear and organized manner to facilitate understanding and interpretation. Chapter five summarizes the main findings of the study, while, in conclusion, Chapter six summarises the study's findings and presents both conclusions drawn from the research and recommendations derived from the conclusion.

1.8 Conclusion

The introductory chapter lays the groundwork for the significance of undertaking research on institutional challenges and service delivery issues within the Lekwa Local Municipality. It consolidates various essential elements to justify the need for such investigation. Firstly, it provides a detailed background to the research study, offering insights into the historical, social, and economic contexts that shape the municipality's dynamics. Subsequently, it articulates the research problem and purpose statement, clarifying the overarching aim and intention behind the study. Additionally, the chapter outlined the specific objectives of the research, delineating the outcomes sought through the investigation. Both primary and secondary research questions are articulated to guide the inquiry process effectively. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the delimitations of the research, specifying the scope and boundaries within which the study operates. Ethical considerations were addressed to ensure the integrity and respect for participants throughout the research process. Lastly, the chapter provides a roadmap for the final research report by outlining the structure and contents of subsequent chapters. Through this comprehensive approach, the introductory chapter sets the stage for a thorough exploration of institutional challenges and service delivery debacles in the Lekwa Local Municipality.

CHAPTER 2

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review undertaken in this study aims to provide a structured and insightful analysis of the local government landscape within the context of service provision and the challenges faced in South Africa. By critically evaluating existing scholarly work in the field, the review seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in local governance. Initially, attention is directed towards providing a brief overview of developmental local government, elucidating the mandate of local government in South Africa, and highlighting the prevalent challenges experienced at the local government level in the country. Moreover, the literature review delves into the strategies that have been implemented to support local government in delivering essential services to communities. Special focus is placed on examining the role of public-private partnerships and their potential in alleviating the burden on local government in terms of service delivery challenges. By assessing the efficacy of such partnerships, the review seeks to identify ways in which collaboration between public and private entities can contribute to enhancing service delivery outcomes.

In addition, the literature review sheds light on emerging issues facing local government, particularly by reflecting on the discontentment surrounding service delivery at the local level. Through an in-depth examination of these challenges, the review aims to justify the need for the research endeavour. Specifically, it lays the groundwork for exploring the institutional factors influencing and affecting service delivery within the Lekwa Local Municipality. In essence, the literature review serves as a vital component in framing the research study, providing a solid theoretical foundation and rationale for investigating the intricate interplay between governance structures and service delivery outcomes in the context of a specific municipality.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Institutions are the basic building blocks to social, political, and organisational firms as they shape the behaviour, perception, and choices. The purpose of an institutions is to reduce the transactional costs in order to meet the social needs. Scott (2014) stated that an institution is comprised of “regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources provide stability and meaning to social life”. Therefore, institutions are interested in how firms interact internally and how it copes with pressure from society. Evidently institutions become the core component to institutional theory.

A significant element to any institution is its structure. The structure of an institution can either be formal (legislature, bureaucracy, political parties) or informal structures (a network of interacting organisations). Institutional structures, arrangements, and procedures often play an important role in the adoption and content of public policies.

Institutional theory considers the processes by which the structures, including schemes, rules, norms, and routines become established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviours. In other words, the theory dives deeper into understanding how various structures of the society needs and sees how the rules, norms and the values become a pathway for social behaviour.

According to Boone (2003), as an underpinning of institutional theory, growth and development are determined by the choices an institution makes in terms of policy, technology, strategy, culture, and historical context, as well as the relationships the state establishes with regional and international actors. Klovienne and Valanciene (2013:386) agree and state that a municipalities' performance is largely dictated by the institutional, legal, and regulatory characteristics of their operation. As stated in the literature review, municipalities in South Africa operate within highly legislated environments with rigorous reporting requirements.

Institutional choices regarding policy and strategies are made by the South African national government, which is responsible for setting the development agenda and ensuring its implementation. For the purposes of this study, the Constitution, which is the supreme law of the country, mandates that local governments provide services to residents in order to advance the transformation process.

Therefore, local governments serve both as institutions and as agents of development. As a result of its mandate, local governments play a crucial role in providing services to the entire government system. The municipal service delivery mandate, however, appears to be a challenge given the wide range of challenges municipalities face. In the event that local government fails to deliver services in accordance with the constitutional provision, corrective remedies are required, including the use of s139(1) interventions. It has been the case in Lekwa Local Municipality to invoke 139(1) interventions over time to align the municipality to meet its constitutional obligations.

There are many aspects of this theory relevant to the research study at hand. The impact of the current changes in local governance and municipal administration on the quality of governance may be explored in future research.

2.3 Developmental local government

The 1994 democratic transition in South Africa witnessed a substantial institutional transformation, encompassing both structural changes and revisions to the operational mandate of the state. The local government level experienced particularly profound alterations, and it can be asserted that the state underwent its most drastic transformation at this level (Klug, 2016). As an institution, the municipality is regarded as one of the main engines for local development and as one of the central institutions for service delivery. As mentioned above, South Africa has adopted the concept of development local government and as such, the government has implemented an elaborate statutory framework whereby municipalities are given the role of developing the local communities and are also required to operationalise it.

The function of local government that came about the constitutional dispensation finds expression in the notion of developmental local government (Fuo, 2013). Shai (2017) asserts that service delivery is an important function of local government as an arm closest to the people. The legislation on local government in South Africa gave clear prominence to the municipalities as acquiring important roles to democratise society and of development within the current dispensation (Sheoraj, 2015). For democracy to materialise at the municipal level, the citizens should by chance hold local government accountable.

Municipal governments are units of government, collectively and individually, that are part of the local sphere of government. They work with citizens and groups in their local communities to deliver defined services and promote social integration. According to the Constitution, they are responsible for delivering a defined set of services and promoting social and economic development within defined geographical areas (Scheepers, 2015). A state in ruins, the ANC inherited the 1980s as the most violent period of South African history. Their rise to power coincided with victories and a variety of socio-economic challenges (Hirsch 2005).

Additionally, transformation for local government involves a need for further process of administrative reorganisation that will prepare the municipalities to fight the substantial challenges of social, economic, and material development in all the local communities. Such a process to succeed it need a commitment from management, organised labour and various stakeholder that have a common vision to develop communities. Sheoraj (2015) believes that the fundamental goal for a democratic system is through citizen satisfaction. Hence, the efficacy of good local governance should be monitored through the capacity of local government structures to provide an integrated development approach to social and economic development issues and to supply essential services congruent with the needs and desires of the local communities.

2.4 The mandate of local government in service delivery

Nicholas (2018) states that the role of local government is to drive the developmental mandate with the purpose of building sustainable and integrated community that require the advancement of sustainable local economies through local development. The national government is gradually transferring authority to local municipalities to allow citizens to actively participate in society (Tsheola and Mokgokong, 2012). In this way, the community will be involved more, and services will be delivered better. A key component to improving citizen-centred service delivery is improving public participation as a means of improving service delivery. However, these efforts are often marred by insufficient capacity from the local municipalities. Local government was given a significant administrative mandate regarding local democracy governance, service delivery and local economic development.

2.5 The dismal state of local government

The municipal government, collectively and individually, is one of the political units that are part of the sphere of government associated with local areas. They are responsible for delivering defined services and promoting social integration in their local communities by working closely with citizens and groups from those communities. Their duties are defined in the Constitution, and according to it, they are responsible for delivering a defined set of services and for promoting social and economic development within defined geographical areas (Scheepers, 2015).

As much as local government was given the hugely important task to lead the development movement, it appears that as a sphere of government, it has not been performing the basic functions which had previously constituted its reason for existence, never mind coming to terms with its new developmental role, which has undermined its credibility. There is general consensus that municipalities as an institution are an important engine for local government as they play a pivotal role in service delivery. As known, municipalities in South Africa are obligated to deliver services that meet basic common needs such as water, sanitation, water, electricity, and infrastructure (Siddle 2011; Mayisa et al. 2021).

The decentralisation of local government in South Africa is one of the major challenges that the country faces. The local government in South Africa was given the responsibility of delivering quality services to the citizens, while being devoted to maintaining the infrastructure, promoting economic growth, and reducing poverty. Unfortunately, two decades have passed since the country entered a new democratic era yet according to the World Bank (2019), South Africa remains the most economically unequal country in the world. In addition, there are high numbers of people living in poverty. There is no doubt that democracy has given freedom to the nation, but the legacy of apartheid's spatial development patterns and inequality continues to be felt (Scott, 2019 and Auriacombe et al, 2015).

To reach the development goal of the establishing the municipal areas, the government has prioritised the necessity to meet the basic needs of the million South African living in poverty.

The government's foundation stone since 1994 has been poverty eradication and redistribution. According to some analysts, this country has some of the most advanced set of statutory frameworks and obligations that should lead to the promotion of service delivery within Africa. However, numerous research studies have demonstrated that in recent years, service delivery has deteriorated and at times, has become so unreliable to the point where the lives of communities are at risk (Mayisa et al. 2021; Kemp and Vyas-Doorgapersad 2020). As a result, persistent protests against the delivery of services have been taking place and at times, they have even been violent. It has been claimed by Morudu and Halsall (2017) that protests are caused by an inadequate provision of basic services at the municipal level and that there are more protests when there are severe shortages in more than one basic service at a time.

In a statement issued earlier in 2024, the auditor-general Tsakani Maluleke noted that although municipal outcomes did not improve in 2020/21, it is a 'debate' against the entire ecosystem of local government accountability, which has not acted in order to arrest the decline that continues to be characterised by poor service delivery. In addition, she stated that "there is an alarming trend where there are more dysfunctional municipalities than ever before," which has been made evident in the latest State of Local Government Report (Nyembenzi 2023).

For a municipality to be considered dysfunctional, there need to be poor service delivery or no service delivery at all. For instance, the Lekwa Local municipality in Mpumalanga, the access to basic water supplies in some communities have been non-existent for the past three years. Furthermore, serious financial problems such as low debt collection and huge overdue creditors payment contribute to the dysfunction of a municipality. According to a report written in August in Parliament's portfolio committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA), the seriousness of dysfunctional municipal systems was comprehensively stated in four main sliding risk categories based on the state of the country's municipalities. As a result of the statistics, 64 municipalities (24.9%) are found to be at high risk and dysfunctional, whereas 111 municipalities are found to be at medium risk. Compared to that, only 16 municipalities (5.45%) are stable - the vast majority of which are in the Western Cape - the largest province in the country (BusinessTech 2022 and Nyembezi 2023). During the budget statement (2020-2021), the former minister of finance Tito Mboweni made it clear

that "For all South Africans, their 'country' is like their municipality" (Mboweni, 2020). Based on the statement, we can conclude that municipalities are a powerful tool for redistribution as they provide basic services, and they are a reliable source of revenue. Shai (2017) asserts that service delivery is an important function of local government as the arm closest to the people.

The financial capabilities of municipalities to deliver on services is dependent on their municipal debt. According to the National Treasury factors such as corruption, poor financial management skills and efficiency play a significant role in municipalities going into debt (National Treasury, 2008; Staton, 2009). Furthermore, National Treasury warned that 151 municipalities in the country are teetering on the brink of collapse – while 43 have already collapsed and require urgent intervention to rescue them. Above this, 151 municipalities are deemed “bankrupt and insolvent”, and are unable to pay creditors and third parties, including the South African Revenue Service and pension funds (Sabc News 2022).

As of November 2022, all municipalities in South Africa are approximately R50 billion in outstanding debts to Eskom alone. An escalation of five billion rands of debts to Eskom was witnessed within the period of four months (July 2022 – November 2022) said the former Deputy President. This situation puts the National Treasury in a crisis, as according to SABC News ‘Eskom has around R400 billion of debt that it cannot service, to which it then it annually relies on the National Treasury to bail it out. The municipal debt to Eskom does not become easy as the country witnessed a 18.65% electricity tariff increase by the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (Nersa) for the financial year 2023/2024 (Cachalia 2023). The municipal debts are a major challenge facing municipalities as the national treasury reiterates that the improvements for municipal debts lie with resolving the administration of the municipalities.

Nevertheless, there are a wide variety of factors that contribute to municipal debt such as service delivery backlogs, increasing service delivery demands, insufficient service infrastructure maintenance, theft and non-payment and unfunded mandates. There are a number of obstacles that South African local municipalities face on an international, regional, and local level that impede effective governance. It is, therefore, necessary to strengthen the links between citizens and municipal officials in order to address specific service delivery issues. Hence the White Paper on Local Government (1998) states that, “developmental local

government is local government committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives". In summary, developmental local government is about actively involving the community, seeking sustainable solutions, and addressing a range of needs to enhance the quality of life for the residents.

The legislation on local government in South Africa gave clear prominence to the municipalities as acquiring important roles to democratise society and of development within the current dispensation (Sheoraj 2015). For democracy to materialise at the municipal level, the citizens should by chance hold local government accountable. Despite the pandemics, climate change, economic meltdowns, and conflicts, corruption remains the most serious threat to social and economic cohesion. Because of this, many scholars believe that most municipal official end up abusing their powers (Enwereji & Uwizeyimana,2019). According to the Financial Report statement (2019), Lekwa Local Municipality had spent many unnecessary millions of rands on their council and on VIP protection (Auditor General, 2018-2019).

Despite this, the low level of service delivery is attributed to inadequate financial capacity and planning skills (Beyers, 2015). Consequently, poor people continue to struggle for access to basic services in South Africa even though service access is recognized as a human right (RSA, 1996). Also, it is clear that the ideal governance system to ensure effective delivery of social and economic services in order to meet the aspirations of people does not appear to exist (Nnadozie,2011).

In the absence of sufficient municipal capacity, it is possible that there has been serious lack of basic services in the local communities. Most scholars, argue that a level of institutional dysfunction across local government, rather than a lack of effective leadership explains the failure of most municipalities to be viable (Mayisa et al 2021; Masuku and Jill 2019 and Public Servants Association 2015).

Additionally, transformation for local government involves a need for further process of administrative reorganisation that will prepare the municipalities to fight the substantial challenges of social, economic, and material development in all the local communities. Such a process to succeed it need a commitment from management, organised labour and various stakeholder that have a common vision to develop communities. Sheoraj (2015) believes that

the fundamental goal for a democratic system is through citizen satisfaction. Hence, the efficacy of good local governance should be monitored through the capacity of local government structures to provide an integrated development approach to social and economic development issues and to supply essential services congruent with the needs and desires of the local communities (Ibid).

2.6 Service delivery challenges in municipalities

The apartheid regime in South Africa, which enforced institutionalised racial segregation and discrimination, systematically marginalized certain population groups, particularly Black South Africans. Even though apartheid officially ended in 1994, its repercussions are still deeply felt today. The unequal distribution of resources and opportunities has perpetuated socio-economic disparities, making it challenging for municipalities to effectively deliver services to all citizens. The prevalence of unemployment, homelessness, and a lack of skills among certain segments of the population reflects the persistent consequences of apartheid, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to address these issues (Mahlalela, 2019).

The administrative hurdles faced by municipalities in South Africa are deeply rooted in systemic issues that have hindered the development and implementation of effective service delivery strategies. Despite efforts to transition to a more inclusive and efficient governance structure post-apartheid, many municipalities continue to grapple with legacy issues that impede progress. Inadequate recruitment practices often fail to attract qualified candidates, exacerbating the shortage of skilled personnel necessary for managing the complexities of service provision. Moreover, insufficient planning processes further compound the problem by limiting municipalities' ability to anticipate and address emerging challenges effectively. Effective planning and preparedness are essential components of successful service delivery, yet many municipalities in South Africa struggle to develop and implement comprehensive strategies to address evolving challenges. The failure to anticipate and adequately respond to complex scenarios, such as natural disasters, socio-economic crises, or infrastructure failures, can have profound implications for service provision and community well-being. Without robust planning mechanisms in place, municipalities are left scrambling to react to crises as they arise, often resulting in inefficiencies and shortcomings in meeting the needs of their constituents.

In summary, the combination of historical legacies, political constraints, and administrative shortcomings presents formidable challenges to effective service delivery in South Africa. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to dismantle entrenched inequalities, strengthen institutional capacity, improve planning processes, and enhance responsiveness to the diverse needs of communities across the country.

In reviewing the literature on the challenges confronting municipalities in South Africa, several recurring themes emerge. These include capacity constraints hindering the effective delivery of services, rampant infrastructure disrepair exacerbated by vandalism and insufficient maintenance efforts, as well as inadequate public participation in municipal affairs. Additionally, political interference often poses obstacles to governance and performance, while the struggle with policy implementation further complicates matters. Corruption remains a pervasive issue, undermining trust and efficiency within local government, alongside persistent challenges in revenue generation and achieving financial sustainability. This complex array of challenges underscores the multifaceted nature of the issues facing South African municipalities, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address them effectively.

2.6.1 Infrastructure challenges

The lack of basic infrastructure in South Africa poses a significant obstacle to effective service delivery, particularly in the realm of sanitation. Many municipalities across the country struggle to provide essential amenities such as clean water, sewage systems, and waste management services, leading to dire consequences for public health and quality of life. The failure of the government to respond promptly and adequately to the increasing demand for infrastructure exacerbates the problem, resulting in chronic deficiencies that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

Research conducted by Mahlalela (2019) sheds light on the stark disparities between rural and urban areas in terms of infrastructure provision. Rural communities often bear the brunt of inadequate infrastructure, with limited access to basic services and amenities compared to their urban counterparts. This disparity exacerbates existing socio-economic inequalities and perpetuates cycles of poverty and marginalization. In municipalities like Nkomazi Municipality, where infrastructure deficiencies are particularly acute, the lack of basic amenities serves as

a catalyst for widespread discontent and protest. Service delivery protests have become increasingly common across South Africa, with communities expressing frustration over the government's failure to address their basic needs. In many cases, the absence of basic infrastructure is cited as a primary grievance, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to address these deficiencies and improve the quality of life for all citizens.

The lack of basic infrastructure stands as a formidable challenge to service delivery in South Africa, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities and undermining efforts to promote development and prosperity. Addressing this challenge requires concerted efforts from the government, civil society, and other stakeholders to invest in infrastructure development, particularly in marginalized communities, and bridge the gap between rural and urban regions. Only through comprehensive and sustainable interventions can South Africa hope to overcome the obstacles to effective service delivery and build a more equitable and prosperous society for all its citizens. The lack of basic infrastructure can be attributed to what the World Bank (2012) states as a low-cost recovery rate. What this statement says is that the provision of services at below cost price is the prime contributory factor towards the lack of capital and low levels of investments in infrastructure that is so prevalent in the most developing countries.

2.6.2 Corruption

Numerous reports have underscored a direct correlation between poor service delivery and the pervasive levels of corruption among local government officials. The perception of widespread misuse of public funds by these officials not only undermines the mandate of service delivery to grassroots communities but also erodes public trust in the integrity of governance processes (Jayne, 2017; Schumpeter, 2017). Such perceptions suggest that officials prioritize personal enrichment over the welfare of deserving members of the public, thereby perpetuating a cycle of injustice and disenchantment. The ramifications of this unethical conduct extend beyond mere perceptions. Belletti, Marescotti, and Touzard (2017) highlight that local municipalities, crippled by financial malfeasance, are left incapacitated and unable to fulfill their service delivery obligations effectively. The diversion of funds through corrupt practices drains vital resources from essential service provision, exacerbating the

already precarious conditions faced by marginalized communities. Consequently, the inability of municipalities to meet their service delivery mandates perpetuates socio-economic inequalities and exacerbates public disillusionment with the governance system.

In essence, the nexus between corruption and poor service delivery underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to strengthen accountability mechanisms and restore public confidence in local governance. Addressing corruption not only safeguards the integrity of service delivery processes but also ensures that municipalities can effectively fulfill their obligations to uplift and empower communities. Only through concerted efforts to combat corruption can municipalities regain the financial stability and moral authority needed to deliver essential services equitably and efficiently (Mahlelela, 2019; Hansen and Wethal, 2014).

The Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) No.56 of 2003 serves as a cornerstone of financial governance within South Africa's local government sphere, aiming to promote transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the use of public funds. However, despite the legislative framework in place, numerous local authorities have failed to adhere to the principles outlined in the MFMA, resulting in widespread instances of fruitless expenditure and financial mismanagement. The recurrence of penalties for fruitless expenditure among certain municipalities underscores a systemic failure to address underlying issues and implement effective financial controls. Despite being penalized repeatedly, many municipalities show little sign of improvement, perpetuating a cycle of financial irresponsibility that undermines public trust and erodes confidence in the government's ability to manage public resources effectively.

