

The Impact of Accountability Mechanisms in Enhancing Municipal Water Service Delivery: A Case of Bushbuckridge Local Municipality, Mpumalanga Province

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Abstract: The study is investigated the impact of accountability mechanisms in enhancing municipal water service delivery at Bushbuckridge Local Municipality in Mpumalanga province. The issue of accountability and the supply of water services has been a major concern for more than two decades in the Bushbuckridge local municipality. Despite the fact that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) provided the majority of South Africans optimism for a better life, the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality has been receiving orders from community members demanding adequate water delivery. The continual demonstrations protest by the community members shows that the municipality is failing to meet the demands of the communities. To this end, the study uses qualitative method to collect data for better understanding for the historical and current concerns about water scarcity in Bushbuckridge Local Municipality. Data collection was gathered from internal stakeholders that are municipal officials and external stakeholders which are BLM community members, ward committee members, ward councilors in ward 18 and 20. The researcher used face-to-face interviews, focus groups and semi structured questionnaires. This investigation could lead to future water-related solutions in Bushbuckridge Local Municipality.

Keywords: Accountability, Water Service Delivery, Corruption, Municipality, Community Members

1. Introduction

There is not a universal definition of the concept "public accountability," this concept has been defined differently by different scholars, however, Turrin and Tullia (2020) defined "public accountability" as an umbrella of all the features that are connected for providing good public service, good conduct and responsible to their actions. Despite the unsatisfactory or rhetoric, public accountability remains an obscure concept and a difficult undertaking for bureaucrats, politicians and citizens in particular. It is a paramount democratic tool for ensuring that public needs and wants legitimate demands, and entitlements are pleased." Mogakana (2018:1) argues that "providing communities with sustainable water is currently a major purpose of the South African Constitution." In most rural places in Bushbuckridge where water is available, the quality of drinking water is typically low and cannot be considered safe.

Ruth *et al.* (2020) assert that water is essential for humans to drink, cooking, bathing and other families' necessities, however, above 1 billion societies still lack safe drinking water, and there is still above

2.4 billion that do not have a satisfactory sanitation in South Africa. The government implementation of Reconstruction and Development (RDP) and other programmes such as Free Basic Water Policy (FBW), Masibambane Programme and Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), and the accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) were all developed by the government and other stakeholders to improve basic service delivery which includes water supply to the South African people (Maluleke, 2011:1). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) declares that water is a basic need and human rights." Mokgakane (2018) agrees that "every citizen has the right to have access to water." Mndawe (2020) has observed that the members of the communities in Bushbuckridge Local Municipality became more violent and damage government properties because of the municipality failing to meet people's basic needs and demands. The following questions will be addressed in this study: What are the mechanisms and structures in place to promote accountability in the local municipality, what is the impact of accountability mechanisms in enhancing efficiency in municipal water service delivery, and as well as what are the challenges associated with accountability

in the provision of efficient water services to the community.

2. Conceptual Reviews

2.1 The Concept of Bushbuckridge Local Municipality Area

The Bushbuckridge Local Municipality is categorized as a category B municipality whereby the head of state nodal positioning located within the District of Ehlanzeni which is situated in the north eastern side of the Mpumalanga province. The BLM is found as one of the largest four municipalities that make up the District in Mpumalanga province which also account for over a third municipal of its geographic area. The Bushbuckridge Municipal area provides a linkage to Lydenburg and other midpoints in the lowveld, especially Hoedspruit area, Pilgrim's rest and as well as far away to Graskop.

The Bushbuckridge Local Municipality can be thus known as the entryway that has to do with a major attractive force of tourist points located in Mpumalanga province and the eastern area of the Limpopo Province. This Municipality was also established in terms of section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa through the drive of carrying and providing the basic service delivery to the local citizens. Those basic services involve the provision of water, sanitation, electricity and housing (The Bushbuckridge Local Municipality Final IDP, 2015/2016). The BLM was constituted in terms of the White Paper on Transforming Public Service delivery of 1997 (the focus of Batho Pele Principles) with a main objective of serving and prioritising the interest of the South African pupils living in the Bushbuckridge area. There challenges in the municipality such as highest poverty rate, unemployment, poor service delivery backlogs and the highest level of the inadequacy of skills. The issue of HIV/AIDS was also further identified as a critical problem that has been also accelerated the level poverty due to a high death rate of parents in households (BLM Annual Report, 2017/2018).

