



The use of collaborative partnerships to improve service delivery in South African local government

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ABSTRACT

Collaboration has the ability to match the demands within the public sector. By involving the government, and/or the private sector or the voluntary sector, a collaborative partnership can place government in a position to strategically deliver services by leveraging the stakeholder's core competencies and resources to address the failure of government and optimise on the creation of social value. The reliance on the expertise of public servants and external stakeholders places a collaborative partnership in a unique position to improve the quality of services by actively selecting and managing stakeholder's differences and interdependencies. This article aims to explore the role and challenges of a collaborative partnership in terms of service delivery. The aim of the study will be achieved by reviewing literature that focuses on service delivery and collaborative partnerships, and review the extent to which policies and legislation encourages the use of collaborative partnerships in South Africa (SA). In the context of the South African local government, the researcher conducts eight (8) expert interviews offering findings on service delivery and collaborative partnerships. Through this explorative study, the researcher's purpose is to add to the important conversation of identifying a need to collaborate and what the context of a collaborative partnership in SA is.

Key phrases

Collaborative partnerships; collaboration; local government; partnership and service delivery



1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Global trends brought about an influence that expected change - a change that required transformation as customer expectations, budgetary constraints, global competitiveness, public sector reform programmes, and changing demographics, which in turn created numerous constraints. The constraints created, and are continuously creating, governments that are focused on searching for new opportunities and methods to improve service delivery (Public Sector Research Centre 2007:3; Meyer *et al.* 2016).

Local government is confronted with a high level of complexity and has many challenges that must be addressed, and needs to be met. The need for collaborative planning and practice is important to support the required standard of performance (GGLN 2017:11). Currently, the public sector engages in partnerships to strike a balance between conformance and performance, to overcome the challenges they are faced with and to enhance their capacity and ability to improve service delivery (Bayne, Schepis & Purchase 2017:135). Over the past few decades, the practice of government has changed from a more unitary policy setting to a policy setting that is horizontally influenced (Doberstein 2016:820). Combining the efforts from the public, private, and voluntary sector is a feasible solution to solve challenges, especially experienced by local government (GGLN 2017:11).

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the study is as follows:

- Review and discuss the importance of service delivery and collaborative partnerships;
- Review legislation and policies that encourage the use of collaborative partnerships for the provision of services; and
- Assess the use and context of collaborative partnerships to improve service delivery in the South African local government.

The study intends to increasingly create an understanding of the role of collaborative partnerships and why the selection of collaborative partnerships is important to improve service delivery.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SERVICE DELIVERY AND COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Governments are faced with increasing pressure to improve service delivery. In their pursuit to improve on public administration, governance, and management, governments have found themselves in a period of needing to collaborate (Kernaghan 2009:241; Meyer & Meyer 2016). Public sector institutions are required to broaden their service delivery arrangement, extending their boundaries across sectors (Kernaghan 2009:242).

3.1 Public service delivery

The focus and improvement of service delivery emphasises expected changes in the management and delivery of services (Public Sector Research Centre 2007:3). The heightened expectations from government require redefining their role and service delivery mechanisms to enable efficient and effective services (Public Sector Research Centre 2007:3). Kernaghan (2009) highlights the increased practice of the concept of single-window service delivery. The arrangement of the single-window service or as Kernaghan (2009:240) describes it, “one-stop shopping”, combines all needs and wants into one single and seamless experience through a collaborative and innovative arrangement within government to deliver services.

3.1.1 *The importance of the shift from New Public Management (NPM) towards New Public Governance (NPG)*

The period of 1980 to 2000 marked a widespread interest in new public management (NPM). Consequently, over the past few decades the development of integrated services became prominent. Most governmental institutions are entering into more partnerships and becoming accustomed to the idea of networking with other stakeholders (Bouckaert & Pollitt 2011:212). According to NPM, government officials and managers need to have an entrepreneurial approach to service production, which saw aspects of service delivery functioning within the private sector (Mohr, Deller & Halstead 2010:895).

There was an impressive growth in governance networks which resulted in the rise of a new paradigm, New Public Governance (NPG). As a result of the improved form of governance by NPG, the public sector environment was able to better address the complexities, interdependencies, and dynamics of problem solving and service delivery (Klijn & Koppenjan 2012:188). The focus shifted towards efficiency and effectiveness, and governments started taking on initiatives that introduced new arrangements to compensate for the increasing need to coordinate and collaborate through joint-up initiatives (Klijn & Koppenjan 2012:198).

3.1.2 Good governance

As noted by Ellahi, Ihsant and Yausaf (2016:201), a good form of governance is to collectively respond to the problems of citizens and to be able to fulfil their needs in an appropriate and acceptable manner. If governance is measured or if government has service standards or principles that they are measuring against, and there is a focus on the improvement of specific indicators, the standard of service can be improved (Besancon 2003:2). There is not a universal model for good governance that can be applied to every country. From a citizen perspective, it is merely the improvement of service delivery and the structure of public service and administration (Ellahi *et al.* 2016:201). This permits government to understand and reflect upon the current service and the future service they want to deliver, with the aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of services. De Graaf and Paanakker (2015:636) describe the improved form of governance as the performance values of effectiveness and efficiency.