One of the most concerning indicators of this failure is the prevalence of qualified or worse audit reports from the Auditor General. Clean audits, once regarded as the norm, have become increasingly rare, prompting celebration when achieved. This shift in perspective reflects the dire state of financial governance at the local level and highlights the urgent need for reform to address systemic weaknesses and enhance accountability mechanisms (Bolatito and Ibrahim, 2014).

The ramifications of poor financial management extend beyond the realm of governance, directly impacting the delivery of essential social services. Limited resources, misallocated

funds, and inefficient spending practices result in compromised service delivery, particularly in marginalized communities already facing socio-economic challenges. The inability to deliver adequate social services exacerbates existing disparities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality and hindering progress towards achieving broader developmental goals. Persistent failure to adhere to the principles of the MFMA and achieve clean audits within South Africa's local government sphere reflects a broader systemic issue that requires urgent attention and reform. Addressing the root causes of financial mismanagement, enhancing accountability mechanisms, and fostering a culture of transparency and efficiency are essential steps towards improving governance and ensuring the effective delivery of social services to all citizens.

2.6.3 Political and cultural challenges

Local government plays a crucial role as the frontline provider of public services, representing the closest point of interaction between citizens and the state. However, persistent challenges in service delivery have significantly damaged the reputation and credibility of local municipalities worldwide. Scholars such as Conto, Conte, Fiore, and Djelveh (2015) underscore the adverse consequences of poor service delivery, which not only undermines public confidence in local government but also reflects negatively on the broader state apparatus.

In South Africa, Abrahams (2018) identifies several key factors contributing to the failure of local municipalities to deliver quality services. Administrative interference by councillors, often driven by political agendas, disrupts the efficient functioning of local government structures and undermines professional decision-making processes. Additionally, limited involvement of local communities in decision-making processes further exacerbates the disconnect between municipal authorities and the needs of the populace, leading to suboptimal service provision.

Furthermore, a fundamental mismatch between national development goals and those of individual municipalities complicates efforts to achieve cohesive and sustainable development outcomes. The failure to align municipal objectives with broader national priorities results in fragmented policymaking and inefficient resource allocation, hindering progress towards addressing pressing socio-economic challenges.

These challenges are compounded by persistent issues such as inadequate infrastructure, skills shortages among municipal staff, and financial constraints. The lack of basic infrastructure undermines the delivery of essential services, perpetuating socio-economic inequalities and impeding community development. Similarly, skills shortages within local government institutions limit their capacity to effectively plan, implement, and manage service delivery initiatives, further exacerbating the challenges faced by municipalities.

In summary, the erosion of public trust in local municipalities due to poor service delivery represents a significant governance and developmental challenge globally. Addressing the underlying causes of inadequate service provision, including administrative interference, limited community involvement, and a mismatch between national and municipal objectives, requires concerted efforts to strengthen institutional capacity, enhance accountability mechanisms, and promote participatory governance practices. Only through collaborative and inclusive approaches can local governments overcome these challenges and regain the confidence of their constituents in delivering quality services and promoting sustainable development (Abrahams, 2018 and Conto, et.al 2015).

2.6.4 Administrative challenges

The provision of water and sanitation services at the local level is essential for safeguarding public health, promoting social well-being, and fostering economic development. However, numerous challenges impede the effective delivery of these services, with capacity constraints emerging as a significant barrier to progress. Poor planning practices contribute to the inadequacy of water and sanitation infrastructure, resulting in insufficient coverage, unreliable service delivery, and compromised water quality. Ineffective management further exacerbates these challenges, leading to inefficient resource allocation, operational inefficiencies, and suboptimal service outcomes. The inability to implement sustainable solutions further compounds the problem, perpetuating a cycle of underdevelopment and systemic deficiencies in service provision. However, capacity constraints undermine municipalities' ability to adopt holistic and sustainable solutions, leading to piecemeal interventions that fail to address underlying systemic issues (Edwards 2017).

Such administrative challenges have serious implications especially in poor rural municipalities such as Lekwa. The extent of the administrative challenges includes capacity constraints, poor planning, lack of coordination and lack of human skills for required activities.

The efficient functioning of local authorities hinges on their ability to effectively mobilize and manage resources to address the diverse needs of their communities. However, many local authorities face significant challenges in this regard, including manpower shortages and resource constraints that impede their capacity to deliver essential services.

Abrahams (2018) highlights the multifaceted nature of resource challenges faced by local authorities, which extend beyond mere financial limitations to encompass human capital and managerial capacity. The shortage of skilled personnel and effective leadership within local government institutions hampers their ability to respond effectively to local-level challenges, resulting in suboptimal service delivery outcomes.

Furthermore, Butler and Rogerson's (2016) research in Southeast Asia provides additional insights into the systemic issues plaguing service provision at the local level. The lack of coordination among sectors and departments responsible for delivering services to communities leads to inefficiencies, redundancies, and overlapping responsibilities, ultimately resulting in wasted time and critical resources. This fragmentation of efforts undermines the effectiveness of service delivery initiatives, leaving the beneficiary public underserved and disenfranchised.

Moreover, the disregard for basic coordinated planning principles further exacerbates the challenges faced by local authorities in delivering quality services to their constituents. Effective service delivery requires a high level of coordination and collaboration across diverse sectors and stakeholders to ensure that resources are allocated efficiently, and priorities are aligned with community needs. Without proper coordination mechanisms in place, local authorities risk perpetuating a cycle of inefficiency and ineffectiveness in their service delivery efforts.

The South African economy is undergoing structural decline, a trend further intensified by global economic conditions and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has resulted in a general decrease in the economic well-being of South Africans, with poverty levels on the rise. In this context, the fundamental responsibility of local government lies in delivering essential services, such as water, electricity, and sanitation, to households in South Africa (SA Cities 2022). Achieving social and economic development necessitates a focused and coordinated effort from local government.

The current developmental local government model is built on the acknowledgment of the crucial connections between development, service delivery, and active participation of local citizens. This participation is defined as the organized effort to enhance control over resources and regulatory institutions by groups and movements that have been historically excluded from such control (Stiefel & Wolfe 1994).

2.6.5 Good governance and Poor public participation

There is a prevalent sentiment that decisions in South Africa often fail to adequately address the needs and values of communities, particularly those belonging to the poor and disadvantaged sectors. Consequently, the planning process, including budgeting and Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), has not adequately reflected the needs of the community. This contradicts the local government legislative framework that forms the basis of local governance, as well as the widespread belief that some form of stakeholder involvement in decision-making is essential in planning for issues that significantly impact people's lives. The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 mandates the facilitation of community involvement across various governance processes, including municipal budgeting, service delivery, and integrated development planning. This legislative requirement underscores the importance of fostering meaningful participation and engagement from community members in decision-making processes at the local government level (Ohemeng and Grant, 2015).

2.6.6 Revenue and financial sustainability challenges

In the literature, it is evident that there are challenges of financial viability amongst the majority of municipalities, particularly rural or small. These municipalities face challenges in performing their functions due to fiscal distress. They lack extensive powers to generate revenue through property and business taxes and impose fees for services. Moreover, these municipalities are overburdened with delivery responsibilities. Over a decade ago, The State of Local Government in South Africa Report from 2009 acknowledged that "the national government may have created expectations that local government cannot fulfill, or placed a

burden on municipalities that perhaps only the strongest amongst them can carry." This statement is suggesting that the national government might have set certain expectations or requirements for local governments that could be difficult for them to meet. The idea is that the national government may have imposed responsibilities or obligations on local municipalities that could be beyond their capabilities. As a result, some local governments might struggle to fulfil these expectations, while only the most robust or well-equipped ones would be able to handle the burden effectively. This situation could create disparities in the ability of different local governments to meet the demands set by the national government. This is the reality for local and district municipalities, primarily dependent on municipal grants and equitable shares (Auditor-general, 2013).

Municipalities with a weak revenue base face challenges in sustaining their operations with the current municipal infrastructure grant and equitable share funding allocations. These allocations are insufficient to fulfill their mandate, as they struggle to ensure universal access to adequate services. For poor and small municipalities, these funding levels are inadequate to effectively address and eliminate service backlogs.

2.6.7 Skills shortages

A critical factor undermining the performance of municipalities is the availability and shortage of required skills. The 2009 State of Local Government in South Africa Report highlights that a skills deficit within municipalities remains a significant challenge. Many municipalities lack the necessary managerial, administrative, financial, and institutional capacity to address the increasing needs of local communities. This challenge is exacerbated by the decline of municipal professionals and weak linkages between local government and the tertiary education sector. Consequently, these municipalities struggle to meet the required performance standards, adversely impacting the delivery of services. Capacity challenges within municipalities represent a complex and multifaceted issue that goes beyond mere qualifications and skills. While possessing the right expertise is crucial, attracting and retaining skilled personnel remains a significant challenge, particularly for rural municipalities (Lovan, Murray and Shaffer, 2017).

Reports from the Auditor General underscore the severity of the staffing crisis within municipalities, with many key positions left unfilled due to budgetary constraints or a lack of suitable candidates (Auditor General, 2018). In some cases, essential roles are filled by individuals with only basic skills, lacking the expertise necessary to make informed decisions and effectively deliver services to the community. The inability to compete with the private sector in terms of salaries and benefits further exacerbates the skills shortage within local government. Highly skilled professionals often opt for lucrative opportunities in the private sector, leaving municipalities struggling to attract and retain top talent. The consequences of skills shortages are particularly acute in rural municipalities, where the exodus of qualified personnel to larger metros exacerbates the staffing crisis. Critical areas such as finance, engineering, spatial planning, and accounting are disproportionately affected, undermining the capacity of municipalities to address basic service delivery needs effectively.

The impact of skills shortages is felt most acutely in the realm of basic service delivery, where the lack of expertise hampers municipalities' ability to provide essential services to their communities. Without the necessary skills and expertise, municipalities struggle to plan, implement, and manage service delivery initiatives, resulting in suboptimal outcomes and perpetuating socio-economic disparities. In conclusion, addressing capacity challenges within municipalities requires a concerted effort to attract and retain skilled personnel, particularly in rural areas. Enhancing salary and benefit packages, improving working conditions, and investing in professional development opportunities are essential steps towards building a capable and effective local government workforce. Only by addressing the root causes of skills shortages can municipalities overcome the obstacles to effective service delivery and fulfill their mandate to serve the needs of their communities (Mahlalela, 2019 and Nicolas, 2018).

2.7 Capacity building as a precondition of service delivery [institutional capacity]

During the 2013/14 financial year, National Treasury identified 86 municipalities experiencing financial distress. This number escalated to 125 in the 2017/18 financial year, representing almost half of all municipalities (National Treasury, 2018). In May 2021, the Minister of Finance reported to Parliament that 163 municipalities were considered to be in financial distress, with 40 facing both financial and service delivery crises, and 102 adopting unfunded budgets. In

various regions, coupled with a decline in the quality of municipal services, the overall state of local basic infrastructure is also deteriorating (Watermeyer and Philips, 2020), largely due to insufficient maintenance. In areas beyond major urban centres, sanitation and wastewater management received a collective 'E' rating from the South African Institute of Civil Engineering, signifying that it is considered unfit for its intended purpose (ibid.). Despite substantial annual allocations for the development of new infrastructure in local government, the maintenance of existing infrastructure consistently falls behind. The prevalent issue in local government is often characterized as a skills shortage. The insufficiency of suitable skills and expertise has become a shorthand explanation for a wide range of challenges within local government in South Africa (Peters and van Nieuwenhuyzen, 2013).

The primary source of the responsibility to enhance capacity and support the development of local government is rooted in the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996). The concept of 'capacity' is directly tied to the ability of local government to exercise its powers and fulfill its functions. In essence, capacity building was clearly envisioned in the Constitution as an activity with a specific purpose—to enhance the ability of local government to fulfill its developmental mandate. The implication of this constitutional definition of capacity building as an 'activity with a purpose' suggests that efforts should be assessed based on how effectively and efficiently they contribute to that end, rather than solely on the attributes of the activities themselves.

The capacity of individual municipalities is a crucial aspect that significantly impacts their performance (Horton et al., 2003:20; McLennan & Ngoma, 2004:279). Unfortunately, it appears that this critical dimension does not receive the appropriate level of attention. Lusthaus et al. (1995:2) explain this link between performance and institutional capacity as follows:

Generally, it is the need or desire to change performance that drives people to engage in institutional evaluations. Performance can be conceived as the tip of the iceberg, the fruits of organizational capacity made visible to the outside world (Lusthaus et al. 1995:2).

This statement suggests that the primary motivation for people to participate in institutional evaluations is the necessity or inclination to improve performance. The term "performance" is likened to the tip of an iceberg, representing the visible outcomes or results of an

organisation's overall capacity. In this analogy, the bulk of the iceberg beneath the surface represents the internal organizational capabilities and processes that contribute to the observable performance. In essence, the idea is that institutional evaluations are driven by a recognition that the external performance of an organization is influenced by its underlying capacity and operations. By evaluating institutions, individuals seek to understand and potentially enhance the factors that contribute to overall performance, recognizing that what is visible externally is just a manifestation of the broader organizational capabilities.

Capacity is a vital element for any institution to effectively carry out its functions and deliver the products and services it is responsible for. In the context of municipalities in South Africa, having adequate capacity is a fundamental requirement for these entities to fulfill the objectives of local government outlined in section 152 and to exercise the powers and perform the functions outlined in schedules 4B and 5B of the Constitution. Evaluating capacity is crucial for comprehending the current challenges faced by municipalities and predicting their potential to progressively enhance their ability to provide services to their communities, fostering social and economic development within their jurisdictions. The assessment of institutions and capacity plays a key role in enabling provincial and national governments to fulfil their supportive role in relation to local government (Boesen, 2006:5).

Enhancing the capacity of municipalities to fulfil their constitutional and legislative mandates, whether by establishing minimum capacity in municipalities that fall short of compliance requirements or by strengthening already well-performing municipalities, necessitates an organizational development process. Organisation diagnosis is frequently highlighted as the most crucial aspect in such an organizational development process. This involves a thorough examination and assessment of the current state of the organization, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and understanding the factors influencing its performance. Organization diagnosis serves as a foundation for implementing targeted interventions and improvements to enhance overall effectiveness and capacity.

2.8 Strategies implemented to assist local government

It is the responsibility of local government to identify needs of the local community through a variety of channels including public meetings, ward committees, petitions, and other forms of engagement, in order to meet those needs. The policies are being developed in the context form of integrated development plan (IDPs) and municipal budgets is located to respond to the needs of the community. This is in accordance with the legislative requirement that all the municipalities in the country establish and approve such plans in order to adequately respond to the needs of their respective communities. The challenge with majority of the municipalities is that they lack requisite capacity and political will to implement such policies. Some strategies that have been implemented by local government to assist in delivering services is;

- Municipalities should recruit and appoint qualified and experienced officials who possess the necessary skills and capacity to implement municipal policies. Municipalities should develop their capacities to collect more revenue so that their fiscus could be enhanced for them to be able to fund their policy implementation.
- Municipalities are ought to conduct awareness campaigns to local communities to improve their understanding of both the integrated development planning and budget process and ultimately their participation. These type of engagement with the community limits protests as the municipality becomes transparent with the community.
- The provisions of the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act, 2004 (Act 12 of 2004) and Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003 (Act 56 of 2003) should be implemented accordingly to ensure that corruption and maladministration is curtailed within municipal governance. Offenders who contravene legislative provisions regarding corruption and maladministration must be punished to discourage future offenders.

The National government had created programmes, acts that should assist municipalities within the country to deliver services:

2.8.1 The Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS)

The Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) implemented by the South African government is a significant initiative aimed at revitalizing and improving the performance of municipalities across the country. The overarching goal of the LGTAS is to renew the vision of developmental local government, with a primary focus on enhancing the quality of life for citizens and meeting their social, economic, and material needs. By doing so, the strategy aims to restore community confidence and trust in government institutions at the local level.

The LGTAS is particularly targeted at municipalities facing various challenges, including performance failures, financial difficulties, and complex social and economic circumstances. These municipalities often require targeted interventions to address underlying issues and improve their capacity to deliver essential services to their communities.

A study conducted by Mcunukelwa in 2019 explored the impact of the LGTAS on the administrative and financial performance of municipalities in South Africa. This study likely examined how the implementation of the LGTAS has contributed to enhancing governance practices, financial management systems, service delivery mechanisms, and overall accountability within municipalities. Key components of the LGTAS may include:

1. Strengthening institutional capacity: This involves improving the governance structures, management systems, and operational processes within municipalities to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability.
2. Financial management reforms: The LGTAS may include measures to improve financial planning, budgeting, revenue generation, expenditure control, and reporting to ensure sound financial management practices and compliance with relevant regulations.
3. Service delivery enhancements: The strategy may prioritize initiatives aimed at improving the delivery of basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity, housing, and infrastructure to meet the needs of residents.
4. Stakeholder engagement and participation: Effective implementation of the LGTAS often involves fostering collaboration and partnerships with

various stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector entities, and local communities, to leverage resources and expertise in addressing municipal challenges.

5. Performance monitoring and evaluation: The LGTAS may incorporate mechanisms for monitoring progress, evaluating outcomes, and identifying areas for improvement to ensure that the objectives of the strategy are being achieved effectively.

Overall, the LGTAS represents a comprehensive and integrated approach to municipal governance reform, with the aim of building resilient, responsive, and accountable local government institutions capable of meeting the evolving needs of their constituents and driving sustainable development at the grassroots level (Mcunukelwa,2019).

2.8.2 SALGA Municipal support and intervention Model

SALGA's strategic goal of ensuring effective, responsive, and accountable local governance for communities is crucial for promoting sustainable development and improving the quality of life for citizens (SALGA, 2020). To achieve this goal, SALGA has developed a Municipal Support and Intervention Model aimed at providing comprehensive support to municipalities and coordinating interventions where necessary. The key objectives of this model include:

1. Achieving internal coherence: SALGA aims to ensure clarity and consistency in its role regarding support and interventions for municipalities. By establishing clear guidelines and procedures, SALGA can effectively coordinate its efforts to provide the necessary assistance to local government entities.
2. Acting as a lobbying and advocacy tool: SALGA plays a pivotal role in advocating for the needs and interests of municipalities at various levels of government and with other stakeholders. Through effective lobbying efforts, SALGA can influence policies and decisions that impact local governance and ensure that support and interventions are aligned with the priorities and challenges faced by municipalities.
3. Managing relationships with external stakeholders: SALGA collaborates with a wide range of stakeholders, including other spheres of government, public entities, private companies, and civil society organizations. By defining roles and responsibilities clearly, SALGA

can strengthen partnerships and facilitate coordinated efforts to monitor, support, and intervene in the local government sector effectively.

4. Research, benchmarking, and knowledge development: SALGA recognizes the importance of data-driven decision-making and knowledge sharing in enhancing local governance. By conducting research, benchmarking best practices, and developing a knowledge portal, SALGA can provide municipalities with valuable insights and resources to improve their performance and service delivery outcomes.

Overall, SALGA's Municipal Support and Intervention Model represents a strategic framework for promoting good governance, accountability, and sustainability in the local government sector. By working collaboratively with stakeholders and leveraging its expertise and resources, SALGA can contribute significantly to the development and success of municipalities across South Africa (SALGA, 2020).

2.9 Public- private partnership assisting municipalities

The history of a turbulent relationship between white-owned businesses and the government has shown in some cases that there is a sense of distrust between them and the government. It was a year after the introduction of the Growth Employment and Redistribution Policy that the idea of pursuing public-private partnerships first came to the fore in South Africa.

In the early stages of GEAR's implementation, there was a general rise in confidence in the government, but this became true up until a certain point. Former president Thabo Mbeki was greatly angered by the conception that whenever white people had the opportunity or privilege to travel abroad and bring business back to the country it was often met by negativity about the country, which often frightened potential investors that in turn put the future of the country in jeopardy (Edigheji 2007).

In order for the South African development process to be successful, the private sector plays a very important role. If the private sector does not support the development process of the country, then it will fail to succeed. Various attempts were made to create unity within the business community, among which Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) was formed as a means of creating unity within the business community. As a result, the relationship between the state and the private sector, which was largely controlled by white business owners, had

become increasingly strained, although it was already strained before. State business relations had suffered many setbacks. For example, the financial crisis that faced the South African Airlines (SAA) and this was solely due to a lot of mistrust between the business's community and the government according to (Ashman, Fine and Newman 2010; Dassah 2011).

Even so there is still a great deal of political division in South Africa, with each camp taking pleasure in the death of the other. As a result, the government has struggled for a long time to establish close working relations with both the business and labour communities, which are two of the most important non-state actors in South Africa (Qobo 2010). Phango and Malan (2004) made emphasis that since South Africa became a democratic state, efforts were made to provide services to all citizens on the basis of equality. The provision of such services should, ideally, take place within the functional realm of developmental local governance and should be able to bring about positive changes. As is well known, municipalities are not only under-resourced, but also have issues with their institutional capacity to offer basic, and even fundamental services in a way that is both equitable and just - even if the latter is not delivered in a well-rounded and equitable manner.