2.2 Public Accountability as a Concept

Turrin and Tullia (2020) defined public accountability as an umbrella of all the features that are connected for providing good public service, good conduct and responsible to their actions in their respective positions in the public sector. According

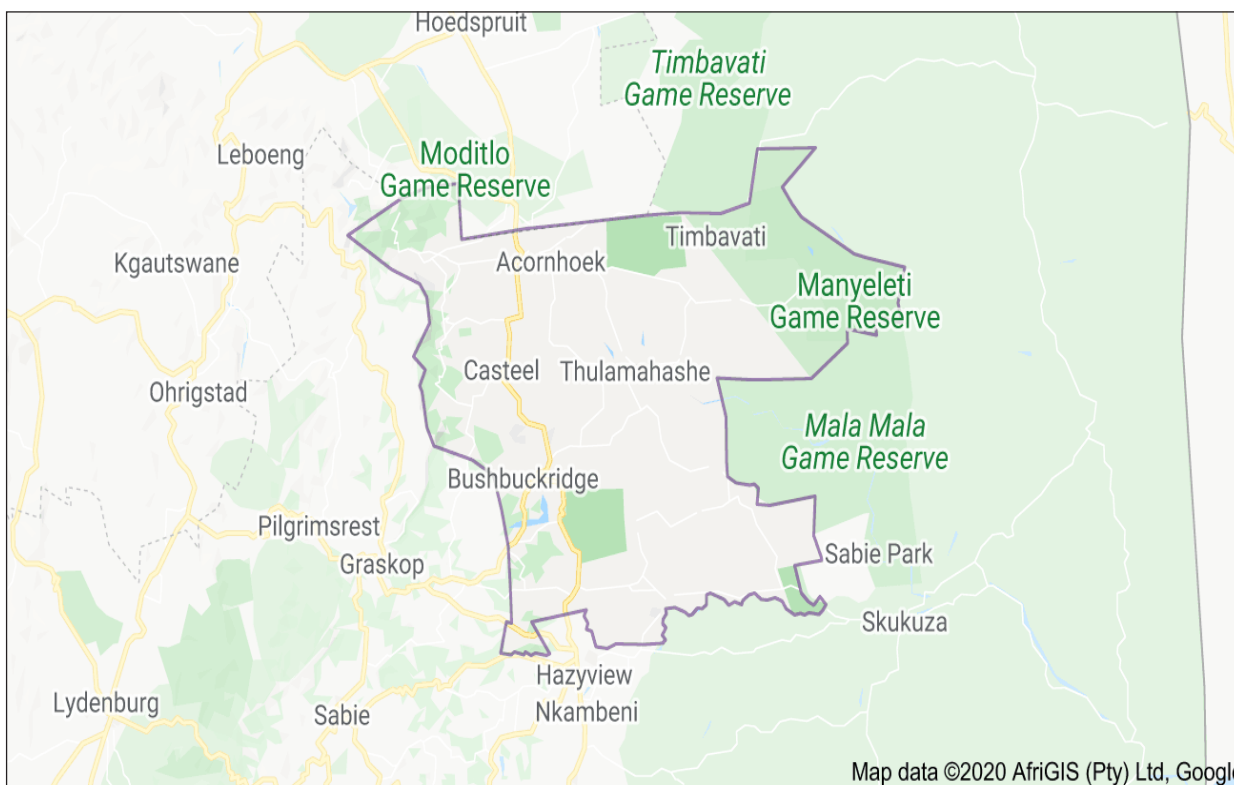
to Pollit (2003:89) accountability has become a popular concept, and people cannot get enough of it. The term has evolved into a rhetorical/verbal technique, serving as a synonym for a variety of political objectives. The concept of public accountability promises equity and justice, learning and progress, as well as transparency and democratic inspection, as well as integrity and ethical appropriateness.