3.1.3 Understanding efficiency and effectiveness

Citizens have the right to be assured that programmes and projects have a clear purpose and that it is being run efficiently and effectively. The services must ensure value-for-money and that the highest standards are being maintained (Cameron 2004:63). The collaborative performance of the public sector is aligned with efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency and effectiveness are basic indicators and conditions for the existence of networks. There are two (2) key focuses discussed by Bayne *et al.* (2017:135) concerning efficiency and effectiveness, namely strategic network efficiency and strategic network effectiveness. Strategic network efficiency is aimed at reducing operational and/or transactional cost of an organisation. The reduction of cost is aimed at the coordination of activities and resources, in other words organisations must optimise the use of their resources. This can be conceptualised as transactional costs that are reduced, network resources that are used effectively, the integration of components, the coordination of organisational activities, and measuring the inputs and outputs of networks. These factors, if correctly implemented, increase the efficiency within an organisation. The increase in efficiency is considered to be one of the main advantages of collaboration (Bayne *et al.* 2017:135).

3.1.4 Public value

According to Bozeman (2007:17), "A society's public values are those providing normative consensus about: (1) the rights, benefits, and prerogatives to which citizens should (and should not) be entitled; (2) the obligations of citizens to society, the state, and one another; and (3) the principles on which governments and policies should be based". According to

Moore (1995:52), citizens want their government to be high-performing and service-orientated public bureaucracies, efficient and effective in achieving the desired outcomes of citizens, and to be fair and just. Moore (1995:71) places public managers at the centre of exploring public value, viewing them as constantly in search of new ways of creating public value.

The social compact between government and citizens in a democratic developmental state is therefore significant. Karuri-Sebina, Hemson and Carter (2009:89) argue that a democratic developmental state is able to advance according to the global environment within their own limits. Reaching national goals, objectives, and allowing continuity in the implementation of policy agendas, allows greater growth and better management of state resources (Karuri-Sebina *et al.* 2009:90). To achieve a stable democratic developmental state, a long-term vision that includes citizens for the purpose of social stability is important. A social compact between government and citizens is a necessity as it defines the rights and responsibilities of stakeholders. Social compacts permit legitimacy and structure between a government and its citizens (Luiz 2014:235). The formation of social compacts requires the inclusion of diverse interest of both the government and citizens, alongside equal social and economic growth (Plagerson, Patel, Hochfeld & Ulriksen 2019:113). In recent decades, the public sector has seen a movement towards collaboration as a key driving force to improve on outcomes that are publicly valued (Bovaird & Loeffler 2012:1119).

3.2 Collaborative governance

To define collaborative governance, it is essential to understand the term 'governance'. In the context of collaboration, Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh (2011:2) note that governance is the ability to steer processes that influence decisions and actions across the public, private, and voluntary sector. More specifically, Emerson *et al.* (2011:2) emphasise that governance is a set of activities that are highly coordinated and monitored as an enabling factor for a collaborative partnership or institution to survive. Draai (2010:136) emphasises the expansive stakeholder interactions which governance seeks. It gives effect to managerial performance, institutional and social interaction, and goes beyond the boundaries of NPM.

Considering the above, Lahat and Sher-Hadar (2020:119) define collaborative governance as a governance arrangement or tool that includes action or strategy using various stakeholders to work together to address a public issue or service needed. These processes and structures are to engage constructively across all boundaries, namely public agencies, private, public and voluntary sectors, and across all levels of government (Emerson *et al.*

2011:2). Collaborative governance is a form of response to the interconnectedness and complex environment which government is confronted with (Bradford 2016:660).

It is important to achieve two (2) fundamental goals when using the correct service delivery mechanism: (1) quality of service, and (2) cost of the service (Public Sector Research Centre 2007:41). Presented in the Project Management Body of Knowledge (Project Management Institute 2017) there is a third element that is of importance, it is the element of time. The element of time allows for thorough planning and better control over the delivery of services (Project Management Institute 2017). This will allow the public sector to focus on core functions according to the specific environment, whilst collaborating with third parties (Public Sector Research Centre 2007:41).

3.2.1 Partnering with the private sector

Partnering with a private organisation requires shared commitment from both the private organisation and public institution to reach a particular outcome (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff 2011:3). However, achieving the desired outcome through commitment and competence does not only require mutuality, but organisational identity is also essential for a partnership. On the one hand, mutuality emphasises the commitment of a shared goal, the extent of responsibility, and shared control (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff 2011:3). On the other hand, organisational identity emphasises the rationality behind the selection of a partner by the public sector institution. The rationality in this instance should be focused on the private organisation being competent and if the organisation is able to add value to the public institution (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff 2011:4).