The White Paper on Municipal Service Partnerships, 2000, acknowledges that many municipalities are not able to provide services to their residents in an effective manner, which is why agreements are being introduced between municipalities and service providers to ensure effective delivery of services to their communities. The Local Government Municipal Systems Act, 2000(Act 32 of 2000) asserts that municipalities may supply their services through internal or external agreements undertaken within the periphery of the municipal authority. Additionally, there may be an agreement made with other municipalities or spheres of government as well as community-based organizations (CBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as with any other institution, entity, or person legally and competently capable of conducting an enterprise activity.

As a result of the South African government's neoliberal economic policies, there is an implicit preference for private sector involvement in initiatives that were traditionally carried out by the public sector. Besides outright privatisation and public-private partnership arrangements, the private sector can also be incorporated into service delivery arrangements in other ways, such as through public-private partnerships (PPP's). Carsten, Greve and Hodge (2005) point out that governments have contracted with the private sector for centuries.

Since the case study that forms part of this research is an example of public-private partnerships it only makes sense to define these partnerships broadly and then contextualise them in terms of South African service delivery initiatives.

Lastly, the nature of cooperation between local municipalities and cooperation of local municipalities in partnership with the private sector has a bearing on impediment or the private sector has a bearing on impediment or facilitation of capacity development of service delivery structures and programmes (Phago, 2004).

2.9.1 The role of public-private partnership

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) represent a highly evolved concept in South Africa. The essence of this arrangement entails the government forging strategic alliances with private entities. Typically, the private partner assumes responsibility for the construction, operation, maintenance, or a combination of these tasks regarding the asset in question, as outlined by Capuno (2014). Across various domains and sectors, PPPs have demonstrated their efficacy as a means of enhancing service delivery, a fact underscored by their widespread utilization in numerous countries.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as a strategy to improve service delivery by leveraging the strengths of both the public and private sectors, with the overarching goal of optimizing value for money and satisfying stakeholders within service delivery communities. Sibanda (2014) emphasizes the pivotal role of the consumer in shaping quality service delivery, highlighting the importance of meeting customer expectations and ensuring that service provision aligns with value for money principles.

To achieve quality service delivery, it is imperative to establish and uphold rigorous service standards. These standards serve as benchmarks against which performance can be measured and evaluated, helping to ensure consistency and reliability in service provision. Moreover, service providers must remain accountable to the electorate or community they serve, fostering transparency, responsiveness, and trust in the delivery process.

Accountability mechanisms play a crucial role in ensuring that service providers are held accountable for their actions and decisions. This includes mechanisms for monitoring performance, addressing grievances, and promoting transparency in decision-making

processes. By holding service providers accountable to the electorate or community, stakeholders can actively participate in shaping service delivery outcomes and holding providers to the highest standards of performance.

The success of multiple towns and cities is attributed to active community engagement and the collaboration of various stakeholders. In South Africa, the significance of partnerships is growing as a key element in efficient local governance. Involving the public in planning and policy decisions ensures that municipal services align with community needs. Additionally, there is a rising engagement of the private and non-profit sectors in collaborative efforts for municipal service delivery. Establishing robust relationships between organizations and municipalities is crucial for ensuring the effectiveness of service delivery and development programs. As municipalities gear up to address the evolving challenges in cities, towns, and rural areas, the involvement of the private sector will play an increasingly vital role.

Engaging the public in planning and policy decisions is instrumental in ensuring that municipal services effectively address community needs. Furthermore, there is a growing trend of increased participation from the private and non-profit sectors in partnerships for municipal service delivery (Joseph 2002)

In order for services to be provided, public-private partnerships (PPPs) are one of the most effective instruments. The necessity of PPPs cannot be overstated. The role of the private sector in South Africa is to assist in advancing the socio-economic and environmental upliftment of local communities in accordance with its role as a supportive contributor to economic growth and development (Fowler 2003). Phago and Malan (2004) further reiterate that municipalities cannot be solely viewed as a service provider to the citizens but rather as a service facilitator in the socio-economic and environmental development could be propagated through the implementation of public-private partnerships projects.

The Municipal Infrastructure Unit which was established in 1997 with the mandate of facilitating and promoting public-private partnerships in the municipal sector. As explained in detail in the Municipal Infrastructure Unit's definition, public-private partnerships are collaborations between government departments and state-owned entities (such as Eskom or Telkom). In a public-private partnership, the scope of the project is to be financed and

operated by the private sector while the state continues to be the owner of the project, while taking advantage of some of that financing and operating risk in the private sector. There has been a growing consensus among academics and practitioners across the globe that one of the strengths of public-private partnerships is their ability to provide services quickly and effectively via superior efficiency. However, this cannot adversely affect other social values (Coghill and Woodward 2005; Mottiour 2008). Moreso, they emphasise the major benefits that the government receive is the contracts for substantial infrastructure projects such as roads and buildings. When major projects like these involve the private sector partner, the government seemingly enjoy the provision of being financed. Russel and Bvuma (2001) argued that during the time of democratisation in 1994 public service was somewhat of a paradox.

2.10 Conclusion

This literature review has meticulously explored the complexities of local government service provision and the challenges faced in South Africa, with a particular emphasis on the context of the Lekwa Local Municipality. The review began by establishing a foundational understanding of developmental local government, articulating the mandate of local authorities in service delivery, and delineating the pervasive challenges that undermine effective governance at the local level. The analysis highlighted significant issues such as the dismal state of local government operations and the persistent struggles in meeting community needs.

A significant portion of the review focused on strategies designed to support local governments, especially through public-private partnerships. These partnerships have emerged as a potential mechanism to mitigate the service delivery challenges faced by local authorities. The efficacy of such collaborations has been assessed, underscoring their potential to enhance service delivery outcomes by leveraging resources and expertise from both sectors.

Emerging issues of discontentment surrounding service delivery were also examined, emphasizing the urgent need for research into the institutional factors affecting service delivery within specific municipalities. The insights gathered underscore the necessity of addressing these challenges to improve governance structures and service provision.

In summary, the literature review not only provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of local governance in South Africa but also sets the stage for further investigation into the intricate dynamics between governance structures and service delivery outcomes. By establishing a solid theoretical foundation, this review justifies the need for continued research into the effectiveness of public-private partnerships and other strategies aimed at overcoming the barriers to efficient service delivery. The findings underscore the critical importance of addressing these issues to foster improved governance and better service delivery in South African municipalities.

CHAPTER 3

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed in this study to explore and analyse the service provision challenges faced by local governments in South Africa. Given the complex and multifaceted nature of local governance and service delivery, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate for capturing the depth and nuances of the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders involved in these processes.

The qualitative method allows for an in-depth understanding of the underlying factors and dynamics influencing local government service delivery. It provides a rich, contextualized view of the issues, which quantitative approaches might overlook. This approach is particularly well-suited for examining the interactions between public and private sectors, as well as the emerging challenges within the realm of developmental local government.

Data collection for this study involved a range of qualitative techniques, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, such as local government officials, service providers, and community leaders, to gain insights into their experiences, challenges, and perspectives. Focus groups were organized to foster discussion and elicit a range of viewpoints from various stakeholders within the community. Additionally, document analysis was performed to review relevant policies, reports, and other materials that provide context and background to the service delivery issues under investigation.

By employing these qualitative methods, this study aims to generate a comprehensive understanding of the local government service provision landscape in South Africa, identify key challenges, and explore potential solutions through the lived experiences of those directly involved in or affected by these services.

3.2 Research design

This research study examines the institutional challenges and service delivery to determine if the institutional challenges have any effect on service delivery. Therefore, this investigation adopts an exploratory approach, focusing on a research area that has not been extensively covered in existing literature. Additionally, the research's descriptive nature seeks to portray a comprehensive and detailed image of the institutional challenges facing the municipality by answering the “how” and “who” questions highlighted in the secondary research questions of this research.

This research study employs a qualitative research methodology to grasp the viewpoints and perspectives of individuals, including officials, politicians, and stakeholders from civil society and business formations. It involves extracting meaning from both primary and secondary source documents to analyse institutional challenges that hinder the Lekwa Local Municipality from effectively delivering services. Utilizing an interpretative paradigm served the purpose of extracting meaning from interviews conducted with identified key informants, as well as analysing documents and newspaper articles. The collected and analysed data adheres to the principles and methodologies of qualitative research methods.

Mason (2002, p4) contended that qualitative research enables a researcher to investigate a "wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences, and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses, or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings that they generate." This multidimensional approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in human societies.

Broadly, as indicated by Nieuwenhuis and Smit (2012), a qualitative study depends on a blend of data-gathering techniques. The comprehensive data-gathering strategy for this research encompassed individual semi-structured, in-depth interviews, as well as primary document analysis. This was done to enhance trustworthiness and credibility that was pursued by crystallizing emerging realities through the analysis of data.

In this study, key informant interviews are the primary method of collecting data. This becomes an advantage as the data collection is gathered on a first-hand basis from the key-informants. Moreover, asking the key informants the same questions as set out in the annexure assists the researcher in ensuring consistency in the collection of data, but this also ensures

that there will be no deviation from the interview question guide. The researcher was able to learn about how the participants have different perspectives on matters concerning services delivery challenges.

In addition, the research study incorporated a document analysis technique, examining both primary and secondary documents, encompassing public and private materials relevant to the research area.

3.3 Sampling

The process of selecting participants for interviews was carried out using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a method commonly employed in qualitative studies, although its application is not restricted solely to this research approach (Laher & Botha, 2012). Purposive sampling involves deliberately selecting participants who possess specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research question. In purposive sampling, “The researcher selects people or sites who or that can best help him/ her to understand the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013). This targeted approach allows researchers to gather in-depth and rich information from individuals who can provide valuable insights into the phenomenon under investigation. In the context mentioned, Laher and Botha (2012) suggest that while purposive sampling is often associated with qualitative research, it can be adaptable to various research methods. This flexibility implies that researchers can employ purposive sampling in quantitative, mixed-methods, or other research designs, depending on the goals and nature of the study. The choice of purposive sampling indicates a strategic effort to ensure that participants chosen for the interviews are well-suited to contribute meaningful perspectives, enhancing the overall depth and quality of the research findings.

This study was conducted in the Lekwa Local Municipality. By employing a non-probability purposive sampling method, participants were intentionally selected based on their suitability as key informants for the research. Non-probability sampling involves a deliberate, non-random selection of participants, and purposive sampling specifically targets individuals who possess valuable knowledge or experiences relevant to the research objectives.

In this context, the emphasis on purposive sampling underscores the importance of selecting participants who can offer unique insights or expertise related to the research topic. Key informants, chosen with purposeful intent, are individuals likely to provide in-depth

information, perspectives, or expertise that are crucial to addressing the specific aims of the study. To ensure representativeness and appropriateness, the sample included applicable participants from both internal and external parts of the municipality. Internally, the sample was comprised of senior officials from the Lekwa Local Municipality as well as political representation from the ruling parties, the ANC, DA and Lekwa Community Forum. Externally, the sample included representatives from active civil society organisations and organised businesses within the municipality. The representatives from civil society included Seriti, Lekwa Community Forum, Astral and for the businesses it included the Seriti. In totality there were fourteen interviewed participants for the study

In conducting this research study, a diverse range of interviewees was included, with the intention of capturing perspectives from various sectors within the municipality. The spectrum of participants encompassed individuals from the municipality itself, community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), organized businesses, and representatives from the major political party within the municipality. This inclusive approach to participant selection aims to gather a comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the research topic. By involving individuals from different sectors and organizations, the research seeks to incorporate a broad range of viewpoints, experiences, and insights. This diverse representation can contribute to a more nuanced analysis of the issues at hand, considering the varied perspectives and interests of stakeholders across different sectors. Engaging with interviewees from the municipality, community-based organizations, NGOs, businesses, and the major political party ensures a holistic exploration of the subject matter, providing a multifaceted view that takes into account the complexities and dynamics of the local context. This methodological choice acknowledges the interconnectedness of various stakeholders and aims to reflect the diversity of voices relevant to the research inquiry.

3.4 Data Collection

Research data was primarily collected through the conduction of semi-structured interviews. Additionally, secondary data was obtained from documents, including both public and private records, which were consulted and analysed. Utilizing qualitative data collection techniques, the methods are regarded as flexible and unstructured, capturing verbatim reports or

observable characteristics, and generating data that typically does not take numerical form (Mouton, 1996).

3.4.1 Interviews

Appointments were made to conduct interviews with a diverse group of key individuals, including those from both within and outside the municipality. The interviews were conducted based on a representative sample drawn from both within and outside the municipality, ensuring the inclusion of the most suitable key informants for the research. Internally within the municipality, seven municipal officials and two councillors were interviewed. In order to maintain confidentiality all, the participants were referred to as participants. Participants from the civil society organisations in the Lekwa Local Municipality included Seriti and Vukuzimele Club for Alder referred to as S1 and S2 (Annexure A).

All interviewees provided responses to the questions posed during the pre-arranged semi-structured interviews. Interviewees were asked questions relating to their role in the Lekwa Local Municipality and how the challenges faced within the municipality affect them. The questions asked were used to explore these institutional challenges and how it affects the people of Lekwa Local Municipality. To enhance the focus of the research, the examination of service delivery was narrowed down to water and sanitation, as well as infrastructure. This limitation was imposed within the context of the prevailing water crisis and inadequate infrastructure that was adversely impacting the residents of Lekwa Local Municipality.

3.4.2 Document analysis

The research involved primary and secondary document analysis, encompassing both public and private documents. These documents were obtained from the mentioned institutions, along with newspaper articles addressing the subject matter over a period extending from 2017 to 2024. The analysis encompassed the examination of the following key primary and secondary documentation: Lekwa IDP 2022/27; Lekwa Annual Financial Statement 2021/22; Lekwa Local Municipality Financial Recovery Plan 2021; LLM Service Delivery and Budget Implementation for 2020/21 and Mpumalanga Vision 2030 Strategic Implementation Framework 2013/2030. These documents were made available online, downloaded and effectively analysed to understand the institutional challenges faced with the municipality and

what approaches has the COGTA taken to assist the municipality in delivering the services to the citizens. Furthermore, the analysis of these document was aligned to the research questions. This contributed to a deeper understanding of the challenges and shed light on the strategies implemented by the municipality to address the situation as discussed in chapter 4.

According to Silva (2012, p.148), “the focus of document analysis should be on the meaning of the document, the situation in which it emerges, and the importance of the interaction that results from the document”. The researcher emphasizes that when engaging in document analysis, the primary attention should be directed towards understanding the significance of the document, the context in which it originates, and the implications of the interactions that stem from the document. By extracting data from this documentation, there was a notable enhancement in trustworthiness and credibility. This improvement can be attributed to the crystallization of emerging realities derived from the gathered information.

In conducting the research study, both primary and secondary documents were approached with a critical and analytical mindset. Employing a qualitative approach, thematic areas were identified, and this process was facilitated by coding words and phrases according to specific themes. The literature review and document analysis are essential to validate the findings of this study.

3.5 Data analysis

Interviews were conducted in English and IsiZulu. Initially, the researcher had developed interview schedules in both English and IsiZulu. However, during testing, it became evident that some respondents felt more liberated and comfortable expressing themselves when using IsiZulu. Data cleaning involved transcribing audio texts from IsiZulu to English. The process involved careful scrutiny of each interview transcript to guarantee the accurate representation of crucial themes and elements. Special attention was given to ensure that the essence and meaning of the original text in IsiZulu were preserved during the translation into English.

During data collection, both throughout the study introduction and consent request phases, the researcher sought permission to record interviews using a mobile phone device. The recorded data underwent transcription, and the analysis involved thematic analysis. An inductive approach was employed to code the data, identifying key themes through a

systematic and exploratory process. The thematic analysis process for this study involved assigning codes to emerging themes (Wagner et al. 2012). Understanding the meaning of data through the identification and analysis of themes is a common technique within the qualitative data analysis approach. This approach, characterized by the identification of themes in the data, is considered a general method for analysing qualitative data (Kawulich & Holland, 2012 Adrian Nicholas). The themes that were identified serve as the foundation for the research findings and can be employed in constructing and developing the final research report. The themes were used to identify the factors that led to the institutional challenges, prominent service delivery challenges that led to the local service delivery protest.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical considerations, ensuring that the researcher followed standard guidelines for ethical conduct throughout the research process. Christians (2000) posits that there exist four overlapping guidelines that are considered standard for guiding ethical conduct by researchers. The ethical considerations encompassed several key aspects, such as informed consent, deception, privacy, confidentiality, and accuracy. Prior permission was sought from the Lekwa Local Municipality for the study to proceed. In addition, all informants provided informed consent before participating in the study, ensuring transparency and respect for the participants' perspective.

3.7 Reliability, Validity, And Dependability

To enhance the credibility of the data, a combination of data collection methods was employed, which included semi-structured face-to-face interviews and document analysis through a critical examination of policy documents, as advocated by Wagner et al. (2012). All informants provided informed consent before participating in the study. Participants were explicitly informed that their involvement was voluntary, and measures would be taken to safeguard their confidentiality if requested. Notably, officials from the municipality specifically requested confidentiality, emphasizing its importance when expressing views about their employer. Additionally, permission was sought from interviewees to record the interviews conducted.

To reinforce the reliability of the findings, a comparison and linkage between the field-generated findings and existing literature were conducted. This connection is evident in the data presentation and discussion sections, where references to previous studies are made in conjunction with the emerging themes discussed. During face-to-face interviews, participants were informed of their right to receive information about the research findings and analysis. Emphasizing the importance of report sharing, it serves not only as a method for validating the findings but also as a gesture of respect for the participants' time and involvement, as highlighted by Richards and Schwartz (2002) and Sandy (2023).

3.8 Conclusion

The research methodology served as the essential scientific toolkit, enabling the researcher to conduct the study. This has been illustrated in this chapter by employing a theoretical framework that forms the foundation for the research method and design. Furthermore, the application of the research method facilitated the organization of collected data into research findings. The data were analysed through the identification of thematic areas and interpreted within the theoretical framework of the study. This process allowed the researcher to draw conclusions and formulate recommendations based on the study's findings.

CHAPTER 4

4 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings of the study, based on the data that was collected while conducting the research. The research data, as mentioned within the methodology of the study, was gathered through semi-structured interviews and the analysis of primary and secondary documents sources. The research findings will therefore be a response to the secondary research questions that, in turn, feed into the primary research question. In order for the research to establish the factors that led to the institutional challenges that Lekwa Local Municipality is currently facing, the findings of the research are in response to institutional factors that affect service delivery within the Lekwa local municipality.

The findings of the study are organised in accordance with the main research question and the sub research questions. The main research questions were *“In what ways do the institutional challenges hinder the Lekwa Local Municipality from delivering services to the community?”* And the sub questions were:

- i. What factors led to the institutional challenges facing the Lekwa Local municipality currently?
- ii. How do these challenges affect service delivery at the local municipality?
- iii. What strategies have been put in place by the municipality to turn around these challenges and enable it to deliver on its mandate?
- iv. How are stakeholders such as business and civil society in Lekwa playing a role to restore service delivery in the municipality?

The study paid attention to who the key role-players within the municipality from both the political and administration view and ward councillors from previous and the current administration. Through the face-to-face semi structured interviews, the researcher was able to obtain valuable and essential information from the 14 participants which are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Overview on Participants

	MALE	FEMALE
Civil Society Groups	3	0
Councillors	1	1
Municipal Officials	5	2
Stakeholders	2	0
Total	11	3
Percentage	78,6%	21,4%

The findings illustrated how financial constraints, unskilled workers and the lack of governance had a bearing on the oversight of the municipality which then had a massive effect on service delivery such as provision of water and sanitation.

4.2 Thematic analysis on the themes

Thematic analysis is used to identify, analyse, organise, describe, and report themes found within a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has been broadly described by various scholars as a ‘theoretical freedom’ as it enables the researcher to examine the multiple perspectives of the different participants through highlighting the similarities and differences and being able to provide a clear and organised report (King, 2004). In this case the researcher analysed the data thoroughly and thus being able to determine themes. The themes that were established were able to answer the research questions and meet the research objectives.

The analysis of the themes will be based on councillors, civil society groups and the municipal officials. While the interviews with the two stakeholders will be aligned to these themes and discussed in this chapter. Themes that emerged from the research answered the research question and have met the research objectives. The themes are arranged as follows:

Theme 1: Factors that led to the institutional challenges

Theme 2: Service delivery

Theme 3: Local service delivery protest

4.3 Theme 1: Factors that led to the institutional challenges

- i. What factors led to the institutional challenges facing the Lekwa Local municipality currently?

