

# GOVERNANCE AS A TOOL FOR FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES. CASE STUDY: EKURHULENI, SOUTH AFRICA

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*Key-words:* urban development, sustainable development, governance, poverty, services.

**Abstract.** Several South African cities are faced with challenges of rapid urbanisation, overpopulation, spatial inequalities, and poor service delivery. The greatest challenge facing South African municipalities is providing efficient and quality service delivery to their citizens. The challenges facing the municipalities include service delivery backlogs, the lack of proper governance, institutional weaknesses, maladministration, and corruption. These fundamental issues have a negative impact on the community as poor service delivery has a direct effect on livelihoods. In this study, the researcher has shown that good governance is a huge obstacle in South Africa, which obstructs the efforts of addressing inequalities associated with poverty. While government has designed numerous policies to address the developmental deficit, it has been found wanting in terms of the proper implementation of its policies and its assessment of their impact on communities. The study has established that there is a need for a continuous process to plan and design sustainable policies that will drive development in the city of Ekurhuleni. Policies that will integrate city planning to ensure that development is guided by a smart city design, spatial inclusiveness and sustainable development. The findings of this study show that good governance is a critical requirement to ensure high standards of development and making a meaningful impact on the lives of those who are in dire need of escaping poverty. Therefore, the city of Ekurhuleni bears a great responsibility of designing a smart and sustainable urban development program which will be comprehensive in addressing the various spatial and urban development challenges.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Several South African cities are faced with challenges of rapid urbanisation, overpopulation, spatial inequalities, and poor service delivery. Their municipalities have failed to adequately address the developmental challenges emanating from the apartheid legacy which continue to plague the current developmental initiatives. In fact, post-apartheid urban growth and service delivery programmes have not been able to keep up with the demand for services (Mtantato, 2013). Municipalities in South Africa also lack good governance, which impacts the delivery of services. Poor governance leads to municipalities failing to efficiently operate and maintain their service infrastructure in a cost-effective and sustainable way (Beyers, 2016). The lack of good governance compromises the ability of the municipalities to provide for efficient service delivery, which is the greatest challenge facing South African municipalities. The challenges facing the municipalities include service delivery backlogs, the lack of proper governance, institutional weaknesses, maladministration, and corruption (Lee, 2014). These fundamental issues have a negative impact on the community as poor service delivery has a direct impact on livelihoods. Service delivery is a valuable tool for alleviating poverty in South Africa (Burger, 2005). It is a critical aspect of government which has been designed to help improve the lives of people, while also assisting the poor to escape the scourge of poverty (Burger, 2005). Marked by extreme poverty and a high unemployment rate, especially pertaining to the young, South Africa must support and sustain an increased number of people who are at the mercy of local government services for their survival. Population growth has also put a

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strain on the government's ability to effectively provide services while being itself burdened by poor governance, maladministration, and corruption. All these aspects have contributed to the bottlenecks that have led to a lack in effectively providing services. However, there are also gaps in the policies that are being implemented. The context in Europe is different as the focus on governance is squarely on the size of municipalities being efficient in the midst of tough economic times. European countries have been in the process of undergoing territorial reform and of amalgamating government entities, from smaller to larger entities, the latter being warranted by the need for efficiency and effectiveness in service provision (Steiner and Kaizer, 2016). Komza *et al.*, (2024) argue that big cities are becoming increasingly valuable in the spatial structure of globalized economies, although these centres contrast significantly concerning population, economic structure, and income conditions. Modern bigger municipalities in Europe have revealed that compared to their surroundings, these cities have generally presented advanced productivity levels, an enhanced rate of employment, higher education, and higher innovation performance (Komza *et al.*, 2024). As of 1970, municipal reforms in Europe have focused on up-scaling which has given rise to the formation of larger municipalities (Ebinger *et al.*, 2018). There have been several factors in the European context that have contributed to countries deciding to amalgamate local government entities; they are urbanization, fiscal challenges, and the decentralization of policy functions from the national to the local government level (Askim, 2015). Over the years, fiscal challenges in Europe have led governments to driving cuts in public spending which has negatively affected the quality-of-service provision and has consequently infuriated residents (Tavarez, 2018). Such challenges have been a major driving force to reduce the number of government entities in European countries. Since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, local governments throughout Europe have been grappling with gradually complex challenges. These challenges have exhibited themselves in three focal proportions: austerity measures resulting from the 2008 financial crisis, the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the mounting need for transparency, comprehensive, and data-driven policymaking enabled by social media and digital governance (Gasparyan and Rijavec, 2025). The research objectives of this paper are twofold: to investigate the impacts of poor governance in local municipalities, and to demonstrate that good governance can be used to foster and accelerate development. This paper seeks to review the depth of the challenges impeding good governance in local government and the impact on service provision. It will further investigate the possibility of utilizing good governance as a tool for sustainable urban development. The city of Ekurhuleni has been strategically chosen as the study area and focus of this research as it has also gone through the reform and amalgamation process. Conspicuously, it has followed a European policy trend of bigger is better. However, the developmental needs are worlds apart, which makes for an interesting comparison, albeit unmatched.