From a public sector perspective, being involved in a partnership is a means of ensuring the provision of public facilities and services. Engaging in a partnership with a private organisation has often been viewed as a partnership entered into to close the funding gap. Public institutions may not partner with a private organisation to deliver a particular service, but rather enter into a partnership that will be able to provide them with the needed funding (Buso, Marty & Tran 2017:58). Each sector has specific qualities that will add value (Rossi & Civitillo 2014:142). Involving the private sector in the provision of services has allowed the public sector to fully make use of the private sector's management, commercial and creative skills (Nisar 2012:629).

In a partnership, all parties should be prepared to take on the necessary responsibilities in order to achieve their objectives and intended outcomes of the partnership. Each partner should account for their contribution and recognise the key principles to ensure a successful

partnership that is suitable for the environment. In Table 1 below, Bovaird (2004) identifies ten principles that are essential from a governance and collaborative perspective.

Table 1: Governance principles

Governance Principles	Collaborative Partnerships
Citizen Engagement	Citizens and stakeholders should participate in decision-making.
Transparency	All parties (including user and citizen representatives) should openly work together to build the critical element of trust.
Accountability	The partners should be prepared to be accountable and account for each other in terms of each partner's performance and actions. In terms of partners' overall performance, they should account to all stakeholders involved in the partnership.
Equalities and social inclusion	As a core value, for a partnership to work it is important for partners to actively seek ways to innovatively improve their performance against this principle.
Ethical and honest behaviour	For an effective partnership, this core value requires innovative processes and outcomes whilst partners seek to continuously improve their performance.
Equity (fair procedures and due process)	The partners should constantly improve their performance and aspire to innovatively improve this core value.
Willingness and ability to collaborate	It is critical for the success of the partnership for all partners to be willing to collaborate and have the ability to collaborate.
Ability to compete	It is critical for the success of the partnership to have the ability to compete.
Leadership	It is necessary at all levels of the partnership to have clear and capable leaders. This ensures effective leadership for each of the constituent institutions and in the communities.
Sustainability	All partners must actively and continuously seek ways to improve the sustainability of policies and activities.

Source: Bovaird (2004:210-211)

3.2.2 Partnering with the voluntary sector

In the last few decades, there has been a significant increase in the voluntary sector being involved in a range of service delivery (Morison 2000:8). The voluntary sector has positioned itself as a prominent role player in the delivery of services. The two (2) prominent types of organisations are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based

organisations (CBOs) (Otiso 2003:223). Their role is either to supplement a particular state service or to entirely provide a service that is not available within the community. The voluntary sector is able to create communication links that benefit all parties involved by acting as intermediaries between government, businesses, donors, and citizens (Otiso 2003:224). Public institutions may depend on the contributions provided by the voluntary sector (Morison 2000:108). The success of the voluntary sector has led to many initiatives being spearheaded by the sector, with the aim of meeting the needs and requirements of citizens (Otiso 2003:224). The voluntary sector is therefore viewed as a resource for government and can be viewed as a repository for social values and needs (Morison 2000:112).

The voluntary sector is also finding itself in a competitive environment, as the public sector increasingly engages in various forms of partnerships, such as outsourcing, shared services and public-private partnerships. Previously, the voluntary sector relied on grants; however, they are finding themselves engaging in more contracts as they are obligated to enter into the bidding process. This is inevitably changing the nature and behaviour of voluntary sector organisations, forcing them to internally restructure to create and improve their capacity to compete for contracts (Davies 2011:645). The voluntary sector is threatened with the idea of not being distinguishable. The sector has become extremely close to the market and resembles several features of the private sector. Due to the increasingly competitive environment for resources, the voluntary sector needs to anticipate change and identify opportunities (Hogg & Baines 2011:346).

3.3 Various influences on collaborative partnerships

It is important to note that there are many different forms of partnerships, involving different stakeholders or partners, thus having different implications. Below are factors that have an influence on collaborative partnerships.

3.3.1 Risk

Partnerships carry an element of risk in it for the parties involved. It is therefore crucial to understand how power will be distributed within the partnership and what are the risk involved. The risk associated with power dynamics does not only lie within resources, but it may lie within how partners trust each other, resolve conflicts, communicate, share information, collaborate, commit, and how satisfied each partner is (Chicksand 2015:121). Thus, each partner should have shared ownership with an official agreement. This agreement should stipulate contract obligations, profit distribution, and a clear system for incentives (Alawamleh & Popplewell 2012:433).