It is quite evident that municipalities operate in complex and demanding environments. This among other factors include, maintenance of municipal budgets, implementation of complex legislative stipulations, adhering to the community's needs, implementing effective communication strategies between the community and various other government bodies and stakeholders. Thus, a need for a high standard of skills, expertise, ethics from the municipal official regardless of their rank within the municipality. The biggest responsibility of local government is to ensure that the benefit of democracy is enjoyed by all (Koma, 2012). Contrast to this, it is evident that municipalities across South Africa are suffering under this new dispensation and the Lekwa Local Municipality is one of the municipalities suffering and thus unable to deliver "benefits of democracy" to the people.

The majority of the interviews spoke in unison that the Lekwa LM is unfixable and thus it would take more than the assistance of national government to eradicate the institutional challenges within the municipality. Their view is that services such as water and sanitation as in accordance with the Bill of Rights stipulated in the Constitution, is their lawful right as members of Lekwa LM. The Human Rights Commission said in a statement the incapacity of Lekwa LM to deliver services rather displays that there is 'no hope' for the situation within Lekwa to change (The Human Rights Commission, 2021). This statement is similar with participant 4 and 6 simply defined the issues of Lekwa LM as

So, there is no hope for us in the townships even with there was to be a political change it would still remain the same because of the systems in place [Interview with Participant 4]

Well to put it in proper English, I can say that the municipality is really messed up, its really messed up... [Interview with Participant 6]

Participant 4 seems to convey a pessimistic view about the potential for improvement in Standerton. The statement suggests that even if there were a change in political leadership, the participant believes that the underlying systems and structures would persist, preventing

meaningful positive transformation. While Participant 6 expresses strong dissatisfaction with the current state of the municipality. The use of the phrase "really messed up" underscores a deep sense of disorder, dysfunction, or inefficiency within the local government or municipal services. The participant seems to believe that the situation is severe and requires attention or intervention. Both the participants highlight concerns about the effectiveness of governance structures and systems in Standerton, suggesting a belief that mere political changes might not be sufficient to bring about the desired improvements. These sentiments reflect a broader social and political critique within the context of the local government, emphasizing the need for comprehensive and impactful reforms.

It is evident the participants have little to no trust in the municipality and they are simply frustrated with their inability to provide their basic services. This act of disservice from the previous administration has led to a massive mistrust between the community and the newly elected administration. The newly administration took over in June 2021 from the previous administration that rendered (reduced) the municipality to be dysfunctional.

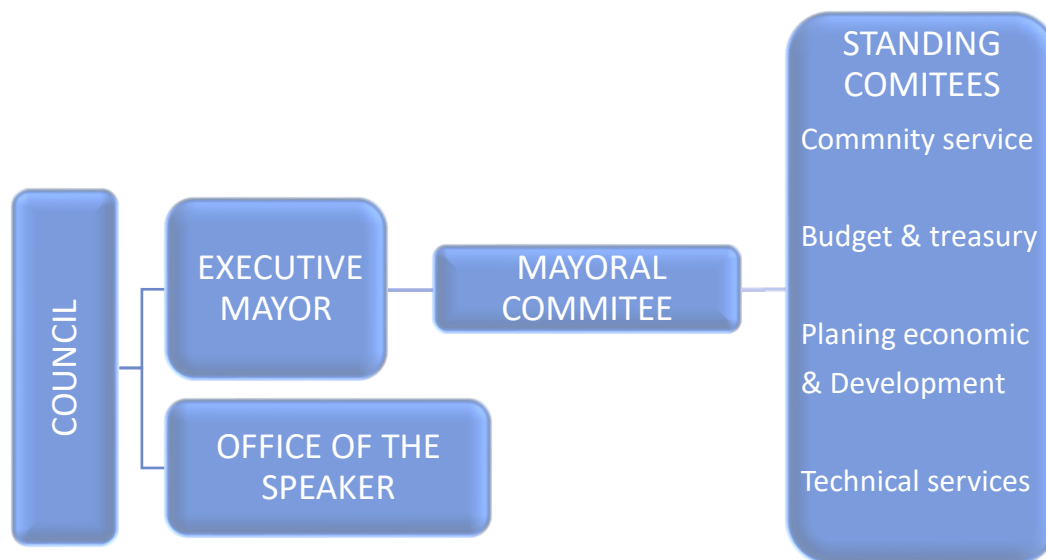
According to the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs the collapse of governance, financial constraints and unskilled workers has amongst other things led to the demise of Lekwa LM. Financial constraint was cited as the most prominent issue that hinders the municipality from achieving its mandate. This brings us to the next section, which contributes to a better understanding the water and sanitation crises and as to how of the financial constraints, unskilled workers and the collapse of governance contribute to the challenges in service delivery.

4.3.1 Political interference

Lekwa Local Municipality is situated within Mpumalanga province, it is one of the seven municipalities in the Gert Sibande District. The municipality is regarded as a category B municipality as it shares municipal executive and legislative authority with a category C municipality which is the Gert Sibande District. Lekwa Local Municipality was established on the 5th of December 2000 after the amalgamation of three former transitional local councils which are Standerton, Sakhile and Morgenzon. Standerton serves as the major urban node, whilst Morgenzon which is 45km northeast of Standerton, serves as a satellite node. As

indicated by the Lekwa Local Municipality Integrated Plan (2022/23-2026/27), the municipal area gives immediate access to KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, and the Free State provinces.

The municipality operates using an Executive Mayoral Committee system comprising of an Executive Mayor and five portfolio chairpersons.



Source: Lekwa Local Municipality Integrated Development Plan (2022-2027).

The Lekwa Local Municipal Council consists of thirty members by mixed-member proportional representation. Fifteen councillors were elected by first-past-the post voting in fifteen wards, whilst the remaining fifteen were chosen from party lists so that the total number of party representatives is proportional to the number of votes received. This was confirmed during an interview, where it was mentioned;

All the ward councillors are cadre deployed and unfortunately, we also play politics at the same time, they have deliberately sabotaged most of the work and that is due to a lot of things such as corruption and things that they do on their side [Interview with Participant 3]

We have people that are responsible for administrative duties that find themselves conflicted with advancing political interests than delivering on service delivery mandates [Interview with Participant 8]

Participant 3 is expressing concerns about the deployment of ward councillors, suggesting that they are appointed based on political connections rather than merit (referred to as "cadre

deployment"). The participant accuses these councillors of deliberately sabotaging work, attributing this to issues such as corruption. The quote implies a lack of effective governance and integrity among these political appointees. Furthermore Participant 8 highlights a conflict of interest among individuals responsible for administrative duties. The quote suggests that these individuals prioritize advancing political interests over fulfilling their primary responsibility of delivering services to the community. This conflict may lead to a compromised focus on service delivery and could contribute to inefficiencies or failures in meeting the needs of the community. The participants point to challenges within the political and administrative spheres, including concerns about corruption, misuse of political influence, and a potential lack of focus on delivering essential services to the community. These issues underscore broader systemic challenges that may hinder effective governance and service delivery in the context being discussed.

Undoubtably, municipalities enjoy powers which are constitutionally defined to self-govern (Fuo, 2017). The Institute of Directors' King IV Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa (King IV Report) identifies the municipal council as the governing body of a municipality. It states the municipal council, as a governing body, has primary accountability and responsibility for the governance and performance of the municipality. The municipal council is therefore primarily responsible for identifying, avoiding, and solving any municipal financial distress as it arises. The administration and the community also have a role to play, but the council's role is primary. Contrast to this, the council in Lekwa is dysfunctional as there is a lot of political sabotage when projects need to be implemented.

There was common perception amongst the participants which included stakeholders, which pointed out that governance had gone out the window as there are multiple failures, intensified by managerial incompetence. With that goes the mismanagement of funds, not paying, being unaccountable which led people to get away with anything (Smith, 2022). For example, some of the municipal officials had this to say;

And the challenge we have now is that some of the employees we found them here as we did not appoint them or the governing party, but they were appointed by the ANC.... So,

we could say there is a lot of political battles that then hinder some of the administration works as it gets sabotaged. So now you find that is a battle between the politicians and the administration [Interview with Participant 3]

Some of the employees and not all of them do not want to assist the community and that affecting our mandate to deliver services. Its sad to find out about some of the employees that do not want to work as they are using politics to sabotage the new administration. But we have engaged with the Municipal manager to take drastic decisions and deal with those people because if employees are not working how do we deliver services? [Interview with participant 2].

Participant 2 discusses the impact of uncooperative employees on the delivery of services to the community. Some employees are described as using politics to sabotage the new administration, creating a barrier to effective service delivery. The participant expresses concern about the lack of assistance from certain employees and indicates that steps are being taken, including engaging with the Municipal manager, to address the issue and ensure that services can be delivered. Participant 3 describes a challenge where existing employees were appointed by a political party (in this case, the ANC) rather than through the current governing party. This situation has led to political battles that hinder administrative work, with the implication that political interference may be causing disruptions and sabotage. Both quotes highlight the complexity of the relationship between politics and administration in local government. Political battles and interference in personnel matters can have direct consequences on the ability of the administration to effectively fulfill its mandate of delivering services to the community. These challenges underscore the importance of finding a balance between political considerations and the efficient functioning of government institutions.

With this perspective politics seems to be killing the mandate of the municipality to deliver services as there is a lot of sabotage by various employees. An investigation was carried out by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs in 2019, and major gaps were identified in terms of governance, compliance and non-attendance at council meetings and more so strategic senior management positions that has not been filled till date.

There is a high vacancy rate currently in the municipality. For example, in the supply chain department, if a vehicle was to breakdown, they would have to procure it and then the struggle would be waiting period as it would take 3-6 months to get the vehicle due to the high vacancy rate...everything piles up and that's why service delivery will be slow. Also, if the refuse truck were to break down it could take at least five months to fix that truck [Interview with participant 13].

Participant 13 points out the repercussions of a high vacancy rate within the municipality, specifically in the supply chain department. The quote illustrates how the absence of necessary staff creates delays and complications. For instance, if a vehicle breaks down, the procurement process becomes protracted due to the high vacancy rate, leading to extended waiting periods (3-6 months) to replace or repair the vehicle. These delays contribute to a backlog of issues, affecting overall service delivery. The example of a refuse truck breaking down further emphasizes the extended timeframes (at least five months) it takes to address problems, exacerbating the challenges faced in providing timely and efficient services to the community. In summary, the high vacancy rate in crucial departments, such as the supply chain department, significantly hampers the municipality's ability to address urgent issues promptly, resulting in delays and impacting service delivery to the community.

According to a statement made by Lekwa LM, about 50% of positions in the municipal offices are vacant. But it is also still saddled with a number of bureaucrats left over from the former ANC regime. Such delays in service delivery add pressure to the stakeholders to urgently assist the municipality, however both the stakeholders had mentioned their major lack in the communication as they do not have the direct access to speak to the relevant people for instance participants 6 and 7 said:

So, we deal with LED a lot because we also wanted to meet up with the waste managers but still, we are still waiting for them so I could say there is a bit of political issues and maybe they could be feeling that the organization is trying to take over. But we try to not step on their toes because we try to move away from politics and focus on the end goal which is to assist the community [Interview with participant 6]

We do not have direct access to the managers or even the mayor, when situations arise we are forced to either communicate with the councillors that would assist us to getting contact with the manager of community service or we are directed to the mayor secretary and you know it takes weeks to even have a personal meeting with the mayor [Interview with participant 7].

These quotes provide insights into challenges related to communication, access to key stakeholders, and potential political dynamics within the context of the municipality. Participant 6 mention challenges in dealing with the LED (Local Economic Development) and trying to coordinate with waste managers. The participant suggests that political issues may be causing delays, with the possibility that some individuals may feel the organization is attempting to take over certain responsibilities. Despite these potential political dynamics, the participant emphasizes the organization's commitment to avoiding political entanglements and maintaining a focus on the overarching goal of assisting the community. Participant 7 highlights challenges in accessing key decision-makers within the municipality. The participant points out a lack of direct access to managers or the mayor, leading to a dependence on councillors or communication with the mayor's secretary. The mention of extended timeframes (weeks) to secure a personal meeting with the mayor indicates delays in addressing urgent matters, possibly hindering efficient collaboration and problem-solving. Both quotes underscore the complexities of navigating political dynamics and bureaucratic processes within the municipality. Challenges in accessing key figures and potential political sensitivities can impact the organization's ability to collaborate effectively and address community needs promptly.

Failure to work hand-in-hand with the stakeholders gives more reason to say most municipalities are controlled by politicians as there is no one to take accountability (Maphanga, 2022). According to the Financial Recovery Plan there was evidence of weak internal capacity in the municipality, which hamstrung any efforts by the administrator to carry out his interventions. Staff are politicised and the executive management team is relatively young, inexperienced, with many facing the prospect of disciplinary action and possible criminal prosecutions. In regard to the staff being politicised in horrific interview with participant 14 they mentioned;

In 2019 I was a part of the council to which it was discovered that R30 million had went missing till today they have not located where the money went. This situation caused major political protests by the community, to the point where three of the municipal official houses got burned and I was one of those three. They even went to the extent of burning my mother's house and unfortunately due to that she had a stroke and passed away I would say that there is a lot of sabotage but mostly jealousy within the council, that protest was not based on service delivery but on false rumours as to the missing R30 million [Interview with participant 14].

The quote from Participant 14 highlights a distressing situation involving financial mismanagement, political protests, and personal tragedies within the context of the municipal council. This account reflects a complex and deeply troubling series of events, involving financial misconduct, community outrage, and personal tragedies. The participant suggests that political dynamics and internal conflicts within the council may have played a role in the protests, leading to destructive consequences for individuals involved.

According to Standerton Advertiser after a political mandated protest had transpired in Lekwa early May 2023, there was an attempted assassination on the Executive Mayor the very same night after addressing the false accusation on Newsroom Africa pertaining the water crises in Lekwa (S

There is a need to draw a line between politics and administration, as most of the respondents indicate that the municipality is perishing under the politics. Addressing the community in May 2022, the newly elected Executive Mayor made it clear they are still experiencing glimpses of political interference. However, there are some members who have accepted the mistakes that happened in the past and are now willing to work with anybody to change the prospects of this municipality.' This highlights a situation where there are concerns about political interference, but there are also individuals within the municipality who are ready to acknowledge past mistakes and work collaboratively to improve the prospects of the Lekwa Local Municipality. He further affirmed that

"But you still get those who are still longing for the old days You cannot deal with the old system overnight. Because there were beneficiaries of that system. But I will not allow

that to divert us from the main objective of turning around the prospects of this municipality (Standerton Advertiser 2022 and Smith 2022).

In essence, the quote reflects the mayor recognition of the complexities involved in instituting change, understanding that some individuals may resist it. Nonetheless, he remains focused on the overarching objective of bringing positive transformation to the municipality.

True to his words the mayor has followed the recommendations by the Financial Recovery Plan, as every second week there are various meetings held with the council, councillors, heads of departments. And better yet workshops have been established quarterly where training is given to all the workers in order to building a friendly working environment.

In this regard John Mettler, the administrator who was appointed by the national treasury after the council was dissolved in 2019, pointed out that even with the newly elected coalition leadership the catastrophic mismanagement of Lekwa will take years to reverse.

4.3.2 Financial mismanagement

Challenges of financial mismanagement continue to haunt the South African local government, as noted in the varies Auditor General Reports. Financial mismanagement is one the many triggers to poverty and poor provision of services as the municipalities fail to uphold their financial accountability within their departments (AG Report, 2018). In a State of Nation address, the former President of South Africa, President Jacob Zuma, highlighted that the service delivery backlog is due to the financial mismanagement and the failure to 'uphold financial accountability' within the municipalities (RSA, 2011). This highlights major complex issues. The backlog in service delivery is attributed to two interrelated problems: financial mismanagement and a failure to uphold financial accountability. Addressing these issues is crucial for the effective functioning of municipalities, ensuring that resources are used efficiently, and public services are delivered in a timely and accountable manner.

Resulting from service delivery challenges associated with financial mismanagement, Lekwa LM is not at all immune to service delivery backlogs as witnessed in the past. For instance, P3 had this to say on the financial problems facing Lekwa LM,

Because truth be told we really don't have any money like at all. We have never been a municipality that has had a positive balance in the accounts we are currently running over a deficit of R300 million bearing in mind our budget has never been funded. This year for the first time in a long time we are being promised by the MM that we will be having a funded budget, and it has never happened before, we had always operated with no budget, so basically dreams. We have been working with dreams. So, the only plan is that we need to have more money in order to be able to deliver services to the people [Interview with Participant 3]

We are surviving on grants for example the MIG (Municipal Infrastructure Grant) grant that is helping us, as we are running on a 0% budget which is to say the municipality is bankrupt. We are unable to do our own capital budget as a municipality [Interview with participant 2].

The mention of running on a "0% budget" implies a severe financial crisis, and the participant straightforwardly describes the municipality as being bankrupt. The inability to create a capital budget further highlights the limitations in undertaking essential infrastructure projects due to financial constraints. The quotes collectively paint a picture of a municipality facing significant financial difficulties, struggling with deficits, lack of funding, and operational challenges. The reliance on grants indicates a need for external financial support, and the participants express the urgency of securing more resources to effectively deliver essential services to the community.

In this regard it could be viewed that the municipality does not have the money nor the budget to sustain the town itself. In 2019 CoGTA claimed that the financial distress of Lekwa LM began in 2016/2017, where major business and service providers wanted the municipality to be placed under Section 139 of the Constitution. Section 139 of the Constitution essentially authorises the provincial executive to intervene in a municipality when it does not fulfil its executive obligation in terms of legislation. Not only was the municipality failing its people, but it was falling behind in paying their service providers, resulting in an increase in debts. To date the municipality is owing Eskom a total of R1,6 billion in historical and current debts.

According to the General Auditor of South Africa the Mpumalanga provincial audit outcomes regressed in 2019 to which Lekwa LM was one of the six municipalities out of 17 municipalities that was regressed.

Table 2: Audit Report Overview

Audit	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/2023
Outcomes	Unqualified	Qualified	Disclaimer	Disclaimer	Disclaimer	Disclaimer	Qualified

As witnessed in the table above, it is quite evident that the financial problems of Lekwa LM started before 2016/2017 as the municipality had not qualified in their audit report. However, 2018/19 a disclaimer audit report was presented which meant that the municipality was unable to provide sufficient and appropriate evidence to support the figures in the financial statement. For the fourth year in a row Lekwa LM had received a disclaimer report. In a document tabled by the Auditor General their remarks were a warning to the officials at large as it stated “It is clear that not one person, but rather it’s the officials who couldn’t care less and political leaders who serve in council and fail to read or comprehend the reports, who should take accountability for the poor audit outcome?” The quote reflects a critical perspective on the causes of a poor audit outcome, attributing it to a combination of apathy among officials and a lack of comprehension or engagement by political leaders. The statement implies a need for accountability to address the challenges identified in the audit.

The municipality is technically still under administration, noting there has been interventions by multiple parties, the High Court, the minister of finance, an administrator, national government, CoGTA, provincial government and a newly elected council. But between all these interventions the audit report still yet remains the same.

In an interview the newly elected Executive Major blamed the financial woes on the previous administration, to which he said;

“They left us with billions of rands of debt, money that we must pay back. All that money is ring-fenced to pay back Eskom. So locally, there is no money ... But if government does

not assist us, the local people and businesses will stand together, and we will fight. We will not give it back to the ANC.” (Smith 2022).

In summary, the quote highlights the severe financial strain faced by the municipality, particularly due to a significant debt allocated for repaying Eskom. This could be linked to what Participant 2 stated in the interview.

The previous administration ended up owing every service provider. So, it is a constant battle to deliver services, especially when our trucks or vehicles breakdown we cannot take it to Lamon as our account is in errors and we were backlisted from all the service providers around Lekwa, but we have tried to settle some debts with them [Interview with participant 2].

The quote highlights the significant impact of financial mismanagement by the previous administration, resulting in a debt burden that continues to affect the municipality's ability to function effectively. Currently the municipality is sitting on a R1.9 billion debt to Eskom, R1 billion debt towards the Department of Water and Sanitation and noting the municipality is incurring massive distribution losses in the sales of electricity while generating little to non-revenue.

As a result of the municipality not having ‘money,’ major protest has been witnessed as the community sees this as the only way to get the attention of the mayor. In aims to regain their financial problems, the Provincial government intervened as according to Section 137 of the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) by establishing a Financial Recovery Plan that was aimed at implementing strategies to help alleviate the financial woes of Lekwa LM. According to the Financial Recovery Plan of 2019 it confirmed that the municipality is unable to sustain itself as there is a lot of financial mismanagement by the council, corruption, the community not paying for their services and lastly the due to the national government not giving Lekwa LM enough capital grants to assist it to function.