The significance of accountability stops from the increased public desire for better services, greater responsiveness, and greater citizen participation (Milakovich, 2003). Public accountability is also stressed as being critical for improving public sector performance since it promotes institutional learning of service regulations, codes of behaviour, and performance standards. It also plays a critical role in promoting public officials' integrity, eliminating unethical nepotism, and discouraging corruption (Bovens, 2003). Trammell *et al.* (2019) postulated that public accountability is a governmental task in which the government allocated finances are being utilized to achieve service delivery to meet the needs of the community members. Public accountability entails the connection between the person's actions and a certain environment whereby an accounting officer has a responsibility to explain and substantiate his or her own conducts, the accounting officer will then need to answer to his/her outcomes and conducts and if perhaps an accounting person is not accountable for the actions taken therefore, he/she might face consequences (Tullia & Turri, 2020).

2.3 The Overview of the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality Area

The Bushbuckridge Local Municipality (BLM) is located in the north-eastern part of Mpumalanga Province, flanked by the east by Kruger National Park. The municipal territory is 2,589.39 kilometres long and has an estimated population of 517,807 people and 126,506 homes. In the area, there are about 235 scattered villages and small communities. The following is the breakdown of languages: Xitsonga make up 58%, Sepedi 27%, SiSwati 7%, and IsiZulu, Tshivenda, IsiXhosa, and IsiNdebele 8% (Salga, n.d., p.987). In terms of economy, Bushbuckridge is a notably poor town, with about 85% of households living in poverty. Only 14% of the population of working age has a job. Water can be obtained from the following sources: A public tap provides 51% of the water, a piped residence provides 29%, wells provide 13%, and a stream or river provides 4%, and the

Figure 1: A Map Area of Bushbuckridge Local Municipality



Source: Google Maps (2020)

remaining 4% comes from boreholes (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2007:19).

Shortage of water, unemployment, crime, poverty, health and education were also found as a core of development challenges facing the Local Municipality of Bushbuckridge. Many people who are living around in that municipal area of dominion are not employed and that was found as a biggest challenge for the BLM with regards to economic development (The Bushbuckridge Annual Financial Year Report, 2019-2020). Even though the Municipality has tried to adopt a holistic approach that will focus on addressing the issue of socio-economic factors that can be able to assist citizens in that area with regards to living quality life, the issue of basic service delivery continues to cast the people who are living in Bushbuckridge areas in a dark shadow.

2.4 The Advantages of Bushbuckridge Local Municipality

The Municipality of Bushbuckridge has an advantage of being surrounded by Inyaka dam which its primary purpose is to provide drinking water to the

various rural areas including the urban areas in the surroundings of Bushbuckridge. There is a "Sabie river" that could also be a river that can be used to distribute drinking water by the Municipality, and that river is located at Hoxane area which is within Bushbuckridge. The Municipality has also "Mutlumuvi river" which is situated at Thulamahashe in Bushbuckridge which can be identify as another river that can be utilized by the Municipality as a source of water provision to the Bushbuckridge Local communities.

In Acornhoek area, there is still an "Agricultural dam" and the "Klein sand river" which can also form parts of water developments whereby the Municipality can connect pipelines to supply people with efficient water service in Bushbuckridge rural areas. It is worth noting that the "agricultural dam" that is located at the place called "Edinburgh" which falls under the Municipality of Bushbuckridge has the sufficient water that can be generated to supply the various communities and urban areas that are located closely to the Municipality. Lastly, the Municipality has an advantage of having a river called "Nwaritjie" in Mariti which is the river that has

non-stop water flows, and the river can be used to generate water to the closest people that are found living in BLM.

2.5 Principles and Strategies to Enhance Water Management

South Africa is still categorised amongst under developing countries in Africa and the country has been facing challenges in water service delivery for decades still up to date. Weaver *et al.* (2017) pronounce that in order to comprehend the matters that are associated with water service supply to the people, it is also fundamental to understand the nationwide measure background of water service provision to the citizens. The scholars outlined that the critical principles for keeping and managing water are; fairness, sustainability, and effectiveness amongst the municipal service providers (public officials) and the service receivers (citizens). These values are therefore to monitor the principal aims of water service management and water supply through satisfactory to the citizens. The other way of managing water could be closing linking taps, and these is one of the strategies that will need involvement, willingness and an action of community members working together with local municipalities to save water linkage in places. Meran *et al.* (2020) the study has found that water management requires to be fully incorporated into the notion of a maintainable water resources managing attitude. The household's members must be advised to use water wisely and in a decent manner. Citizens that own cars were found as one of the people who are wasting water by using pipes to wash their cars rather than using buckets to save water.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Literature Review From International to Local Perspective on Accountability in Municipal Water Provision