To reduce risks experienced during the delivery of services many public institutions enter into formal agreements with private organisations to share risks. Such an agreement has the ability to largely contribute to the success of service delivery as partners agree to share liability. In turn, partners apportion the risks in such a manner that it reduces negative impacts experienced by individual institutions or organisations. In principle, these partnerships should focus on exchange and reciprocity. Mutuality in sharing benefits is equally as important in sharing risks and liabilities, however misalignment can occur. Consequently, private organisations run the risks of liabilities being amplified and duplication of efforts (Friday, Sridharan & Collins 2017:234). Furthermore, private organisations run the risks of experiencing uncertainty during partnerships as not all benefits and risks are foreseeable (Terman, Feiock & Youm 2020:36).

3.3.2 Capacity

If municipalities focus on building their capacity, they will ultimately improve their performance. The properties included in the concept of capacity are: administrative capacity, political commitment, financial resources, technical and managerial capacity, institutionalised participation, skills and knowledge (Robinson 2007:3-6). In terms of SA, Apartheid deliberately created uneven distribution of resources and limited the capacity of municipalities in certain geographical areas (Van Baalen 2014:1).

In terms of lacking capacity, Makanyeza, Kwandayi and Ikobe (2013:5) identified the lack of training and skills as one of the key downfalls of local government. To improve the implementation and institutionalisation of collaborative partnerships, sound human resource policies should thus include capacity building and employee motivation (Makanyeza *et al.* 2013:9). Today, urban communities lend themselves towards a more collaborative stance as they have more resources to especially partner with the private sector, whereas in less affluent communities this might not be possible. Less affluent communities therefore do not deliberately fail to perform or answer to their communities needs whilst needing to conform to global needs; they unfortunately and sincerely lack the capacity and require assistance (Van Baalen 2014:8).

3.3.3 Socio-political environment and the importance of political stability

Based on evidence presented by Milio (2008:932), a stable government is more cooperative and less disruptive. In theory, if governments focus on stability and work hard to reduce tension within government, they become more efficient and effective. Having a credible government creates a more united society (Milio 2008:932). Furthermore, the socio and political activities of a country have a strong influence on public sector officials, and it forces

development to proceed in a certain direction. Balance between the socio and the political environment can become challenging for governments as they are affected by public sector managers and officials, the political environment, the socio environment, and administration (Chitescu & Lixandru 2016:821). For SA, the socio-political environment is extremely complex because the country has yet to fully move from a segregated society towards an integrated society. Many citizens still need to be informed, capacitated, and exposed to collaboration within the socio-political environment. This in turn will enable citizens' involvement in the development, maintenance, and sustainability of socio-political progress (Ratangee 2007:1).

3.3.4 Policy environment

It is important to nurture and understand the policy environment as it continuously affects the decisions and actions which shape the public sector environment (Arts, Leroy and Van Tatenhove 2006:96). Being informed about the needs of citizens is important; this will allow government to determine which goals and objectives to reach (Roux 2002:421). Policies are reflective of governments course of action, thus it always relates to the current issues within society (Roux 2002:425). As much as policy change is essential, Arts *et al.* (2006:96) note that there must be continuity. The continuity refers to policy goals and objectives, and the continuous drive of government to strategically address social issues. The change refers to the ability to innovatively adapt to the environment. A balance between traditional and new initiatives to steer policies is therefore key. The policy environment is focused on strategic decision-making and action (Ijeoma 2008:101). The developmental approach towards policies is therefore focused on stability and dynamism. Institutionalisation, policy arrangements, and political modernisation are the three concepts Arts *et al.* (2006:96-97) place emphasis on. These concepts refer to the development of structures, stabilisation, and change (Arts *et al.* 2006:97).

4. Regulatory and Legislative Framework for Service Delivery and Collaborative Partnerships in South African Local Government

SA has adapted to the use of collaborative partnerships, and this is reflected in the South African regulatory and legislative framework.

4.1 Service delivery

4.1.1 *The Constitution of South Africa of 1996*

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 is the supreme law of SA and it governs the way in which each sphere of government executes the tasks which they are mandated to perform (Republic of South Africa 1996). Prescribed in Chapter 10, Section 195(1) of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996) are basic values and principles that highlight several key principles relating to service delivery in terms of public administration. These key principles are as follows: resources must be used in a manner that is efficient, effective, and economical, public administration must be development-orientated, services must be done in a manner that is impartial, fair, equitable and without bias, the needs of citizens must be responded to, and public administration must be accountable (Republic of South Africa 1996).

4.1.2 *Batho Pele White Paper*

The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele White Paper) of 1997 is important for transformation and provides the “policy framework and a practical implementation mechanism for the transformation of Public Service Delivery” (Republic of South Africa 1997). The Batho Pele White Paper embraces viewing citizens as customers. For government to take on the task of meeting the expectations of their customers and essentially developing a service-orientated culture, they require the assistance of the broader community, which includes the private and voluntary sector (Republic of South Africa 1997: section 6.1).