So, while I was working service delivery was bad being on the inside, I felt that they were trying to solve the situation. But the biggest problems I saw was that the municipality did not have a budget to solve the problems that were already internal like debts but more so they could not deliver the services [Interview with Participant 8]

The quote suggests that, despite efforts to improve service delivery from within the municipality, the lack of a budget poses a significant obstacle. The inability to allocate funds to address internal issues, such as debts, may contribute to ongoing challenges in delivering services to the community.

This is consistent with an article done by Ngwenya (2023) who claimed that there are conflicts of interest as this is seen as politics versus administration, when politicians interfere in the field of administration hiring inexperienced contractors to do some projects accountability drops not completed before time and no consequences. In the Financial Recovery Report (2021) the administrator, witnessed that there was a lot of sabotage within the departments. “I saw that politics is a dirty game as you would be sabotaged by the people who collaborate with you in the department, there would be plans that needed to be finalised, but they would be sabotaged.” Essentially the Administrator observation suggests that the political environment within the municipality is characterized by internal conflicts and actions that hinder the progress of plans and projects.

This amongst other factors, demonstrate that the municipality is focused on the politics more than anything, the functioning, and the workings within the municipality in general is solely based on politics and sabotage. All the respondents expressed their concerns on the sabotage and the lack of devotion do their work.

4.3.3 *Unskilled workers*

There were several responses to explain the challenges faced by the LLM. For instance, one interview mentioned

What led to these challenges I could say is a combination of unskilled workers, aging infrastructure, and sabotage within the municipality. So, in terms of Human resources, it is a bit of both between unskilled workers and just irresponsible or ‘could not care less’ set of skills. And this is why in 2022 I submitted a motion to council for a skills audit because it is important to know the skills we have in each department and people may be redirected to departments they fully skilled for or they may be upskilled for the departments they are in. We are also severely understaffed, so if we had skills audit, we could know where the shortage is, and we could then move forward to try and recruit those specific skills. But there is a skills

shortage and with our administration it consists mostly of cadre deployment [Interview with participant 3]

Like I said one of the internal problems is corruption, but another is unqualified people in the workplace. For example, when we look at the water purification treatment plant for it not to be maintained is because people do not have the skills, and this costs people to not have water as there will now be a delayed process of fixing those pipes [Interview with participant]

Additionally, the mention of cadre deployment by participant 3 suggests that the current administration is largely composed of individuals appointed based on political affiliations rather than necessarily being selected for their expertise.

An assessment done by the committee of Cogta on Lekwa LM found that 70% of municipalities in South Africa employ people who do not have the qualification nor the necessary skills. The inability of municipalities to hire people that have the needed skill actually delay the delivery of services. For instance, a report tabled parliamentary committee going forward the municipality needs to do background check before employing anyone.

4.4 Theme 2: Service Delivery

What emerged from the interview engagement were complains surrounding water and sanitation and infrastructure. Some residents had not had the privileged to see water running through their taps for nearly 11 – 15 years. While some had sewage flowing right into their houses, toilets, and bathrooms (Standerton Advertiser, 2021). Attempts by the government was made in order to fix these issues, the municipality had awarded tenders with aims that the situation would be fixed but years later the water and sanitation crises still prevails. This section will be discussing the water and sanitation debacle as well as the infrastructure that contributes to the water and sanitation problems.

The Financial Recovery Plan was strategically established to help LLM to address their financial distress by focusing on the short-term financial liquidity of the municipality and by improving the long-term financial sustainability of the municipality. Issues pertaining to the institutional stability and service delivery will be the main focus of addressing in so far as they undermine the financial recovery of the municipality.

4.4.1 Water and Sanitation

On the 23rd of June 2023, the Lekwa LM was slapped with a R70 million fine by the Standerton Court for contravening environmental laws. The municipality was found guilty on seven counts relating to: failure to comply with conditions stipulated in the waste management licence; prohibition of unauthorised disposal of waste; failure to comply with a compliance notice; unlawful water use; causing significant pollution to the environment; unlawful negligent disposition and distribution of raw untreated sewage; and failure to comply with directives issued.

A lot of lives have been **COMPROMISED!**

This is a clear indication on the municipalities failure to adhere to ethical government practises has significantly contributed to its financial crises. In addition, an additional R500 000 needs to be paid, as according to National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) Spokesperson; “The municipality impeded the flow of contaminated water within public water channels and roads, they disposed of and distributed raw and untreated sewage into the municipal substations — Stein pump station, Rooikoppen, Johan Street, Muller and Taljaard pump stations,” In such situations, it is crucial for authorities to address the issue promptly, conduct investigations into the causes, and take corrective actions to prevent further harm. This kind of environmental and public health hazard requires transparency, communication with the affected community, and a comprehensive plan to rectify the situation. According to the NPA these incidents occurred between 2017 and 2022.



Source: Lekwa News& Advertising captured the dirty water that flows from the taps of residents

The Lekwa Local Municipality IDP (2019-2020) respectively mentioned that SAICA had graded the standards of the municipality to D and E in terms of the water, electricity, and infrastructure. One of the services that need to be provided in Lekwa Local Municipality is the provision of clean water. Lekwa has two water reservoirs.

For instance, one interview mentioned:

As you know the new administration came into a very dysfunctional municipality that was covered in debts and it is not easy to fix problems that come from years back. What I could say is that currently the municipality has water trucks that supply water to the majority that do not have water and in terms of the internal loadshedding that has been greatly fixed as the municipality has made means to pay the debt that it owns to Eskom. These problems have not necessarily been fixed but I could say we are in the process of trying to fix these issues faced by the majority of the people in Standerton [interview with Participant 3].

The biggest challenge is that the water we receive from the treatment plant is very dirty to the point that it is undrinkable. So now it has escalated to not even have that dirty water running through our taps [Interview with Participant 10].

The municipality, under new administration, is grappling with legacy issues inherited from past administrations. The water quality issue remains a significant challenge, with water from the treatment plant being described as undrinkable. There is a recognition that these problems are complex and require ongoing efforts to find solutions. The interviews portray a municipality grappling with historical issues, debts, and challenges in service delivery. While there are positive steps such as water truck initiatives and addressing debt-related load shedding, there are ongoing struggles, especially concerning water quality.

The IDP report 2019-2020 mentioned that one of the main contributing factors to the water crises is the old unmaintained infrastructure at the water treatment plant. According to the report the water treatment plant was constructed in 1950 and since then the plant has not been extended to suit the growing population of Lekwa. Furthermore, the plant is still using the very same pipes from 1950 hence there being multiple malfunctions with the motors. This was evident as the whole town of Standerton in did not have water for more than a week, as the municipality had to buy new equipment since the '1950 motors' were no longer being

manufactured. The situation fuelled civil society organisations, community leaders to take some action. Participant 1 asserted that *‘we could not sit down and do nothing about the water situation as the whole town had not had water for five days. We then planned a protest in order to get the attention of the provincial government.’* This statement conveys a community's response to a critical water shortage through proactive measures. The decision to plan a protest indicates a collective effort to bring attention to the issue and seek intervention from the provincial government, reflecting a sense of frustration and a determination to address the immediate and pressing concern of water scarcity.

As an immediate response to the current water crises, the Minister of Water and Sanitation had to intervene by contributing R350 million to refurbish the water treatment plant, to which the project is currently underway.

4.4.2 Infrastructure

Other than financial constraints, collapse of service delivery in Lekwa could be contributed to the infrastructure that has not been maintained for years. The Financial Recovery Plan (2021) made comments as to how the infrastructure is not coping with the current demand, especially since the population keeps growing immensely.

The infrastructure failures were mainly due to the municipality not maintaining the infrastructure, lack of forward planning and incorrect sewer designs and pipelines. The former municipal manager further mentioned that;

“The infrastructure is not coping with demand and is poorly maintained, and this situation will likely subject the community to severe inconvenience and even danger without prompt attention. The infrastructure is in the verge of failure, exposing the community to health and safety hazards and needs immediate attention.”

The former municipal manager paints a picture of a community with critical infrastructure issues. The combination of high demand, poor maintenance, and the imminent failure of infrastructure components poses risks to the community's well-being. Urgent and immediate attention is deemed necessary to prevent severe inconvenience, danger, and exposure to health and safety hazards. This underscores the importance of timely intervention and investment in the maintenance and improvement of community infrastructure.

Lekwa LM IDP of 2019-2020 made an importance phrase to which 'Local government has a vital role in turning around the economy', in other words through various policy decisions, investments, and collaborations, local governments can contribute significantly to turning around the economy and creating conditions for sustainable growth. In contrast the municipality had an increased rate of weak financial planning, underinvestment in assets maintenance and renewal, poor management, and non-payment of creditors, which compromised the ability of the municipality to deliver service to the community.

[The mayor said the municipality's electrical infrastructure is so run down it is difficult to even know how to go about fixing it. Lekwa's new leadership plans on putting up water and electricity meters and dealing with illegal connections to ensure that the municipality has more revenue coming in.

4.5 The effect of challenges on service delivery

ii. How do these challenges affect service delivery at the local municipality?

The institutional challenges have affected the residents tremendously as they have suffered from the lack of water, battles with electricity and explosive sewage problems. In a statement the South African Humans Rights Commission (2020) stated 'Other than financial constraints, there does not appear to be the necessary human and technical capacity to attend to the prevailing challenges'. While this is true, the previous administration had no plans to dire plans to maintain the already failing infrastructure which ultimately led to the water crises. Interviewees P4 and P7 also stated that the previous council had awarded millions of tenders in aims to fix the problems, but all their aims fall unto futile ground.

There was a case where they municipality had issued a tender worth R14.6 million in order to fix the sewage draining system but till today that sewage system has not being fixed and the people are suffering. Imagine walking in dirt every day, you wake up and you walk in dirt because the sewage system is not fixed, and nobody was held accountable as to where did the money go [Interview with Participant 4].

There was also an incident with the previous council where R32 million was not accounted till date. The National and Provincial government had no option to dissolve the council. So, its heart wrenching that people think of their self-desires and not the people or the community [Interview with participant 7].

P4 highlights a critical failure in delivering an essential public service, with a significant impact on the daily lives of community members. The lack of accountability adds to the complexity of the issue, raising concerns about transparency and responsible governance. While P7 noted that the incident involving unaccounted funds and the dissolution of the council highlights a breakdown in financial management and governance. The emotional impact expressed in the statement reflects the disappointment and frustration when leaders prioritize personal interests over community welfare. There is a need to address infrastructure and accountability to which this will rebuild the trust by ensuring transparent and accountable governance will be essential for the community's well-being moving forward.

The lack of holding people accountable for the mismanagement of funds seems to be a major. Not only are officials not being held accountable but also big businesses within Lekwa are stealing services such as water without paying for the services. P12

Early Bird that falls under Astral Cooperation as big as it is steals water from the municipality and they use about thousands of kilolitres of water a day. And the sad things are they do not pay for the services or are they even held accountable. [Interview with participant 12].

The reported practices of Early Bird, including substantial water usage without payment and perceived lack of accountability, raise important questions about the fairness of resource allocation and adherence to regulations. Addressing these issues may require increased enforcement, transparent reporting, and a commitment to corporate responsibility to ensure equitable access to essential services within the. Such problems do set the municipality backwards, as financial mismanagement can only cause a service delivery backlog.

Look the municipality does not represent the aspirations of the municipality and that is the many reasons as to why we hit and streets and go march because it means they are not delivering services and we are talking about water, electricity, and roads. When you check whether these essential are being delivered you find that they are not, there is nothing being delivered.

4.6 Strategies adopted by the municipality

iii. What strategies have been put in place by the municipality to turn around these challenges and enable it to deliver on its mandate?

It is safe to say that the current administration has been working effortlessly to implement strategies that would alleviate the existing issues within the community and within the municipality itself. The strategies implemented were recommended by the national and provincial government which are stipulated in the Financial Recovery Plan (2021). In addition, the involvement of stakeholders played a major role as they assisted financially to execute these strategies.

4.6.1 Water and sanitation

A 12-month project is currently in full swing, where the municipality is upgrading the sewage line in Coligny Street, as this sewage line has resulted in massive sewage in the area. So with the help of the Department of Water and Sanitation, the municipality was able to employ a contractor and 17 general workers who are hands on the project.

Due to the water losses the municipality alongside the stakeholders (Astral Cooperation and Seriti) have invested in buying back-up generators for the water treatment plant as to when the town experiences loadshedding the community will have water running in their taps. [Interview with participant 1 and 2].

As already stated, the infrastructure of water treatment plant is unable to meet the demand as the population of Lekwa keeps growing. On the 9th of June 23, the minister of Department of Water and Sanitation Senzo Mchunu visited the water treatment plant and has committed R350 million to assist Lekwa in dealing with its many water and sanitation challenges. The departments support is geared towards refurbishing the ageing infrastructure and operations and maintenance to improve the provision of service delivery to the community (Standerton Advertiser, 2023)

4.6.2 Governance

In terms of governance there is investigation underway and a Report 106 which will detail the misuse of money and all those implicated in that report will face the fury of the law [Participant 1]. The main area of concern on governance was the political instability surrounding councillors, to which SALGA partnered with Provincial Treasury to provide support by conducting training workshop for councillors.

4.6.3 Skills and competencies

“A skills audit is underway in the municipality because now we have people that have been in the municipality since forever and do not even have the required qualifications or the needed skills for their jobs” [Participant 9]

The participants essentially are insinuating that skills audit in the municipality is a proactive approach to ensuring that the workforce is well-equipped for their roles. It addresses potential gaps in qualifications and skills, contributes to legal compliance, and supports the overall efficiency of the organization. Additionally, it creates opportunities for ongoing professional development and ensures fairness in the workplace. Vetting or known as background check is something that the municipality is introducing so that the only solution to nepotism will be to check the background of each application when they apply for a particular job and management operating system will bring accountability in the workplace and its definitely value for money.

4.6.4 Boosting local business and Financial Management

Various strategies have been implemented to address the development of the community. The Lekwa LM handed over equipment to small businesses, this campaign was mainly focused on entrepreneurs in the townships and rural areas. A total of 33 business had been approved and a grant amount of R10 000 to procure machine tools and equipment was given the enterprises (Standerton Advertiser, 2022)

According to participant 9, a new monitoring and evaluation system has been established that keeps track on the tenders that have been issued. The aim of the system is to ensure the required services are really supplied to the community. But also, an external monitor is employed by the provincial to evaluate all the projects that are supposedly begin maintained or fixed in the town.

According to the FRP, the national treasury suggested a new electricity meter, which will enable the municipality to gain revenue from those meters. The municipality was able to acquire about 7900 smart meters from the national treasury and this project is underway. This project brings about delight to residents who are paying for water and electricity, as some of the residences do not pay for services they receive from the municipality. Through this campaign the municipality is also advocating for the residences who are currently unable to pay for services, in this case the municipality has a form called ‘Indigent Form’ where those

who are not working or earning a salary above R4000 have the right to apply for this Indigent Form to which the municipality will subsidise the people. The aim of this is to limit the people from bridging electricity.

4.7 Understanding the role of stakeholders

iv. How are stakeholders such as business and civil society in Lekwa playing a role to restore service delivery in the municipality?

For municipalities to deliver services they rely on finances and considering that Lekwa LM currently has no money to deliver those services, they rely on the stakeholders to assist them in providing services. The role of stakeholders is incredibly significant as they play a critical role in delivery services to the community. Therefore, it is important for municipalities to maintain a good relationship with stakeholders.

However, in the case Lekwa it seems communication with stakeholders is not strong as the participants complained on the lack of attention and communication they receive from the municipality. Each participant noted that;

Well, we continuously try to engage with the municipality, but we normally engage more with the LED office because we have not had access to talk or engage with the Municipal Manager or at least some of the councillors [Interview with participant 6]

We do not have any communication with the executive Mayor, in most cases the municipality does not really engage with us unless we make means to communicate with them [Interview with participant 7]

It is essential to approach these strategies diplomatically and persistently to foster open lines of communication between the community and municipal leaders. By using a combination of formal requests, community initiatives, and leveraging existing channels, there may be opportunities to enhance dialogue and collaboration.

The Lekwa LM Local Economic Development Strategy mentioned that businesses are prone to move away from towns or cities that provide terrible services delivery, where there is no effective communication strategy as this disrupts production processes and where there is a lack of security results in financial losses. According to IDP (2022/2027) the town had

witnessed an increase in unemployment as some of the business closed due to the effects of Covid-19 but more so the lack of support from the municipality. This has been an issue as P3 voiced out that,

The municipality is drowning because Standerton used to be a very trending town with job opportunities, for example textile companies have closed, the biggest employer Coke has also shutdown, so many people lost their jobs you so there is no hope for this town [Interview with participant 3].

In summary, this participant's perspective underscores the severe economic challenges faced by Standerton due to the closure of key industries and the loss of major employers. The use of phrases like "no hope for this town" reflects the profound impact of these economic setbacks on the community's outlook and future prospects. With such a background the stakeholders indicated that their role is to change the situation in Lekwa by creating employment and ensuring that people are gaining necessary skills that would benefit them in the long run but mostly importantly their role as stakeholder is to also support Lekwa in their development strategies.

The stakeholders indicated that their role is to ensure that the community of the municipality aims to provide excellent basic services delivery, safety, and security. Instability within the municipality ranges from not providing steady and clean water, electricity which was led by the continuation of default payments to Eskom. In one of the interviews, it was mentioned that

We saw that there was a lot of youth unemployment and a huge lack of service delivery, the roads were bad, and there was also loadshedding known as the Lekwa loadshedding which affected only the residents of Standerton and bearing in mind there was also the Eskom load shedding [Interview with participant 6].

The other project is focusing on agriculture where a lot of people are struggling to get food, especially when we looked deep in the township we discovered that most of the people living in Lekwa cannot afford to buy food due to how expensive it is and also because some do not have money. This project has hired a lot of youth, and they get a bit of stipend which at least assists them to buy food or things for their essential need, but the important fact is that they

are working, and they are at least gaining a bit of skills from this programme. We also call this work-learn and grow.

In this instance Smitt (2022) reported on the instance where the Gold Chicken, which is one of Lekwa's biggest employer, had no water for one week which is vital to maintaining hygiene especially at a plant that slaughters thousands of chickens a day. Goldi has about 24 million birds on floor that need to be fed and watered on a daily basis, this can solely mean without services such as water and electricity the company loses money keeping the chicken alive.

In the Astral Operation Limited annual report of 2017, it said that:

Astral Foods said feeble municipal infrastructure had played havoc with a number of the group's manufacturing and processing facilities. It also noted that businesses have to come up with measures to mitigate the risk posed by "cash-strapped Eskom and the ailing electricity infrastructure, predominantly in control by municipalities."

The statement highlights the adverse impact of feeble municipal infrastructure on Astral Foods' operations, particularly its manufacturing and processing facilities. Additionally, it emphasizes the challenges and risks associated with both Eskom's financial situation and the deteriorating electricity infrastructure controlled by municipalities. The need for businesses to implement measures to mitigate these risks underscores the importance of adapting to and navigating challenging infrastructure conditions in the business environment.

In their bid to assist the municipality to deliver services to the community, Astral Operation in 2018 approached the Northern Gauteng High Court seeking intervention from the National Executive into the financial and service delivery affairs of the Lekwa Local Municipality in terms of Section 139(7) of the Constitution. In a media statement the CEO of Astral Chris Schutte stated, "The poor service delivery from the Lekwa municipality is untenable and Astral decided to take extraordinary steps in launching legal proceedings against the provincial and national government to hold them accountable for the failures in municipal service delivery in Standerton."

The statement signifies a determination to take significant and unusual measures by pursuing legal action against higher levels of government to address the perceived failures in municipal

service delivery in Standerton. The legal proceedings aim to hold authorities accountable for the identified shortcomings and seek remedies through the legal system.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the study in alignment with the research objectives, aiming to address the study questions comprehensively. The analysis was conducted through a thorough examination of the qualitative data using thematic analysis methods. The qualitative findings were presented using identified themes and sub-themes derived from the data, allowing for a structured and detailed exploration of the research outcomes.

Through qualitative interpretation of the findings, based on the insights gathered from interviews with study participants, the researcher provided valuable insights into the institutional challenges impacting service delivery within the Lekwa Local Municipality. By organizing the findings around key themes, the chapter facilitated a clear understanding of the complex issues at hand and their implications for municipal governance and service provision.