Water is fundamental and observed as a gift of nature in all places, water is seen as a necessity for human life. Many states and societies have engaged in wars over water service delivery. Without water, it is highly challenging for humankind to continue with their daily activities in their households. Mohammed *et al.* (2021) postulated that, the issue of water in (Iran) leads the countries together with Iran into clashes because of the rivers which are based in the country and are furthestmost fundamental source of such

water. The scholars further stated that, the members of the communities in Iran gathered and residing closer to those rivers for the aim of getting water closer because of their government which is failing to provide adequate water service. Mohammed *et al.* (2021) have also observed that the Arabs and the Israeli residents have been fighting to own rivers for the purpose of getting water closer, and one of those rivers is Jordan river. In these battles, some water projects have been carried out, however, Arabs had not been counted for getting clean drinking water.

Water is a basic need where every citizen should have an access of water to use, without sufficient water this will threaten the livelihood of human beings. Bayeh (2016) proclaim that since the year 2015 till up to date there have been serious negotiations between Egypt and Ethiopia on how the two countries should discuss about the water crisis, the purpose of negotiation's was because of, the two countries was battling over the regulations of satisfying the reservoir of a river dam, it was also reported that the amount of water is not sufficient to serve all the community members of the two countries. Bani Salameh and Hayajneh (2019) declare that the immigrants arrival in Iran is one of the main causes of water scarcity, the Syrian wave of immigrants to Jordan since 2011 have been also the most recent cause that the countries experience water shortage.

3.2 South African Experience on Accountability in Municipal Water Service Provision

Olivier (2019) in his study "making effective use of groundwater to avoid another water supply crisis in Cape Town (South Africa) has found that citizens have been addressing the concerns of water scarcity caused by draught. It was concluded that government disappointments water provision keeps on increasing in various areas in Cape Town. Olivier (2019) further declares that helplessness of water scarcity in areas of Cape Town caused by mishandling of existing surface water infrastructure. The issue of water crisis in the City of Cape Town has been shading the provincial government with a red tape since 2015. Muller and Zille (2017) reported that the provincial government has been attempting to increase additional storage of sufficient water by diverting water from the main rivers in Cape Town, it was further reported that, these water development projects was installed, however, some projects are still awaiting for national government to assist with funds to complete all planned development of water projects.

3.3 Provincial Context in Accountability in Municipal Water Service Provision

Rankoana (2020) observed that Vhembe District is one of the areas that is experiencing problems of drought in the most municipalities in South Africa. The municipality in Masisi area is experiencing inadequate finances to deal with provision of satisfactory drinking water to the Masisi community members. There is evidence that municipality is failing to cover all the areas that are experiencing draught which result to scarcity of water in Vhembe District. Rankoana (2020) further posits that there is still another area which is called Maheni in the Limpopo province that suffers from extreme draught that lead to the community member's questioning the municipalities for service delivery to the people. The Maheni (2021) Community Water Management Plan (CWMP) has also demonstrated that the groundwater intensities and boreholes have dropped down due to dangerous levels, and these put the members of the community in a situation of experiencing insufficient water service in the Maheni area.

3.4 The Challenges of Water Provision in Bushbuckridge Local Municipality

Mndawe (2020) Bushbuckridge Local Municipality in Mpumalanga province has been experiencing numerous violent protests for more than two decades, community members have been striking and vandalising government properties for the purpose of drawing municipal attention to respond on their mandate that the municipality has received from the members of the community demanding water service delivery and other basic services that the municipality render. Mndwane (2020) affirms that the municipality has been experiencing these protests since from 1997-2019, the findings of her study focused on Bushbuckridge Local Municipality concluded that the municipality is facing challenges of funds or finances to render adequate services to the members of the communities. Many scholars have indicated in their research projects that, most South African municipalities have a crisis of generating raising funds that could be able to render services to the local municipalities' closest residents. The local spheres of government have been given responsibility by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of (1996) to ensure that basic services to the members of the community are delivered. It is worth noted that failure to render those services, most lives of poor citizens in rural areas will be affected post

negatively because water is one of the basic needs of human beings. Local government is one of the arms of government located closest to the citizens and constitutionally tasked with the responsibility of delivering basic services to the citizens.