4.1.3 *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998*

All officials within municipalities must be dedicated to the needs of the municipality. It is important to know what these needs are in order to know how to go about meeting them. As stated in Chapter 4, Section 44(2) of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 the following are important: municipality needs must be identified, reviewed, and evaluated in order of priority, officials must recommend strategies, programmes and services to the municipal council that addresses the needs; and recommend or determine the best methods to the maximum benefit of the community (Republic of South Africa 1998).

4.1.4 *Public Finance Management Act No. 1 of 1999*

A huge financial responsibility is placed on municipal officials. One of the objectives of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) No. 1 of 1999 focuses on the security of public finances by clearly stating that the main objective of the act is to “secure transparency,

accountability, and sound management of the revenue, expenditure, assets and liabilities” (Republic of South Africa 1999). Prescribed in Chapter 6, Section 57(b) of the PFMA (Republic of South Africa 1999) public officials are responsible for the effective, efficient, economical, and transparent use of their entities’ finances and other resources. The objective of the PFMA (Republic of South Africa 1999) serves as a clear standard for national and provincial government.

4.1.5 Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003

For municipalities, the Municipal Finance Management Act 56 (MFMA) of 2003 provides specific duties and responsibilities “to secure sound and sustainable management of the financial affairs of municipalities and other institutions in the local sphere of government” (Republic of South Africa 2003). As stated in Chapter 8, Sections 61(1) and 62(1) of the MFMA (Republic of South Africa 2003) all financial affairs of municipalities should be in the best interest of the municipality by ensuring that all decisions are aligned to their service delivery goals, and that their resources are used in a manner that is efficient, effective, and economical.

4.1.6 Local Government Turnaround Strategy

The Local Government Turnaround Strategy (Republic of South Africa 2009), assisted government in understanding the root causes of municipalities experiencing poor performance, distress or dysfunction (Republic of South Africa 2009:4). The Local Government Turnaround Strategy recognised both the challenges and progress of local government. It emphasised that it is essential to assist municipalities based on their specific strengths and weaknesses to implement the appropriate interventions (Republic of South Africa 2009:11). Furthermore, it is noted that the following be taken into consideration: the extent municipalities are delivering services, optimising their revenue base, meeting their developmental mandate, complying with legislation, reflecting good governance and that municipalities are recruiting and retaining the needed capacity (Republic of South Africa 2009:46-47).

4.1.7 Medium-Term Strategic Framework

The Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) is a five-year strategic plan spanning from 2014-2019 implementing the National Development Plan (NDP). Two key focus areas within the MTSF that relate to this paper are “improving service delivery” and having a “responsive, accountable, effective and efficient local government” (Republic of South Africa 2014:27). As highlighted in the NDP, capacity and development commitment are a high priority for the MTSF (Republic of South Africa 2014:11). The MTSF recognises the demand from citizens

for quality services, value-for-money, and social justice. Local government thus requires a proactive form of governance to address the numerous weaknesses, assisting in the fulfilment of the central focus of the MTSF, which is to ensure sustainable and reliable access to basic services (Republic of South Africa 2014:28).

4.2 Collaborative partnerships

4.2.1 *The Constitution of South Africa of 1996*

In Chapter 13, Section 217 of the Constitution, public procurement strictures are established. It identifies the structures against which partnerships need to function. When public institutions enter into a partnership and contracts for goods or services, the institutions must do so in a manner that is fair, equitable, transparent, competitive and cost-effective (Republic of South Africa 1996). It is important for institutions to understand these structures as it is a critical foundation for the success of partnerships.

4.2.2 *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act*

The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 is one of the core acts in local government as it provides the “core principles, mechanisms and processes that are necessary to enable municipalities to move progressively towards the social and economic upliftment of local communities, and ensure universal access to essential services that are affordable to all” (Republic of South Africa 2000).

4.2.2.1 *External mechanisms*

As stated in Chapter 8, Section 76 of the Municipal Systems Act (Republic of South Africa 2000) there are two (2) mechanisms municipalities may use to provide services: internal and external. Prescribed in Chapter 8, Section 78(3) of the Municipal Systems Act, when a municipality decides to explore the use of external mechanisms to deliver services it must “give notice to the local community of its intention to explore the provision of the municipal service through an external mechanism” (Republic of South Africa 2000). Furthermore, when municipalities explore the possibility of using external mechanisms in the provision of services they have to conduct or commission a feasibility study. If the municipality decides to enter into an agreement with external mechanisms the content of the service delivery agreement must be communicated to community members through the media (Republic of South Africa 2000).

4.2.3 *White Paper on Municipal Service Partnerships*

Supporting the viable option of entering into partnerships is the White Paper on Municipal Service Partnerships (MSPs) (Republic of South Africa 2000). The MSPs provide guidelines

to enter into partnerships with the purpose of working towards the overall objectives and duties of municipalities (Republic of South Africa 2000: section 1.1). The MSPs aims to create a more conducive environment for functioning of service delivery. Working towards increasing efficiency and effectiveness through partnerships can lead to improved and greater flexibility in addressing the needs of municipalities (Republic of South Africa 2000: sections 1.1-1.2).