Moving forward, the next chapter will build upon these findings to present key conclusions drawn from the study outcomes. Additionally, the chapter will offer recommendations based on the identified challenges and insights, aiming to inform policy and decision-making processes within the municipality and contribute to the enhancement of service delivery and governance effectiveness.

5 Chapter 5 Discussion of findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher synthesizes and discusses the data collected in the study. Initially, secondary sources were considered, including the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) of the Lekwa Local Municipality, municipal plans, and other official reports. These documents, previously identified in earlier chapters, serve as the primary means of communication by the municipality regarding its intended plans to both the national government and the public. The findings of the study are organized and discussed in accordance with the main research question and sub-questions. Themes emerging from the data are arranged relative to the research questions and objectives, allowing for a systematic exploration of the collected information. By structuring the discussion in this manner, the researcher aims to provide a coherent and insightful analysis of the study's outcomes.

5.2 Brief Summary of the Research Objectives

This section delves into the heart of our study's findings and interpretations, engaging in a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of the data and evidence presented in preceding chapter.

5.2.1 Objective 1: Discuss how the institutional challenges hinder the Lekwa Local Municipality from delivering services to the community.

The analysis of Lekwa Local Municipality's Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and related documents underscores the municipality's recognition of the urgent need to address critical service delivery challenges, particularly in the areas of water and infrastructure. While there have been some improvements in water and sanitation service delivery, significant challenges persist, highlighting the complex nature of the issues facing the municipality.

Despite visible improvements such as the procurement of new water trucks and the installation of water pipes, the municipality has yet to begin upgrading water plant infrastructure. This delay further hinders efforts to address the inadequate provision of clean water, emphasizing the need for more proactive and comprehensive strategies to overcome infrastructure deficits and ensure access to essential services for all residents.

Additionally, the analysis reveals that Lekwa Municipality lacks transparent, accountable, effective, and efficient leadership. The prevalence of political factions and infighting within the municipality undermines service delivery and exacerbates governance challenges. To

address these issues, organizational restructuring and effective human resource management are imperative to ensure a sustainable working environment, maintain and improve municipal policies, and enhance overall performance.

Understanding the institutional factors that may be hindering success in delivering services is crucial for Lekwa Local Municipality (LM) to effectively address service delivery challenges. These institutional factors can include various elements within the municipality's organizational structure, processes, and governance framework that impact its ability to deliver services to the people. Some key institutional factors that Lekwa LM should consider include:

5.2.1.1 Poor implementation of local legislative framework

The poor implementation of the local government legislative framework in Lekwa Local Municipality has resulted in governance failures, hindered effective service delivery, and eroded trust in local authorities. The municipality's failure to adhere to legal requirements and principles has led to mismanagement, corruption, and a lack of accountability, exacerbating social inequalities, and impeding the municipality's ability to meet the needs of its residents.

The local government legislative framework in South Africa provides the legal basis for the functioning and governance of municipalities, including Lekwa Local Municipality. However, the municipality's poor implementation of this framework has contributed to a range of governance challenges, undermining its effectiveness and legitimacy.

One of the most significant consequences of poor implementation is the prevalence of mismanagement and corruption within Lekwa Local Municipality. Without effective enforcement mechanisms and oversight, municipal officials may engage in fraudulent activities, misuse public funds, or abuse their authority for personal gain. This not only wastes vital resources but also undermines public trust in local authorities, leading to disillusionment and dissatisfaction among residents.

Furthermore, the failure to adhere to legal requirements can result in a lack of transparency and accountability in Lekwa Local Municipality's governance processes. When municipal officials fail to uphold standards for public procurement, financial management, and decision-making, it becomes challenging for residents to hold them accountable for their actions. This

lack of accountability fosters a culture of impunity and undermines democratic principles, weakening the municipality's ability to serve the interests of its constituents effectively.

Additionally, poor implementation of the legislative framework can exacerbate social inequalities within Lekwa Local Municipality. Municipal resources may be misallocated or prioritized to benefit certain groups or individuals, neglecting the needs of marginalized communities and perpetuating disparities in access to services, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. This further alienates vulnerable populations and undermines social cohesion within the municipality.

To address these challenges, urgent action is needed to strengthen the implementation of the local government legislative framework in Lekwa Local Municipality. This may require capacity-building initiatives for municipal officials, improved oversight mechanisms, and increased transparency and citizen participation in governance processes. Additionally, robust enforcement of anti-corruption measures and accountability mechanisms is essential to deter malpractice and promote ethical conduct within the municipality.

5.2.1.2 Poor Governance

Poor governance in Lekwa Local Municipality has led to a myriad of challenges, including ineffective service delivery, financial mismanagement, and a lack of accountability. This governance deficit has eroded public trust, exacerbated socio-economic inequalities, and hindered the municipality's ability to meet the needs of its residents. Urgent reforms are needed to address these governance failures and restore confidence in local authorities.

The poor governance practices in Lekwa Local Municipality have manifested in various ways, undermining the municipality's ability to effectively serve its constituents. One of the most glaring consequences is the chronic problem of ineffective service delivery. Residents of Lekwa Local Municipality continue to face challenges in accessing basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity, and healthcare, despite being entitled to these services as citizens. This failure to deliver essential services not only perpetuates socio-economic disparities but also undermines the municipality's legitimacy and credibility.

Furthermore, poor governance in Lekwa Local Municipality is often synonymous with financial mismanagement and corruption. Reports of irregular expenditure, unauthorized spending,

and procurement irregularities are common occurrences, reflecting a lack of transparency and accountability in financial matters. The diversion of public funds for personal gain or political purposes deprives the municipality of resources needed for service delivery and development projects, exacerbating the socio-economic challenges faced by residents.

Another hallmark of poor governance in Lekwa Local Municipality is the lack of accountability and transparency in decision-making processes. Municipal officials may operate without proper oversight, ignoring legal requirements for public participation, financial reporting, and procurement procedures. This lack of accountability fosters a culture of impunity, where public officials feel immune to consequences for their actions, further eroding public trust in local governance structures.

The consequences of poor governance extend beyond immediate service delivery challenges to exacerbate broader socio-economic inequalities within the municipality. Marginalized communities bear the brunt of inadequate service provision, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion. Without effective governance mechanisms to address these disparities and promote inclusive development, social cohesion and community resilience are compromised.

To address the governance deficits in Lekwa Local Municipality, urgent reforms are needed to strengthen accountability, transparency, and ethical leadership. This may entail enhancing oversight mechanisms, promoting citizen participation in decision-making processes, and implementing measures to combat corruption and financial mismanagement. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives for municipal officials and robust enforcement of legal and regulatory frameworks are essential to instil a culture of good governance and restore public trust in local authorities.

Poor governance in Lekwa Local Municipality has far-reaching implications for service delivery, financial management, and socio-economic development. By addressing these governance failures through comprehensive reforms, the municipality can work towards restoring public confidence, promoting inclusive growth, and improving the well-being of all residents. The observation regarding the lack of coordination and communication among departments, as highlighted by Butler and Rogerson (2016), is indeed a critical factor contributing to inefficiencies in service delivery within municipalities. This lack of coordination often results in wasted time, duplicated efforts, and misallocation of resources, ultimately hindering the

municipality's ability to effectively address the needs of its constituents. In the context of Lekwa Local Municipality, the absence of effective leadership has likely exacerbated existing challenges and hindered progress towards improving service delivery. The absence of effective leadership has resulted in mismanagement, corruption, and a failure to address the needs of residents, exacerbating socio-economic challenges, and eroding public trust in local government.

The lack of effective leadership in Lekwa Local Municipality has been a pervasive issue that has hindered the municipality's ability to fulfill its mandate and serve the needs of its residents. One of the most glaring consequences of poor leadership is the chronic problem of governance failures and service delivery shortcomings. Without strong and visionary leadership, municipal officials may lack clear direction and fail to prioritize the delivery of essential services such as water, sanitation, electricity, and healthcare. This results in ongoing challenges for residents and perpetuates socio-economic inequalities within the municipality.

Furthermore, poor leadership is often associated with mismanagement and corruption within municipal structures. In the absence of ethical and accountable leadership, there is a risk of financial irregularities, embezzlement of public funds, and abuse of power by municipal officials. This not only squanders valuable resources but also undermines public trust in the integrity of local government institutions, leading to disillusionment and apathy among citizens.

Another consequence of poor leadership is a lack of transparency and accountability in decision-making processes. Municipal leaders may operate without proper oversight, disregarding legal requirements for public participation, financial reporting, and procurement procedures. This lack of accountability fosters a culture of impunity, where public officials feel immune to consequences for their actions, further eroding public trust in local governance structures.

Moreover, the absence of effective leadership exacerbates broader socio-economic challenges within Lekwa Local Municipality. Marginalized communities bear the brunt of inadequate service provision and governance failures, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion. Without strong and accountable leadership to address these disparities and promote inclusive development, social cohesion and community resilience are compromised.

To address the issue of poor leadership in Lekwa Local Municipality, urgent reforms are needed to foster a culture of ethical and accountable governance. This may involve strengthening leadership capacities, promoting transparency and citizen participation in decision-making processes, and implementing measures to combat corruption and maladministration. Additionally, fostering a culture of integrity and ethical conduct within municipal structures is essential to rebuild public trust and restore confidence in local government.

By addressing these leadership deficiencies through comprehensive reforms and promoting ethical and accountable governance, the municipality can work towards addressing socio-economic challenges, improving service delivery, and enhancing the well-being of all residents.

5.2.1.3 Poor Financial Management Systems

Poor financial management systems in Lekwa Municipality have led to a myriad of challenges and inefficiencies that have significantly impacted the municipality's ability to effectively manage its finances and deliver essential services to its residents. These poor financial management systems are characterized by several key issues:

- Lack of Budgetary Discipline

The municipality may struggle with adhering to budgetary constraints and fails to effectively plan and allocate financial resources. This can result in overspending, budget deficits, and financial instability. The situation described, where Lekwa LM is operating without a budget and is facing a deficit of R350 million, is indeed concerning and indicative of significant financial challenges within the municipality. Operating without a budget can severely hamper the municipality's ability to plan, prioritize, and allocate resources effectively, leading to uncertainties and disruptions in service delivery. A deficit of R350 million highlights the magnitude of the financial shortfall facing Lekwa LM. Such a deficit can have serious implications for the municipality's financial sustainability, creditworthiness, and ability to meet its financial obligations. It may also indicate underlying issues such as inadequate revenue generation, unsustainable expenditure patterns, or poor financial management practices.

- Weak Internal Controls

Inadequate internal controls contribute to a lack of oversight and accountability, making the municipality vulnerable to financial mismanagement, fraud, and corruption. Without proper checks and balances in place, there is a higher risk of funds being misappropriated or misused.

- Poor Financial Reporting

The municipality may lack accurate and timely financial reporting mechanisms, making it difficult to track and monitor financial transactions, expenditures, and revenue streams. This lack of transparency can hinder decision-making and accountability.

- Inadequate Revenue Collection

Poor financial management systems may result in ineffective revenue collection processes, leading to a shortfall in funds needed to support municipal operations and service delivery. This can exacerbate financial strain and limit the municipality's ability to invest in infrastructure and development projects. One of the most significant issues contributing to financial mismanagement within the Lekwa Local Municipality is the inadequacy of revenue collection. Currently, the municipality is failing to collect revenue from approximately 70% of the population residing in Standerton. This poses a major challenge, as while community members continue to receive essential services, they are essentially obtaining these services for free from the municipality. This situation severely hampers the municipality's ability to execute service delivery effectively. The failure to collect revenue from a substantial portion of the population not only deprives the municipality of vital funds but also undermines the sustainability of service provision in the long run. Without adequate revenue streams, the municipality faces significant constraints in meeting the growing demands for infrastructure development, maintenance, and service delivery enhancements. Consequently, essential projects and initiatives may be delayed or scaled back, compromising the quality and accessibility of services for all residents.

Addressing the issue of inadequate revenue collection requires a multi-faceted approach that includes improving billing and collection processes, enhancing public awareness and compliance with payment obligations, and implementing measures to tackle issues such as non-payment and arrears. By addressing these challenges head-on, the municipality can

bolster its financial sustainability and ensure the equitable and efficient delivery of services to all residents.

- High Debt Levels

Lekwa Municipality may struggle with high levels of debt due to poor financial management practices, including excessive borrowing, failure to repay loans, and reliance on short-term financing. High debt levels can constrain the municipality's financial flexibility and increase financial risk.

Impact on Service Delivery Ultimately, poor financial management systems can have a direct impact on service delivery, leading to delays, disruptions, and deterioration in the quality of essential services such as water, sanitation, electricity, and healthcare. Residents may experience inadequate access to basic services, further exacerbating socio-economic challenges within the community.

Addressing poor financial management systems in Lekwa Municipality requires a concerted effort to implement reforms aimed at strengthening financial governance, improving internal controls, enhancing transparency and accountability, and promoting fiscal responsibility. This may involve implementing proper budgetary processes, enhancing financial reporting mechanisms, investing in staff training and capacity building, and strengthening oversight mechanisms to ensure compliance with financial regulations and standards. By addressing these underlying issues, Lekwa Municipality can work towards improving its financial health and better meeting the needs of its residents.

The latest Lekwa Local Municipality Budget Report for 2023/2024 (2023) reveals alarming financial figures, including a deficit of R315 million and a debt burden of R69.3 million. These staggering numbers indicate a severe financial crisis within the municipality. The provincial treasury has expressed concern, noting that it may take several years for Lekwa LM to achieve a funded budget.

Scholars such as Belletti, Marescotti, and Touzard (2017) have extensively documented how municipalities like Lekwa LM are crippled by financial mismanagement, leading to their incapacitation and an inability to fulfil their mandate of service delivery. Despite the Municipal

Finance Management Act No. 56 of 2003 serving as a cornerstone for financial governance, the financial records of Lekwa LM suggest a significant deviation from the principles outlined in the act.

5.2.1.4 The high levels of debt, excessive expenditure, and the substantial deficit underscore a failure to adhere to the principles of financial prudence and accountability mandated by the MFMA. It appears that the previous leadership or council may have disregarded fiscal discipline, leading to the dire financial situation currently facing the municipality. Addressing these financial challenges will require comprehensive reforms, including improved financial management practices, enhanced transparency, and greater accountability to ensure the sustainable financial health of the municipality and its ability to deliver essential services to its residents.
Incompetent Human Resource

Monitoring the skill levels of the workforce within Lekwa Local Municipality (LM) is imperative for ensuring effective service delivery and organizational development. Leveraging the provisions of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 presents an opportunity for the municipality to enhance the capabilities of its employees through skills upgrading initiatives.

Implementing a systematic approach to skills development involves ongoing assessment of the existing skill sets within the workforce. By regularly monitoring the skill levels of employees, Lekwa LM can identify areas where skills gaps exist and prioritize training and development interventions accordingly.

The Skills Development Act provides a framework for promoting skills development in South Africa, emphasizing the importance of continuous learning, and upskilling to enhance productivity and competitiveness. Lekwa LM can utilize the provisions of this legislation to access training programs, funding opportunities, and other resources aimed at improving the skills of its workforce.

A structured and comprehensive skills development program supported by the municipality can ensure that employees have access to relevant training and educational opportunities aligned with organizational needs. This may include internal training initiatives, external courses, workshops, and certifications designed to enhance job-specific skills, leadership abilities, and professional competencies.

The presence of incompetent human resources within Lekwa Municipality poses significant challenges and impediments to effective governance, service delivery, and overall organizational performance.

Several key issues associated with incompetent human resources include:

- Underqualified Staff

The municipality may have personnel who lack the necessary qualifications, skills, or expertise to effectively perform their roles and responsibilities. This can result in substandard performance, errors, and inefficiencies in various municipal functions, including administration, service provision, and project management.

- Inadequate Training and Development

Insufficient investment in training and development programs may contribute to a lack of skills development among municipal staff. Without ongoing training opportunities, employees may struggle to keep pace with evolving job requirements, technologies, and best practices, leading to stagnation and obsolescence of skills.

- Poor Recruitment and Selection Processes

Ineffective recruitment and selection processes may result in the hiring of unsuitable candidates who are ill-equipped to meet the demands of their positions. This can perpetuate a cycle of incompetence and underperformance within the organization, hindering its ability to attract and retain high-quality talent.

- Low Morale and Engagement

Incompetent human resources can negatively impact morale and engagement levels among employees, leading to dissatisfaction, disengagement, and a lack of motivation to perform at their best. This can result in absenteeism, turnover, and a toxic work culture that further exacerbates organizational challenges.

- Risk of Mismanagement and Misconduct

Incompetent employees may be more prone to mismanagement, negligence, or misconduct in their roles, posing risks to the municipality's financial integrity, reputation, and legal

compliance. Without effective oversight and accountability mechanisms in place, the municipality may be vulnerable to fraud, corruption, and other forms of malfeasance.

- Impact on Service Delivery

Ultimately, the presence of incompetent human resources can have a direct impact on service delivery, leading to delays, errors, and deficiencies in the provision of essential services to residents. This can undermine public trust, satisfaction, and confidence in the municipality's ability to meet community needs and expectations.

The comparison between Lekwa Local Municipality and Nkomazi Local Municipality, as highlighted in the case study by Mahlalela (2019), underscores the shared institutional challenges faced by municipalities in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa. One of the prominent challenges identified in both municipalities is the lack of skilled workers, particularly in rural areas. This high skill shortage, coupled with a high vacancy rate, significantly impacts service delivery outcomes.

The shortage of skilled workers in municipal governments can have several detrimental effects on service delivery. Without sufficient expertise and capacity within key departments, municipalities may struggle to effectively plan, implement, and manage projects and programs aimed at meeting the needs of their communities. Skilled workers are essential for carrying out critical tasks such as infrastructure development, public health initiatives, economic development programs, and social services delivery. Lack of skilled workers can exacerbate existing governance challenges within municipalities. When key positions remain vacant or are filled by individuals lacking the necessary qualifications or experience, it can lead to inefficiencies, errors, and delays in decision-making and implementation processes. By addressing the root causes of incompetence within its human resources, Lekwa Municipality can strengthen its organizational capacity, improve service delivery, and better meet the needs of its residents.

5.2.2 Objectives 2: Determine the reasons that led to the institutional challenges facing the Lekwa Local Municipality.

The failure to update backlogs and sanitation statuses in Lekwa Local Municipality highlights a systemic issue with monitoring and reporting mechanisms, exacerbating the municipality's challenges. This failure reflects a broader landscape of political tensions, governance

deficiencies, and service delivery challenges within Lekwa Local Municipality, which have profound implications for its residents and overall functionality.

Despite being a 'Hung' municipality, characterized by no single political party holding a majority, the emergence of the new political party, LCF, has sparked optimism among some municipal officials. However, this optimism sharply contrasts with the widespread dissatisfaction among residents, particularly in Standerton, where an overwhelming 80% of respondents perceive service delivery as poor. This disparity underscores a significant disconnect between municipal leadership and the communities they serve.

This disconnect can be attributed to several factors, including inadequate communication channels, ineffective governance structures, and a lack of responsiveness to community needs. As a result, residents feel marginalized and disempowered, leading to growing frustration and disillusionment with municipal authorities.

The troubling pattern of stalled, delayed, and aborted projects outlined in Lekwa Local Municipality's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) underscores systemic inefficiencies and governance challenges within the municipality. These issues have not only been recognized by residents but have also prompted protests against the municipality's failure to deliver essential services. This community unrest highlights the urgent need for effective leadership and strategic planning to address the root causes of service delivery failures and restore public trust in municipal governance.

The challenges facing Lekwa Local Municipality are indeed multifaceted and require urgent attention from all stakeholders. The disconnect between municipal officials and residents, compounded by governance deficiencies and financial mismanagement, has severely undermined the municipality's ability to fulfill its mandate of providing essential services to its residents. To address these challenges effectively, concerted efforts are needed to improve governance practices, enhance transparency and accountability, and prioritize the needs of the community over political interests.

Achieving these objectives will require a holistic approach that involves collaboration between municipal authorities, community members, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders. It will involve implementing reforms to streamline decision-making processes, strengthen oversight mechanisms, and promote greater citizen participation in local

governance. By addressing these underlying issues, Lekwa Local Municipality can begin to rebuild public trust and work towards delivering the services its residents deserve.

The Auditor General's qualified audit opinions and series of disclaimer reports spanning multiple financial years present a grim picture of Lekwa Local Municipality's financial management practices. These reports consistently highlight issues of non-compliance with financial reporting standards, indicating systemic weaknesses in the municipality's financial governance framework. Such deficiencies not only diminish public confidence in the municipality's ability to manage public funds but also impede its capacity to effectively deliver essential services.