4. Research Methodology

This paper adopted qualitative research approach, and data collection has been conducted through face-to-face interviews, semi structured interviews questions and focus groups for a researcher to comprehensively understand the impact of accountability in enhancing municipal water service delivery at Bushbuckridge local municipality in Mpumalanga province. According to Macmillan and Schumacher (2001), purposive sampling enables the researcher to identify participants based on their knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation of the impact of accountability mechanisms in enhancing municipal water service delivery in BLM. A sample of twenty (20) was selected which includes one municipal Director from the Finance Department, one municipal manager, Regional Manager and two officials from the lower level in the water department. The external stakeholders are comprised of two wards councillors and two ward committee members and as well as eleven community members from ward 18 and ward 20 around BLM.

5. Results and Discussion

The study obtained information from the internal structures and the community. From the sources consulted and surveyed the following findings were obtained from the two different sources.

5.1 The Internal Structure (Municipal Officials and Related Stakeholders)

In summary the following are results from the internal stakeholders:

The mechanisms and the municipal structures that was put in place to promote accountability in the BLM were not proper and effective, the accountability and mechanisms in enhancing efficient water service delivery was not monitored and evaluated to see whether there is a promotion of accountability that will lead to best service delivery to the citizens.

Most challenges associated with accountability in the provision of efficient water services to the

communities include the lack of municipal budget, Lack of public participation, unskilled appointed municipal officials. The BLM does not generate enough funds to enable the municipality to provide efficient water service delivery to the communities.

Only the municipal officials that are in the executive positions understand the concept of accountability towards water service delivery to the communities.

The lower-level employees do not have an idea on how the accountability can support water service delivery to the members of the communities.

The BLM does not know what can be done to enhance accountability on water service delivery since the municipality does not have sufficient budget to render effective service delivery.

5.2 Community Members Findings and Results

In summary the results from the community reflect as follows:

- The nature and the state of water supply in the BLM has been and currently poor due to corruption and mismanaged of public funds. The nature and the state of the BLM water supply trends as compared to the previous years is still the same and without no improvement.
- The observed main problem of the municipality in terms of water provision is corruption, lack of unskilled officials, lack of uneducated deployed politicians, political interference and as well as the lack of understanding of public accountability with regards to service delivery.
- The community members have perceived that the problem can only be resolved if the municipality can avoid deploying unskilled, uneducated and unqualified politicians to fill the positions that has to do with service delivery.
- The BLM does not organise and conduct workshops that will educate the public officials to have a better understanding with regards to accountability on service delivery broadly.
- The BLM seems to be careless in providing quality water service delivery to the various communities since the problem has existed for many decades.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper undertook to discover whether accountability does contribute to enhance municipal water service delivery at the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality in Mpumalanga province. The literature review from international to local perspective has indicated that accountability on water service delivery has been a challenge and still a problem around the globe. The BLM is more dependent on municipal grants and it does not generate many funds in terms of its own source of revenues because the community members are not paying for the services provided as they are living in rural areas. On the other hand, the municipality does not have enough capacity to effectively and efficiently to deliver the quality water service delivery that is demanded by the various communities due to the budget constraints. The BLM will need to start initiating workshops that will have a content of teaching officials in all levels with regards to the essence of accountability on service delivery. It will be very crucial for the municipality to prioritize the evaluation and monitoring of employees given tasks, by so doing however the employees will be able to know what is expected from them and therefore the municipality will realise the goals and the objectives. Based on that, the study recommends the following:

- The municipality to organise and initiate workshops that will teach about the essence of accountability on service delivery broadly.
- To introduce strategies that will be able to deal with unethical conduct of the municipal officials.
- To put municipal system in place that will eliminate incompetent line managers, mechanisms to deal with corruption and as well as to promote the municipality to have necessary resources to enhance water service delivery to the community members.
- The municipality to strengthen weak IDP, to promote and support public participation, to deal with municipal low budget, unskilled officials and as well as non-participated municipal projects.
- It will be very crucial for the municipality to evaluate and monitor the work of municipal employees.
- Strengthening communications through top-down approach.

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