4.2.4 Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act 117 of 1998

The private sector has been a key partner for the public sector in the provision of services. Prescribed in Chapter 11, Section 120(4) of the MFMA (Republic of South Africa 2003), municipalities must conduct a feasibility study that describes and explains: the strategic and operational benefits, the nature of the private entities role, the extent of the role that the private entity can perform, the value added, the affordability of the partnership, the technical, operational and financial risks, the impact on budget, and the monitoring and management of the agreement (Republic of South Africa 2003).

4.2.5 The National Planning Commission

The NDP National Planning Commission (2011) “provides a broad strategic framework to guide choices and actions”. One of the key themes throughout the policy document is the need to achieve longer-term mechanisms through collaboration. As highlighted in the NDP, it is important to “strengthen planning capabilities within local government” (National Planning Commission 2011:291). According to the NDP, the most effective route to achieve this is by extending the existing initiatives and developing new ones that include and allow for cross-border sharing of capacity (National Planning Commission 2011:291).

5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The nature of the study is qualitative and makes use of qualitative approaches to provide an understanding of the context of collaborative partnerships that support optimal service delivery. The researcher gathered primary and textual data by means of semi-structured interviews. The reason for selecting this method was to follow standard questions but be able to individually ask tailored questions during the interview to get clarification or probe the participants’ reasoning to ensure that the questions were understood and answered truthfully (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:188).

Eight (8) expert interviews were conducted by means of non-probability sampling. At first the researcher selected six (6) experts through purposive sampling, which was used by the researcher to deliberately obtain the required data that supports the study (Welman, Kruger

& Mitchell 2005:69). However, after conducting the interviews one of the interviewees suggested additional experts as they would be beneficial for the study, the final two (2) experts were thus selected through snowball sampling. The selected experts are relevant to the study as they have extensive experience with collaborative partnerships and provide a high level of insight in local government, the public sector, the private sector, as well as the voluntary sector.

Below is a brief description of each expert:

- Expert 1 holds a Doctorate Degree in Public Management and Governance and published in the field of public policy in SA.
- Expert 2 has 8 years' experience with a private organisation assisting municipalities in providing value-added assistance and improved service delivery.
- Expert 3 has over 10 years' experience in a local municipality.
- Expert 4 is currently working at a provincial department aimed at providing municipal support and capacity building.
- Expert 5 holds a Master's Degree in Business Administration and a Doctorate Degree in Administration and Local Government Performance Management. The Expert has worked as a Municipal Manager.
- Expert 6 has worked as an oversight committee member, audit committee member, and has 13 years' experience at two (2) municipalities as a Municipal Manager. Currently, the Expert works as a lecturer and a consultant for private, public, and voluntary sector organisations.
- Expert 7 has 21 years' experience working in a provincial department aimed at supporting District and Local Municipalities.
- Expert 8 worked in the field of organisational performance and integrated planning, and has worked in the public sector managing projects, programmes, and managing internal and external stakeholder engagements.

The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with each participant. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, form of data analysis, anticipated length of the interview and bulk information received during the interview, a tape recorder was used to record the interviews. Once all interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed all interviews. Each interview was transcribed into an electronic Word document. Thereafter, each participant's interview was colour coordinated and arranged in a systematic manner to present a comprehensive discussion based on findings generated by the interviews.

The researcher asked each expert the following questions:

1. In your opinion, is the policy environment conducive for the use of collaborative partnerships to improve service delivery?
2. Is the socio-political environment conducive for the use of collaborative partnerships to improve service delivery?
3. To what extent are municipalities able to deal with the use of collaborative partnerships to improve service delivery?
4. What is or can be done to better deal with the use of collaborative partnerships to improve service delivery?
5. To what extent is the use of collaborative partnerships viable to improve service delivery? What are the constraints?
6. To improve service delivery, under what circumstances does the use of collaborative partnerships work rather than self-provision?

6. FINDINGS

This section discusses the interview responses.

6.1 Question 1

Experts 1, 2 and 3 agree that the policy environment is conducive for collaborative partnerships. Expert 1 and Expert 2 agree that regulations for public-private partnerships have gone beyond policy prescripts and have now filtered down to actual work streams. It has placed municipalities in a position to overcome service delivery challenges. Expert 2 does however state that there should be less red tape regarding partnerships for it to function properly. Municipalities are aware of the steps to follow, however the number of tasks that must be completed by municipalities and the lack of capacity does hinder their actions to go beyond compliance driven activities.