Moreover, the challenges outlined in the IDP between 2022-2027 exacerbate the municipality's water and sanitation woes. Factors such as increasing population pressure, poor revenue collection, and inadequate funding further compound the municipality's ability to address these pressing issues. The significant increase in the backlog of households without access to water, from 731 in 2016 to 2,347 in the 2016 community survey, underscores the urgency of the situation.

Furthermore, the backlog of households without access to clean water continues to escalate, particularly in wards encompassing the entire town, such as wards 1 to 15, highlighting the widespread nature of water and sanitation challenges faced by the community. These challenges not only impact the health and well-being of residents but also pose significant obstacles to the municipality's efforts to deliver essential services effectively.

Addressing these complex challenges will require comprehensive strategies that prioritize financial accountability, improve revenue generation, and allocate resources effectively. Additionally, investing in infrastructure upgrades and expanding service delivery capabilities will be essential to meet the growing demands of the population. Collaboration with stakeholders, transparent communication, and proactive governance will also be crucial in navigating these challenges and restoring public trust in the municipality's ability to deliver essential services.

The visit conducted by the Minister of Water and Sanitation in June 2023, alongside the earmarking of R350 million to tackle water and sanitation issues, underscores the government's recognition of the seriousness of service delivery and infrastructure.

Nevertheless, despite these efforts, advancements in resolving these issues have been sluggish, with service provision still lagging behind demand.

The town of Standerton in Mpumalanga, South Africa, boasts one of the country's largest chicken producers, Astral Foods, which serves as a major employer in the area. However, despite its economic significance, the town has grappled with persistent service delivery challenges, including frequent power cuts, water shortages, and poorly maintained roads filled with potholes. These issues have had a significant impact on the town's residents and local businesses, including Astral Foods.

The ongoing service delivery problems in Standerton have garnered national attention, highlighting the town as a symbol of South Africa's broader municipal woes. Astral Foods' managing director, Frans van Heerden, acknowledged the severity of the situation, emphasizing that the municipality still has a long way to go before these issues are fully resolved. However, he also noted that there have been some improvements, indicating a glimmer of hope for the town's future.

After enduring years of mismanagement and facing allegations of corruption, the Lekwa Municipality, which oversees Standerton, was placed under administration by the national government in 2021. Johann Mettler assumed the role of Lekwa's administrator and now serves as the national Cabinet representative for the municipality. Mettler has been diligently working to address the municipality's substantial debt while also ensuring that essential services are delivered efficiently.

Despite the challenges stemming from years of poor service delivery and legal disputes, there are signs of improvement in Lekwa Municipality, suggesting that the community may be on the path to recovery. Mettler acknowledges that while progress has been made, there is still much work to be done to fully address the municipality's issues. He emphasizes that the results of the intervention have been generally positive, although there is room for further improvement.

The intervention in Lekwa Municipality serves as a crucial step towards rectifying the systemic problems that have plagued the community for years. By focusing on financial stability and improving service delivery, Mettler and other stakeholders aim to ensure a brighter future for

Standerton and its residents, marking the beginning of a new chapter in the municipality's journey towards effective governance and sustainable development.

5.2.3 Objectives 3: Discuss the challenges that affect service delivery at the local municipality.

5.2.3.1 *Political administration*

The Lekwa Municipality's lack of transparent, accountable, effective, and efficient leadership is evident through recurring incidents of political factions and infighting, ultimately hindering service delivery. To address these systemic issues and foster a sustainable working environment, organizational restructuring and effective human resource management practices are imperative. These measures are essential for enhancing transparency, accountability, and performance within the municipality, ultimately improving service delivery outcomes for the community.

The absence of transparent, accountable, effective, and efficient leadership within the Lekwa Municipality has been a longstanding concern, as evidenced by recurring incidents of political factions and internal conflicts. These conflicts often overshadow the municipality's core mandate of delivering essential services to its residents, leading to delays, inefficiencies, and a lack of progress in addressing community needs.

Political hindrances indeed significantly impact the effectiveness of municipal governance. A notable example occurred in November 2023, when a motion of no confidence was initiated against the mayor of the town, resulting in their removal from office. However, just two weeks later, the same mayor was reinstated, with the rationale being "rather the devil they know" (Nyaka, 2023). This situation underscores the political tumult within the municipality, which directly influences the day-to-day operations of the towns.

The reinstatement of the mayor despite a vote of no confidence highlights the instability and unpredictability inherent in the political landscape of the municipality. Such occurrences can erode public trust in the governance process and undermine the legitimacy of decision-making authorities.

Moreover, political debacles can disrupt strategic planning, impede policy implementation, and deter potential investors. The lack of continuity and consistency in leadership can hinder

long-term development initiatives and perpetuate a cycle of uncertainty and inefficiency within the municipality. The prevalence of political factions and infighting within the municipality not only undermines governance integrity but also erodes public trust and confidence in municipal leadership. Residents rightfully expect transparent and accountable governance processes that prioritize their welfare and well-being. However, the persistent internal conflicts and power struggles detract from this objective, diverting resources and attention away from service delivery initiatives.

To address these systemic challenges, organizational restructuring is necessary to streamline decision-making processes, clarify roles and responsibilities, and enhance accountability mechanisms within the municipality. By fostering a culture of transparency and openness, municipal leaders can mitigate the risks associated with political factions and promote more effective collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders.

Furthermore, effective human resource management practices are essential for cultivating a sustainable working environment and improving overall organizational performance. This includes recruiting and retaining qualified personnel, providing ongoing training and development opportunities, and fostering a culture of accountability and professionalism. By investing in its workforce, the municipality can enhance productivity, efficiency, and service delivery outcomes.

Additionally, maintaining and improving municipal policies are crucial for ensuring consistency, fairness, and effectiveness in governance processes. Regular policy reviews and updates can help address emerging challenges, align practices with best standards, and promote greater transparency and accountability across the organization.

5.2.3.2 Provision of water and infrastructure

Inadequate bulk negatively affects LED unable to expand, Inadequate capacity (Human Resources), High unemployment rate & inequality which will lead to land invasion (S), Political instability discourage investment, Lack of regulatory framework to regulate informal business, Poor Business relationship with business communities, New political leadership, Mismatch between skills base and economic sector demands, Mushrooming of informal businesses, Lack of regulatory framework to regulate informal business, Undiversified township economy (Tuckshops) Low population negatively affects economic growth.

As Abraham (2018) stated that the inability to implement sustainable solutions can further down the line cause more problems, this is witnessed as the municipality's infrastructure status, graded as Grade D and E for water, sanitation, electricity, and roads, underscores the severity of the challenges faced by residents in accessing basic services. This grading system indicates infrastructure that is struggling to cope with the demands placed upon it and is poorly maintained, exacerbating the difficulties experienced by the community.

One of the most critical issues arising from inadequate infrastructure is the impact on residents' daily lives. Insufficient access to clean water and sanitation facilities not only compromises hygiene and health but also undermines the dignity and well-being of individuals and families. Similarly, unreliable electricity supply disrupts daily routines and economic activities, while poorly maintained roads pose safety hazards and impede transportation.

Moreover, the inadequate infrastructure poses significant risks to public safety and health. For instance, unreliable water and sanitation systems can lead to the spread of waterborne diseases, posing health risks to the community. Similarly, poorly maintained roads increase the likelihood of accidents and injuries, endangering the lives of residents.

The consequences of inadequate infrastructure extend beyond inconveniences to potentially dire outcomes, necessitating prompt attention and effective interventions from municipal authorities. It is imperative for the municipality to prioritize infrastructure development and maintenance to ensure the provision of reliable and safe basic services to residents.

Addressing the infrastructure challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including strategic planning, investment in infrastructure upgrades and maintenance, and collaboration with relevant stakeholders. Municipal authorities must allocate sufficient resources and implement proactive measures to address the deficiencies in water, sanitation, electricity, and roads infrastructure, thereby improving the quality of life and safety of residents.

5.2.3.3 Public Participation

The Lekwa Municipality's failure to involve the community in municipal affairs, compounded by the non-functionality of council and sub-committees, represents a significant obstacle to effective governance and community development. This lack of engagement not only undermines democratic principles but also deprives residents of the opportunity to contribute

to decision-making processes that directly affect their lives. Urgent measures are required to revitalize council structures, ensure their functionality, and foster genuine community participation to address this critical issue.

The Lekwa Municipality's inability to include the community in municipal affairs is a fundamental deficiency that hampers democratic governance and community development. Despite the vital role of community involvement in shaping local policies and priorities, the municipality's council and its sub-committees often fail to fulfill their functions effectively, limiting opportunities for meaningful public engagement.

The non-functionality of council and sub-committees not only reflects organizational dysfunction but also highlights a systemic failure to facilitate citizen participation in decision-making processes. Without active involvement from residents, the municipality risks making decisions that do not fully reflect the needs and aspirations of the community, leading to a disconnect between governance institutions and the people they serve.

As highlighted in the literature review, the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 emphasizes the importance of facilitating community involvement in governance processes. However, despite this legislative mandate, 60% of the participants interviewed express dissatisfaction with the level of public participation in the municipality. Particularly concerning is the lack of involvement in crucial processes such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and budget preparation, which has been a major source of contention.

The failure of the previous administration to effectively engage with the community has had dire consequences, with communities enduring significant service delivery challenges for over a decade. A glaring example is the prolonged lack of access to water, which has severely impacted residents' quality of life. This lack of public participation not only undermines the principles of democratic governance but also contributes to the failure of policy implementation. Lack of public participation has been seen through the wide protest within the community. Late 2023, the community of Standerton took to the streets in demand of access to water but importantly the demand to be involved in the affairs of the town. To address these challenges, urgent action is needed to revitalize council structures and ensure their functionality. This may involve reforming administrative processes, providing training for council members, and establishing clear guidelines for sub-committee operations. By

revitalizing these governance structures, the municipality can create avenues for citizen participation and ensure that community voices are heard in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, efforts should be made to foster genuine community engagement and participation in municipal affairs. This could include organizing public forums, conducting outreach campaigns, and leveraging digital platforms to solicit feedback from residents. By actively involving the community in discussions on key issues and policy initiatives, the municipality can promote transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in its governance practices.

Additionally, the municipality should prioritize transparency and accountability in its operations to build trust with the community. This entails providing regular updates on council activities, making information readily accessible to the public, and fostering a culture of openness and responsiveness to citizen concerns.

5.2.3.4 Financial sustainability

The Lekwa Municipality's incorrect and inconsistent billing system, combined with non-functional meters, represents a systemic failure in municipal service provision that directly impacts residents' financial stability and trust in local governance. Despite recent strides in improving audit outcomes, persistent challenges with billing accuracy and meter functionality continue to plague the municipality, creating significant barriers to effective service delivery and community satisfaction.

The incorrect and inconsistent billing system not only imposes undue financial burdens on residents but also erodes confidence in the municipality's ability to manage public resources responsibly. Residents often face inflated bills, erroneous charges, and irregular billing cycles, leading to confusion, frustration, and financial strain. Moreover, the lack of transparency and accountability in the billing process undermines public trust and raises concerns about the municipality's commitment to fair and equitable service provision.

The presence of non-functional meters further compounds the problem, as it prevents accurate measurement of water and electricity consumption, leading to arbitrary billing practices and disputes between residents and the municipality. In addition to financial implications, non-functional meters also pose public health risks by hindering the

identification and mitigation of water leaks and wastage, compromising the integrity of the municipality's water supply system.

While recent improvements in audit outcomes are commendable, they do not fully address the underlying issues with the billing system and meter functionality. To effectively tackle these challenges, urgent action is needed to overhaul the billing system, implement robust meter maintenance, and repair programs, and enhance transparency and accountability in billing practices.

Furthermore, the municipality must prioritize customer service and responsiveness to residents' concerns by establishing clear channels for billing inquiries, dispute resolution, and feedback mechanisms. By fostering open communication and engagement with the community, the municipality can rebuild trust, enhance service delivery, and promote a culture of accountability and transparency in its operations.

5.2.3.3 Local Economic Development

The Lekwa Economic Development (LED) faces multifaceted challenges, including inadequate bulk infrastructure hindering expansion, insufficient human resources capacity, exacerbated by high unemployment and inequality, which may spur land invasions. Political instability deters investment, compounded by a lack of regulatory frameworks to manage informal businesses and strained relationships with business communities. Additionally, mismatches between skills and sector demands, coupled with an undiversified township economy and low population growth, further impede economic progress. Addressing these issues necessitates comprehensive interventions to bolster infrastructure, enhance human capital, foster regulatory clarity, and promote inclusive economic growth.

The Lekwa Economic Development (LED) grapples with a myriad of obstacles that hinder its growth and sustainability. Firstly, inadequate bulk infrastructure severely restricts expansion opportunities, limiting the municipality's ability to attract new businesses and industries. This infrastructure deficit not only stifles economic growth but also undermines the municipality's competitiveness in the region.

Furthermore, the LED faces significant challenges related to human resources capacity, exacerbated by a high unemployment rate, and widening inequality. The lack of skilled personnel impedes effective policymaking and implementation, hindering the municipality's

ability to address pressing economic issues. Moreover, the prospect of land invasions looms large, driven by socio-economic disparities and heightened by inadequate job opportunities, exacerbating social tensions and instability.

Political instability further compounds these challenges, deterring potential investors and eroding confidence in the local economy. The absence of a conducive regulatory framework to govern informal businesses adds to the uncertainty, hampering formalization efforts and impeding the municipality's ability to harness the potential of the informal sector.

In addition to these challenges, strained relationships with local business communities pose a significant barrier to economic development. Lack of trust and cooperation between the municipality and businesses inhibits collaboration on key initiatives and undermines efforts to stimulate growth and innovation.

Moreover, mismatches between the skills base and the demands of the local economy exacerbate unemployment and underemployment, limiting opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. The prevalence of informal businesses, particularly in township economies, further underscores the need for regulatory clarity and support to promote formalization and economic diversification.

Overall, the LED's economic prospects are constrained by an undiversified economy reliant on traditional sectors, such as tuckshops, and a stagnant population growth rate. To overcome these challenges and unlock the municipality's economic potential, comprehensive interventions are required, including investments in infrastructure, skills development, regulatory reforms, and stakeholder engagement. Only through concerted efforts to address these issues can the LED pave the way for inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

5.2.4 Objectives 4: Determine the strategies that have been put in place by the municipality to turn around these challenges and enable it to deliver on its mandate. In accordance with the Lekwa LM IDP the municipality prioritised the following in order to ensure that the services may be eradicated:

- Improve Water and Sanitation
- Provide reliable electricity supply
- Provision of efficient and effective solid waste management service

- Provisions of safe and dependable roads

5.2.4.1 *Economic Repositioning*

Strategic objective: is to Reduce unemployment rate by 10% and grow local economy 3%.

Reducing the unemployment rate by 10% and achieving a 3% growth in the local economy are ambitious yet achievable goals that require concerted efforts from both public and private sectors. By implementing targeted policies and initiatives focused on job creation, skills development, and fostering entrepreneurship, the Lekwa Municipality can unlock its economic potential, enhance productivity, and improve living standards for its residents.

Reducing the unemployment rate by 10% and achieving a 3% growth in the local economy represent critical objectives for the Lekwa Municipality's economic development agenda. These goals not only signify tangible improvements in livelihoods but also contribute to broader socio-economic stability and prosperity within the community.

To realize these targets, proactive measures must be taken to address the root causes of unemployment and stagnation in the local economy. One key strategy involves investing in job creation initiatives, such as infrastructure development projects, small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) support programs, and public works schemes. By prioritizing labour-intensive projects and incentivizing private sector investment, the municipality can generate employment opportunities across various sectors, thereby reducing unemployment rates.

Additionally, efforts to grow the local economy by 3% necessitate a comprehensive approach that focuses on enhancing productivity, promoting innovation, and diversifying economic activities. This may involve supporting strategic industries with growth potential, such as agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and technology. By providing targeted incentives, access to financing, and business development support services, the municipality can stimulate economic expansion and create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and investment.

Moreover, investing in skills development and education is crucial for equipping residents with the capabilities needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving job market. By expanding vocational training programs, promoting STEM education, and fostering partnerships with educational institutions and industry stakeholders, the municipality can bridge skills gaps, empower youth, and enhance employability prospects.

Furthermore, promoting inclusive economic growth requires addressing structural barriers and fostering an enabling business environment that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation. This may entail streamlining regulatory processes, reducing bureaucratic red tape, and improving access to markets and financing for aspiring entrepreneurs and SMEs. By implementing targeted policies and initiatives that prioritize job creation, skills development, and entrepreneurship, the municipality can unlock its economic potential, create sustainable livelihoods, and improve the well-being of its residents. Through collaborative efforts between government, private sector, and civil society stakeholders, the municipality can pave the way for inclusive and resilient economic growth that benefits all members of the community.

5.2.4.2 Community participation

Community participation is not only a fundamental democratic principle but also a crucial driver of effective governance and sustainable development in the Lekwa Municipality. By actively engaging residents in decision-making processes, fostering collaboration, and empowering local communities, the municipality can harness the collective wisdom, expertise, and resources of its citizens to address pressing challenges, promote social cohesion, and build resilient and inclusive communities.

Community participation lies at the heart of democratic governance and is essential for ensuring that the voices, needs, and aspirations of residents are heard and respected in the decision-making process. In the context of the Lekwa Municipality, fostering meaningful community participation is not just a moral imperative but also a pragmatic approach to addressing complex socio-economic and environmental challenges facing the local community.

Active engagement of residents in decision-making processes enhances transparency, accountability, and legitimacy in governance. By providing opportunities for citizens to contribute their perspectives, insights, and expertise, the municipality can make more informed and inclusive decisions that reflect the diverse needs and interests of the community. Moreover, involving residents in the co-creation and implementation of policies and programs fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment, strengthening social cohesion and trust between government and citizens.

Furthermore, community participation serves as a catalyst for innovation and problem-solving. Local residents often possess valuable knowledge of their communities, including local resources, cultural practices, and social networks, which can inform more contextually relevant and effective solutions to local challenges. By tapping into this collective wisdom and creativity, the municipality can develop more sustainable and resilient strategies for addressing issues such as unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation, and public health.

Empowering local communities through participatory processes also contributes to capacity-building and social capital formation. By providing platforms for skill-building, leadership development, and civic engagement, the municipality can nurture a culture of active citizenship and collective action, enabling residents to take ownership of their own development and contribute to the common good. Moreover, fostering partnerships and collaborations between government, civil society organizations, businesses, and other stakeholders can amplify the impact of community-driven initiatives and facilitate the mobilization of resources and support for local projects.

5.2.4.3 Human resource strategy

Strategic objective: Municipal employees and councillors must be trained

Regular review of the organizational structure and consistent implementation of an annual recruitment plan are imperative for ensuring the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of the Lekwa Municipality's operations. By periodically assessing the organizational structure to align with evolving needs and objectives and adhering to a structured recruitment plan, the municipality can optimize its human resources, enhance service delivery, and foster a culture of accountability and excellence in public administration.

The organizational structure serves as the backbone of the Lekwa Municipality's operations, providing the framework for roles, responsibilities, and reporting relationships within the organization. Regular review of this structure is essential to ensure that it remains aligned with the municipality's evolving priorities, mandates, and service delivery requirements. By conducting periodic assessments, the municipality can identify inefficiencies, redundancies, and gaps in the organizational setup and make informed decisions to streamline processes, clarify roles, and optimize resource allocation.

Furthermore, consistent implementation of an annual recruitment plan is critical for attracting, retaining, and developing a skilled and motivated workforce that is essential for effective service delivery and organizational performance. By proactively planning recruitment efforts, the municipality can anticipate staffing needs, identify key skill gaps, and develop targeted strategies for talent acquisition and retention. Moreover, adhering to a structured recruitment plan promotes transparency, fairness, and meritocracy in the hiring process, ensuring that vacancies are filled based on qualifications, experience, and suitability for the role.

In addition to recruitment, the annual implementation of a recruitment plan encompasses various aspects of human resource management, including training and development, performance management, and succession planning. By investing in employee development and career advancement opportunities, the municipality can enhance staff competencies, job satisfaction, and retention rates, while also fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Similarly, robust performance management systems enable the municipality to set clear performance expectations, provide regular feedback, and recognize and reward excellence, thereby motivating employees to perform at their best and contribute to organizational success.

Moreover, succession planning ensures continuity and stability in leadership and critical roles within the organization by identifying and developing internal talent pipelines. By grooming high-potential employees for future leadership positions and key responsibilities, the municipality can mitigate the risks associated with turnover and ensure a smooth transition of knowledge and expertise.

Regular review of the organizational structure and consistent implementation of an annual recruitment plan are indispensable for optimizing human resources, enhancing service delivery, and promoting organizational effectiveness and resilience in the Lekwa Municipality. By prioritizing these initiatives, the municipality can build a skilled, motivated, and high-performing workforce capable of meeting the evolving needs and expectations of the community while upholding principles of transparency, accountability, and excellence in public administration.

5.2.4.4 *Develop Water Master Plan*

Strategic objective: To improve the access to water

The development of a Water Master Plan is not only essential but urgent for the Lekwa Municipality to ensure sustainable management of its water resources, address pressing challenges, and meet the growing demands of its residents. By crafting a comprehensive and forward-thinking plan, the municipality can enhance water security, improve infrastructure resilience, and safeguard the well-being of its communities, while also promoting economic development and environmental sustainability.

The Lekwa Municipality faces significant challenges related to water management, including limited access to clean and reliable water, aging infrastructure, and increasing demand due to population growth and economic development. In light of these challenges, the development of a Water Master Plan is imperative to guide the municipality's efforts in ensuring the sustainable and equitable management of its water resources.

A Water Master Plan serves as a strategic roadmap for assessing current water supply and demand dynamics, identifying vulnerabilities and risks, and charting a course of action to achieve long-term water security and resilience. Through comprehensive data collection, hydrological assessments, and stakeholder engagement, the municipality can gain a holistic understanding of its water resources and develop strategies to optimize their use while mitigating potential risks and impacts.

One key aspect of the Water Master Plan is infrastructure planning and investment. By prioritizing infrastructure upgrades, repairs, and expansions based on projected water demands, population growth patterns, and climate change projections, the municipality can ensure the reliability, efficiency, and sustainability of its water supply systems. This may include investments in water treatment plants, distribution networks, storage facilities, and wastewater treatment infrastructure to improve service reliability, quality, and coverage.

Moreover, the Water Master Plan should incorporate measures to promote water conservation and efficiency, as well as sustainable water use practices. By implementing demand management strategies, such as public awareness campaigns, water-saving incentives, and leak detection programs, the municipality can reduce water wastage, alleviate

pressure on existing resources, and enhance resilience to droughts and other water-related challenges.

5.2.4.5 Financial Recovery Plan

The Municipality confronts significant financial challenges, including revenue shortfalls, budget deficits, and mounting debt obligations, which threaten its ability to deliver essential services and meet the needs of its residents. In response to these challenges, the implementation of a Financial Recovery Plan is imperative to chart a path towards fiscal sustainability and operational resilience.

A Financial Recovery Plan entails a comprehensive assessment of the municipality's financial health, including an analysis of revenue sources, expenditure patterns, debt levels, and cash flow dynamics. Through this assessment, the municipality can identify key areas of weakness and develop targeted strategies to address underlying financial constraints and improve overall financial performance.

One critical aspect of the Financial Recovery Plan is enhancing revenue generation through measures such as improving billing and collection systems, expanding the tax base, and diversifying revenue streams. By optimizing revenue collection processes, reducing leakages, and implementing fair and transparent tax policies, the municipality can increase its revenue base and reduce reliance on external financing sources, thereby improving its financial resilience and independence.

In addition to revenue enhancement, the Financial Recovery Plan should focus on controlling expenditure and optimizing resource allocation to ensure efficient and effective use of financial resources. This may involve implementing cost-saving measures, streamlining administrative processes, and prioritizing investments in high-impact projects and programs that align with the municipality's strategic priorities and development objectives.

Furthermore, improving financial management practices is essential for ensuring accountability, transparency, and compliance with regulatory requirements. By strengthening financial reporting mechanisms, internal controls, and governance structures, the municipality can enhance its credibility and reputation among stakeholders, including investors, creditors, and residents. Moreover, adopting best practices in budgeting, financial

planning, and risk management can help mitigate financial risks and uncertainties, ensuring the sustainability of the municipality's operations in the long run.

The implementation of a Financial Recovery Plan is critical for the Lekwa Municipality to overcome its fiscal challenges and build a solid foundation for sustainable growth and development. By adopting a proactive and strategic approach to financial management, revenue generation, and expenditure control, the municipality can restore financial stability, regain the confidence of stakeholders, and fulfill its mandate of delivering quality services to its residents. Failure to implement a Financial Recovery Plan risks further deterioration of the municipality's financial health and undermines its ability to meet the needs of its communities, underscoring the urgency and importance of this strategic initiative.

5.2.5 Objectives 5: Determine how the businesses, civil society and other stakeholders play a role to restore service delivery in the Lekwa Local municipality.

Exactly, private-public partnerships (PPPs) offer a viable approach for municipalities like Lekwa Local Municipality (LM) to overcome some of the challenges they face in delivering services and developing infrastructure. By leveraging the resources, expertise, and innovation of both the public and private sectors, PPPs can help municipalities tackle complex problems more effectively and efficiently.

In the context of Lekwa LM, where there are significant service delivery challenges and infrastructure development needs, PPPs could be particularly beneficial. For example, PPPs could be utilized to address issues such as water supply and sanitation, road maintenance and construction, waste management, energy infrastructure, and community development initiatives.

The collaboration between the municipality and private sector entities in PPPs allows for shared investment and risk, enabling projects to move forward even in cases where the municipality may lack sufficient funding or technical expertise. Additionally, PPPs can foster innovation and creativity in finding solutions to local challenges, as private sector partners bring their specialized knowledge and capabilities to the table.

However, it is important for Lekwa LM to approach PPPs carefully, ensuring that projects are structured in a way that maximizes public benefit, protects the interests of the community, and maintains transparency and accountability throughout the process. Effective governance

frameworks, clear communication channels, and robust monitoring mechanisms are essential for the successful implementation of PPPs in Lekwa LM.

It is evident that Lekwa Local Municipality faces challenges in effectively managing Business Chambers and LED forums, which are crucial for fostering economic growth and development in the area. The collapse of these structures underscores the need for enhanced capacity-building efforts within the municipality to better engage with the private sector and drive local economic development (LED) initiatives.

One approach to address this issue is through partnerships between the public and private sectors. As you mentioned, the private sector can play a key role in driving investment and creating job opportunities, while the public sector can provide support through incentives such as tax breaks, reduced tax rates, and access to affordable land.

Additionally, efforts to strengthen the capacity of smaller entities to compete with larger businesses are essential. This could involve providing targeted support, training, and resources to local entrepreneurs and small businesses, enabling them to thrive in the competitive market environment.

Moreover, it is crucial for the municipality to establish effective communication channels and collaboration mechanisms with stakeholders, including business chambers, LED forums, and other relevant organizations. By fostering a culture of collaboration and partnership, Lekwa LM can leverage the collective expertise and resources of both the public and private sectors to drive sustainable economic growth and prosperity in the region.

6 CHAPTER 6

6.1 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter provides the key conclusions and the recommendations based on the findings of the study. The aim of the study was to examine the institutional factors enhancing and affecting service delivery in Lekwa Local Municipality. It aimed at exploring the strategies that the municipality has in place for eradicating service delivery while determining the factors or challenges that contribute to the lack of service delivery. Lastly the study aimed at exploring the Private-public partnership with the municipality. This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

6.2 Key finding of the study

The main objective of good governance is to achieve various goals, including enhancing the well-being of its people, promoting economic development, ensuring political stability,

upholding democracy, and ensuring overall accountability for actions. Good governance entails monitoring and evaluating government actions and decisions, promoting transparency, collaboration, and responsibility in public service delivery.

Effective leadership plays a crucial role in promoting good governance by fostering transparency, clear roles, collaboration, and understanding among stakeholders. Leadership encourages the involvement of all members of society, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, in decision-making processes. This ensures that the allocation of development resources is equitable and addresses the needs of all segments of society, including those in rural areas.

Furthermore, effective leadership and good governance go hand in hand in promoting organizational performance. When leaders prioritize transparency, accountability, and collaboration, they create an environment conducive to achieving the goals of good governance. In return, good governance fosters a commitment from leadership and management to be held accountable for their actions and decisions, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance and better service delivery to the public.

The presence of deep-seated mistrust and organizational challenges within Lekwa Local Municipality significantly undermines its ability to function effectively and deliver services to the community. The issues outlined, including the lack of trust between councillors, officials, and oversight committees, as well as the political deployment arrangement for appointing senior officials, are indicative of systemic governance and leadership deficiencies that need to be addressed urgently.

The practice of regional political party structures making strategic decisions regarding senior appointments can lead to perceptions of favouritism, nepotism, and political interference, further eroding trust and confidence in the municipality's leadership. This lack of transparency and accountability in the appointment process contributes to suspicion and challenges regarding the intentions and capabilities of appointed officials, including the municipal manager.

Furthermore, the high turnover and rotation of team and thematic leaders, along with long-term acting appointments, create instability and uncertainty within the organization. Such frequent changes in leadership roles and responsibilities hinder continuity, consistency, and long-term planning efforts, ultimately impacting the municipality's ability to deliver predictable and sustainable services to its residents.

Additionally, there is a need for clear communication channels, inclusive decision-making processes, and mechanisms for resolving disputes and grievances within the municipality. Building a culture of collaboration, teamwork, and mutual respect among councillors, officials, and oversight committees is essential for overcoming the pervasive distrust and creating an environment conducive to effective governance and service delivery.

Ultimately, addressing the root causes of mistrust and organizational dysfunction requires strong leadership, commitment to ethical conduct, and a concerted effort to instil confidence and accountability at all levels of the municipality. The internal environment within the municipality appears to be characterized by negative power struggles between the political and administrative spheres. This challenging organizational culture has detrimental effects on the morale and effectiveness of officials working within the municipality.

Political interference is evident in various aspects, including the intrusion of politicians into the responsibilities of officials and the affiliation of officials with political parties. This interference, combined with the institutional context, has led to the development of a commanding authoritarian tone from politicians that undermines the skills and expertise of officials. As a result, officials may feel pessimistic about their ability to perform their duties professionally, contributing to a sense of disillusionment within the workplace.

The limited space for constructive engagement between politicians and officials further exacerbates tensions within the municipality. Officials may feel unprotected from these tensions, and political priorities often take precedence over formally approved implementation plans and administrative needs.

Overall, the prevalence of negative power struggles and political interference within the municipal environment creates challenges for effective governance and may impede the municipality's ability to address key issues and deliver essential services to the community. Addressing these issues will require fostering a more collaborative and respectful relationship

between political and administrative actors, as well as implementing mechanisms to protect the integrity of administrative processes from undue political influence.

6.3 Recommendations

This section will provide recommendations as to how service delivery may improve in the Lekwa Local Municipality

6.3.1 Recommendation 1- Stabilising the administration of the municipality.

The stability and effectiveness of municipal governance hinge significantly on the strength and competency of senior management. Therefore, prioritizing the stabilization of senior management through strategic appointments is paramount. Municipalities must ensure that individuals appointed to key positions, such as the Municipal Manager and other senior administrative roles, possess the requisite qualifications, experience, and leadership qualities necessary to navigate the complexities of local governance and drive positive change.

Moreover, filling all vacant senior executive managerial positions is essential for creating stability within senior management structures. Vacancies in key positions can disrupt organizational continuity, hinder effective decision-making, and undermine the municipality's ability to meet its obligations to the community. Therefore, prioritizing the recruitment and appointment of qualified candidates to these positions is critical for maintaining operational efficiency and ensuring the effective delivery of services.

The research findings underscore significant challenges facing the LLM in attracting and retaining suitable and qualified personnel. The identification of scarce and critical skills within the municipality highlights the pressing need to address gaps in the workforce and ensure the availability of essential expertise to support effective governance and service delivery.

One of the key factors contributing to difficulties in recruitment and retention is the geographical location of the district. Municipalities situated in remote or less developed areas often face challenges in attracting skilled professionals due to limited access to amenities, infrastructure, and employment opportunities. As a result, LLM may struggle to compete with urban centres in attracting talent, particularly in fields where specialized skills are in high demand.

The municipality bears the responsibility for ensuring that all positions within its administration are evaluated and accompanied by comprehensive job descriptions. This

crucial step not only provides clarity regarding roles and responsibilities but also serves as a foundation for effective recruitment, performance management, and organizational development.

Nicholas (2009) underscores the importance of municipalities adopting innovative human resource practices to attract and retain qualified employees. In today's competitive job market, municipalities must differentiate themselves as desirable employers by offering attractive opportunities for career advancement, professional development, and work-life balance.

In addition to creating job descriptions, municipalities must implement innovative recruitment strategies to attract top talent. This may include leveraging digital platforms, social media, and professional networks to reach a broader pool of candidates, as well as partnering with educational institutions, professional associations, and community organizations to identify potential candidates.

It is the responsibility of the municipality to ensure that all positions are evaluated and accompanied by comprehensive job descriptions. By implementing innovative human resource practices and prioritizing transparency, equity, and diversity in recruitment efforts, municipalities can attract and retain qualified employees capable of effectively serving their communities.

Addressing challenges related to the scarcity of critical skills and difficulties in attracting and retaining suitable personnel in Lekwa Local Municipality requires a multifaceted approach. By reevaluating its salary structure, implementing targeted incentives, and investing in initiatives to enhance the overall attractiveness of the district, LLM can overcome barriers to recruitment and retention and build a skilled workforce capable of driving positive change and fostering sustainable development within the municipality.

6.3.2 Recommendation 2- Policy Implementation Support

Policy failures within governments at the national and provincial levels are often the result of various institutional weaknesses that hinder effective implementation. These failures can have far-reaching consequences, affecting the lives and well-being of citizens. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to tackle underlying factors such as unaccountability, administrative incompetence, corruption, and inadequate community engagement.

Unaccountability among politicians and officials is a significant contributing factor to policy failures. When decision-makers are not held accountable for their actions or decisions, there is little incentive to prioritize the public interest or ensure effective policy implementation. This lack of accountability erodes public trust in government institutions and undermines the legitimacy of policies and programs.

Administrative incompetence, including corruption, further exacerbates policy failures by undermining the effective functioning of government institutions. When officials lack the necessary skills, resources, or ethical standards to perform their duties effectively, it can lead to inefficiencies, mismanagement, and outright corruption. Corruption not only diverts resources away from essential services but also erodes public trust in government institutions and undermines the rule of law.

Additionally, the lack of meaningful engagement with communities undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of policies and programs. When communities are not consulted or involved in decision-making processes, policies may fail to address their needs or reflect their priorities. Meaningful community engagement is essential for ensuring that policies are responsive, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse needs and perspectives of citizens.

To address these institutional weaknesses and support effective policy implementation, governments must take proactive measures to promote accountability, transparency, and integrity within their institutions. This may include strengthening oversight mechanisms, enhancing transparency in decision-making processes, and implementing measures to prevent and combat corruption.

Furthermore, Lekwa Local Municipality must prioritize meaningful community engagement by involving citizens in the policy-making process from inception to implementation. This may involve conducting consultations, soliciting feedback, and fostering partnerships with community organizations and civil society groups.

6.3.3 Recommendation 4- Strengthening the role of PPP

The research findings underscore significant challenges facing Lekwa in leveraging private-public partnerships (PPPs) to enhance service delivery. The weak role of PPPs within the municipality reflects a broader issue of inadequate capacity to effectively manage and coordinate such partnerships in policy implementation.

The lack of capacity to manage and coordinate PPPs in Lekwa has several adverse consequences. Firstly, it results in non-functional structures, where intended partnerships fail to materialize or achieve their objectives due to ineffective management and coordination. This leads to missed opportunities for leveraging private sector expertise, resources, and innovation to address pressing service delivery challenges.

Moreover, the absence of effective PPP management contributes to a broader lack of service delivery within Lekwa. Without the necessary capacity to engage with private sector stakeholders, the municipality struggles to effectively plan, implement, and monitor service delivery initiatives. As a result, essential services may be compromised, leaving residents underserved and communities without access to vital infrastructure and resources.

To address these challenges and improve service delivery outcomes, it is imperative for Lekwa to prioritize the establishment of capacity to manage stakeholders effectively. This involves building the skills, systems, and processes necessary to identify, engage, and collaborate with private sector partners in a strategic and coordinated manner.

Establishing robust stakeholder management capacity enables Lekwa to strengthen the involvement of private sector partners in service delivery initiatives. By fostering meaningful partnerships and collaboration, the municipality can leverage the expertise, resources, and innovation of the private sector to address key development priorities and deliver better outcomes for residents.

Additionally, effective stakeholder management enhances transparency, accountability, and trust in PPPs, ensuring that partnerships are aligned with the needs and priorities of the community. This, in turn, fosters greater public confidence in the municipality's ability to deliver essential services and promote inclusive and sustainable development.

Addressing the weak role of private-public partnerships in Lekwa and improving service delivery requires the municipality to prioritize the establishment of capacity to manage stakeholders effectively. By building the necessary skills and systems to engage with private sector partners, Lekwa can unlock the potential of PPPs to address key development challenges and deliver better outcomes for its residents.

6.3.4 Recommendation 5- Improving the political and oversight and accountability

The relationship between political and administrative leadership within a municipality plays a crucial role in shaping governance dynamics and influencing service delivery outcomes. In many cases, however, this relationship is characterized by fragmentation and lack of coordination, resulting in inefficiencies, conflicts, and suboptimal performance.

Improving the interface between political and administrative leadership is essential for promoting effective governance and enhancing service delivery within the municipality. This requires creating a supportive environment and fostering a cooperative working relationship between these two arms of leadership.

One key issue that needs to be addressed is the practice of appointing senior politicians from outside the municipality to administrative positions. While such appointments may be politically motivated, they can lead to conflicts of interest, factionalism, and compromised decision-making processes. Additionally, individuals appointed to administrative positions should possess the necessary qualifications and expertise to effectively perform their duties, ensuring that decisions are made based on merit rather than political considerations.

Regularising the interface between political and administrative leadership is crucial for establishing clear lines of authority, decision-making processes, and accountability mechanisms. This would help streamline governance processes, reduce ambiguity, and promote consistency in decision-making, ultimately enhancing the municipality's ability to address community needs and priorities.

Improving decision-making and enhancing accountability within the political/administrative interface at the municipal level requires a multifaceted approach that leverages existing legislation and guidelines while also considering potential reforms to strengthen governance mechanisms.

Encouraging the combined implementation of both the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 and the guidelines provided by SALGA offers a comprehensive framework for addressing decision-making and accountability weaknesses. The Municipal Structures Act provides a legal framework for the establishment and functioning of municipal councils, while the SALGA guidelines outline the roles and responsibilities of councillors, political structures, and officials within the municipality.

By implementing these two instruments in tandem, municipalities can clarify roles, streamline decision-making processes, and promote accountability within the political/administrative interface. The Municipal Structures Act delineates the powers and functions of municipal councils, ensuring that decision-making authority is exercised in accordance with legal provisions and democratic principles. Meanwhile, the SALGA guidelines provide practical guidance on how councillors, political structures, and officials should collaborate and interact to fulfill their respective roles and responsibilities effectively.

One of the key objectives of this combined approach is to address issues of overreach from both an accounting and executive authority perspective. By clearly defining the boundaries of authority and ensuring that decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive, municipalities can mitigate the risk of excessive interference or usurpation of power by any particular group or individual within the political/administrative interface.

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7 Annexure A

Interview questions for Municipal Officials

1. Tell me more about your work in the municipality (occupation, department and how many years of services)?
2. How many people work in this division/office?
3. What are some of the challenges that the municipality has been facing in delivering services to the residents?
4. Have you been experiencing protest since the municipality has been placed under administration?
 - a. What led to these protests?
 - b. What did the municipality do in order to fix the problem?
5. In your own opinion, what are some of the factors that lead to the challenges faced in the municipality in regard to the following;
 - a. Delivery services, water, electricity?
 - b. Public Participation?
 - c. Debts?
6. What are the internal governance challenges facing the municipality?
7. How are these challenges hindering the municipality from delivering on their mandate?
8. What strategies does the municipality have in place to eliminate the challenges faced?
9. In your own opinion, has there been any improvement since the strategies have been implemented?
10. What effective communication strategy does the municipality have in regard to its stakeholders, civil society and residents?
11. What other strategies can be put in place for the public and private sectors to effectively deliver services?

8 ANNEXURE B

Interview for Stakeholders, and Civil Society

1. Describe your organisation and its main role in assisting residents through delivering services (water, employment, infrastructure)?
2. What is the relationship between you and LLM?
3. How often does LLM engage and consult with civil society?
4. What plans and strategies do you use to communicate with Lekwa?
5. How would you describe the role and impact that LLM has on (stakeholders, civil society and its residents)?
6. In your opinion, how does LLM represent your aspirations and preferences?
7. What strategies have you put in place in your organisation to support LLM?
8. What are the main issues that negatively impact service delivery on your end?
9. What are your general comments or views in regards to the municipality?