There is a general consensus amongst the three (3) experts that urban municipalities are better able to navigate themselves within the public environment. As explained by Expert 3, rural municipalities find themselves mainly delivering basic services due to capacity constraints and wide geographical areas. Experts 4 and 5 state that the environment is partially conducive for collaborative partnerships and discusses the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998, sections 76 and 78 (Republic of South Africa 1998). The experts elaborate that the process is not functional within the public sector. The process is too cumbersome and costly for municipalities to conduct. For this very same reason, Experts 6, 7 and 8 deem the policy environment to not be conducive at all.

Question 2

Experts 1, 2, 3 and 6 state that the socio-political environment is conducive for collaborative partnerships. They argue that the voluntary sector has shifted to the other end of the spectrum where public institutions consider them ready to be stakeholders. Expert 1 elaborates that government allows for stakeholders to form part of a process from the beginning, leading stakeholders to take ownership within the partnership. This reduces the risk of services being rejected by the community. Expert 1 emphasises that collaborative partnerships have an extremely positive effect on the socio-political environment. They state that it reduces the space between municipal administrative officials and office bearers, and the degree of accountability could automatically increase because stakeholders gain an understanding of what the actual processes are within a municipality. Expert 6 notes that citizens are ready to embrace change to ensure a co-produced product that is more effective and efficient. There are many individual citizens within communities that are well-informed and can offer solutions.

Experts 4, 5, 7 and 8 argue that the socio-political environment is not conducive for collaborative partnerships. Expert 5 states that in terms of legislation, a municipality is a tier of government and not a sphere of government as it is normally portrayed. It is therefore an independent sphere of government and municipalities govern on their own accord, which hampers service delivery. Signing social compact agreements with the community will therefore assist government. From a political perspective, Expert 3 declares that the problem with SA is that each political party has their own idea as to what they want for their constituents. When one party is in office they have their own agenda, five (5) years afterwards another party is elected and their agenda is completely different. This forces municipalities to start over each time. To solve this, Expert 7 maintains that municipalities should manage their administration more effectively. Administrative leadership should take responsibility and be managed as a separate entity from the political leadership.

Question 3

Expert 3 firmly believes that municipalities are able to deal with collaborative partnerships. Expert 3 states that many municipalities consist of public servants that focus on development and the betterment of their communities. Experts 1, 2, 4 and 5 express that urban municipalities are better able to deal with collaborative partnerships than rural municipalities. Municipalities are guided and supported by regulations and procurement policies that inform them about the steps to follow when engaging in a partnership. In many instances, municipalities are able to deal with collaborative partnerships if there is a willingness and political will.

According to Expert 5, a municipality's ability to deal with the use of collaborative partnerships to improve service delivery depends on how stable the municipality is in terms of their administration. Municipalities need to capacitate staff and communities on these issues. Furthermore, there are many services that are unfunded in municipalities, causing them to struggle. Municipalities need collaboration as it can have the biggest impact and influence on supplementing government resources.

Experts 6, 7 and 8 do not consider municipalities ready to deal with collaborative partnerships. Expert 7 expresses that not all municipalities can acquire the critical skills needed for municipalities to deal with the environment and external forces. Factors such as the geographical location of municipalities do have a huge impact on attaining critical skills. Furthermore, many municipalities do not have dedicated units for collaborative partnerships, and their staff are not ideally trained or particularly suited for positions that deals with collaborative partnerships.

Question 4

Expert 1 suggests that collaborative partnerships should be included in the Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP) and Integrated Development Plan. This will assist municipalities in identifying community needs, government shortages and be able to identify the stakeholders who should form part of a particular project. Once projects are in the SDBIP, municipalities are forced to report against it. Expert 7 emphasises the need for stronger leadership in local government to drive improvement mechanisms.

Furthermore, Expert 5 recommends signing a service delivery agreement with the community; this will assist communities in taking responsibility within their wards. Municipalities and their communities must become more aware of and educated on collaborative partnerships. Expert 2 notes that there should be more awareness campaigns surrounding collaborative partnerships. If the public are informed about upcoming developments and decisions and they can understand that it will better the community, they will almost certainly support the services, projects and/or programmes and not be reluctant towards it. Furthermore, Expert 2 expresses that a key difficulty is that institutions and officials work in silos. All government institutions, including provincial and national government should work together to successfully implement collaborative partnerships.

Question 5

All of the experts view collaborative partnerships as a viable option for municipalities. Expert 1 mentions that depending on how they set up the partnerships, they can shift some of the risks to the private sector. Partnerships are important, especially at local government level,

and the manner in which the MFMA (Republic of South Africa 2003) is drafted, individual officials can be held personally liable if they make investments or spend money in a manner that officials determine reckless or irregular. Expert 7 emphasises that if the policy environment is written out and practiced properly, it will work well and government will be able to create competition in the market.

Expert 1 noted that municipalities may enter into a partnership for incorrect reasons. Many municipalities use the excuse of not being capacitated, yet there are officials in the position. Furthermore, Expert 2 admits that they (the private sector) do not have equal say within the partnership. This may lead to service providers rendering an incorrect or incomplete service. Municipalities are fearful of giving away the authority and losing control to a certain extent, either over money, function or flow of information. Expert 4 notes that in rural municipalities, there are many instances where there is no alternative but to enter into a partnership. It is beneficial because municipalities are able to obtain scarce or specialised skills based on their needs.

Voluntary partnerships are a way to supplement government resources. Expert 1 however emphasises that municipalities should not be overly reliant on the voluntary sector. Municipalities require the input and contribution of the voluntary sector to assist with municipal functioning, prevent moral decay, prevent financial instability and unsustainability in certain services. According to Expert 6, municipalities need the voluntary sector: they need to collaborate with them and make them part of the solution.

An additional challenge is that many municipalities do not see the value in the partnership from the volunteers' perspectives. Expert 4 explains that the volunteers' main focus is to contribute to their society through initiatives. Municipalities, focus on improving service delivery and what they are mandated to do. From a political view, politicians might not see the value in terms of garnering political support. Expert 4 thus insinuates that volunteerism in municipalities needs to be beneficial for both volunteers and the municipality.

Question 6

All experts emphasise that collaborative partnerships work when municipalities do not have the skills, service or resource in-house, or when there is a niche service. A municipality may also enter into a partnership when it is more cost-effective. Additionally, Expert 3 mentions that partnerships work when municipalities require a new perspective and is beneficial for a municipality if they are in need of a service that is of better quality.

Expert 6 notes that collaborative partnerships are favourable when a municipality does not have control over the political or socio-economic dynamics or has employees that they

cannot let go off. In this instance, allowing another organisation to have full control over the delivery of a service is a great solution for stability. However, if staff is capacitated and can do the job, if the political environment is responsive in terms of policy, and the community supports the initiatives of their municipality, then self-provision is the best option.

There was a general consensus amongst all experts that a partnership between the voluntary and public sector will only work when there is a need that the community has identified. Making reference to more community-based projects, instead of capital projects. Expert 1 notes that if a community is not interested in a particular service or project, the implementation thereof will not be successful.

7. DISCUSSION

In the sphere of local government, partnerships assist private organisations in understanding how municipalities function. It improves their ability to identify gaps and be able to improve their partnership, as well as the services rendered. The regular partnerships entered into has created stronger relationships between the two (2) sectors and over time created a conducive environment for municipalities to want to engage in partnerships. Leading towards a trusting environment for municipalities to willingly give some power to the service providers, and see the benefits and value of the partnership, and go beyond what they are mandated to do.

Identifying the need for more awareness campaigns within municipalities and their communities will increase their awareness and knowledge on collaborative partnerships. It is important to ask: is the community for or against a particular service. If the public are informed about upcoming developments and decisions, and feel more involved, their support will certainly increase and they will become less reluctant.

All spheres of government need to provide civic organisations with the platform to have a substantial amount of influence, responsibility and say within a collaborative partnership. It will only assist municipalities to understand the needs of their communities and what must be done to meet these needs. It will assist public officials to be better equipped to fully comprehend what improvement methods are suitable for the municipality.

To ensure that the environment is more conducive, political parties need to come to a consensus that allows for administrative stability within municipalities. Administrative leadership should take responsibility and be managed as a separate entity from the political leadership. A municipality needs policy certainty, stability from top to bottom, and a healthy organisational culture and productive environment.

It is essential that municipalities capacitate staff and their communities on these issues. Public officials and community members must know how the structures work, their functions, and responsibilities. Municipalities should have dedicated units for collaborative partnerships. These units will enable a successful institutionalisation of collaborative partnerships. Understanding the environment and knowing how to critically respond to it, can have the biggest impact and influence on improving services. Additionally, municipalities need a specific budget to conduct studies and assessments to understand their needs. Plans can thereafter be developed to focus on their core needs, instead of simply doing what municipalities are mandated to do and not going beyond what is required.

8. CONCLUSION

In this contribution, the researcher created an understanding of how collaboration, specifically collaborative partnerships, influence service delivery and vice versa. Whilst the unpacking of essential concepts such as good governance, public value, collaborative governance, partnering with the private sector, partnering with the voluntary sector is important for the theoretical basis of this study, the researcher goes further by addressing a few prominent influences on collaborative partnerships in SA. This allowed the researcher to ask the right questions and better understand the adoption of collaborative partnerships for service delivery in the South African context.

The article highlighted how essential collaboration is for service delivery. Whilst government has implemented the use of collaborative partnerships, there are many municipalities that either engage in collaborative partnerships for the incorrect reasons or they are unable to engage in collaborative partnerships because of limited resources. Collaborative governance has not fully filtered through public institutions, and the resources available for it, as well as the knowledge about collaboration is not focused on enough for it to be as successful as it could be. SA is not optimally making use of this service delivery mechanism, however based on the findings and recommendations they have the ability to effectively institutionalise collaborative partnerships for rural and urban municipalities.

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