## 2. THE CHALLENGE OF GOVERNANCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Municipalities in South Africa lack good governance, which impacts the delivery of services. Poor governance leads to municipalities failing to efficiently operate and maintain their service infrastructure in a cost-effective and sustainable way (Beyers, 2016). The lack of good governance compromises the municipalities' ability to provide efficient service delivery. Poor governance presents an obstacle to development as it prevents municipalities from providing proper service delivery. This in turn undermines the plans in place to eradicate poverty and inequality in South Africa. Access to municipal services helps to advance the quality of life and assists the poor in their escape from poverty (Burger, 2005). South Africa is a country faced with inequalities because of its colonial and oppressive history emanating from the apartheid era (SASAS, 2016). According to Kroukamp and Cloete (2018), a crucial contributing factor to the weakness of local government is that its management capacity is ineffective, the training of managers is not relevant to the tasks at hand, and there is a lack in rotating senior managers to ensure the exposure of management to all aspects of service delivery. There are serious inconsistencies between the performances of municipalities across South Africa. The Auditor General's (AG) Report for the

2014/15 financial year, for instance, indicates that the provinces with the highest percentage of municipalities with clean audit assessments were the Western Cape (73%), Gauteng (33%), and KwaZulu-Natal (30%) (Ndevu and Muller, 2018). However, the AG further indicated that the audit results of municipalities in the Eastern Cape, Free State, and Mpumalanga are beginning to show signs of recovery after many years of poor audit results (Ndevu and Muller, 2018). The poor performance of municipalities in South Africa has had a devastating effect on their communities, with their dissatisfied members taking to the streets in protest. As demonstrated by the spate of service delivery protests over the years, there has, in fact, been and still is an absence of public confidence in the local government system. In 2009, service delivery protests intensified, with Gauteng and North West being the most distressed provinces, and Mpumalanga the worst affected by the demolition of public and local government infrastructures, which resulted in the burning of a library and the municipal offices (Ndevu and Muller, 2018). Leggassick (2010) contends that over the past 10 years, service delivery protests in South African cities and towns have not only been over inadequacies in the delivery by local government of sanitation services, water, and electricity, but also about the lack of a democratic ethos and accountability from elected officials. As a result of the appalling quality of service provision and the urgent needs of the poor, issues of service delivery in developing countries are a challenge that needs to be addressed (Besley and Ghatak, 2007). Good governance is documented as an objective for achieving economic growth and development indicators (Gisselquist, 2002). Good governance is an international best practice standard which is mandatory for governments to exercise in their processes and services to communities since it fosters market exchange, stimulates investment and innovation, and works towards the mitigation of poverty (Jha *et al.*, 2013). Globally, service provision is linked to good governance and accountability. However, South African challenges have a historic background tied to the colonial legacy and apartheid which have shaped the course of development in the pre- and post-democracy eras.

### 3. APARTHEID GEOGRAPHIES

South Africa has a well-documented history of apartheid, which produced a society characterized by inequality, marginalization, and fragmented development. The country epitomises a multi-national site of interest on matters of reconciliation and transformation. Within this historical context, ethnic hostility, racial exclusion, and the catastrophic mismanagement of its diversity still have the upper hand (Steyn and Ballard, 2013). Apartheid city planning had discriminatory systems, such as influx control and group areas legislation in place, which contributed to dysfunctional and unsustainable urban settlements, especially for the black population. As such, apartheid government not only segregated races; it also entrenched inequality, clearly manifested in the different forms of housing, geographical locations, landscapes, and the distribution of facilities (Spinks, 2001). The spatial legacy of apartheid has had long-lasting effects, which still negatively impact people, even in the democratic dispensation. Foster (2005) makes a critical observation that places have an explicit significance for people, who attach meaning to them; in fact, they resonate with emblematic and emotional significance. All people carry with them a sense of place identity, and significantly, identity with their place of abode/village/city/region/province/country on a personal level. The components of this particular space are not only intimately linked, but dynamically support one another. Since space has a significant meaning and shapes the identity of people, it then influences their lifestyle decisions in terms of the amenities and services (e.g., education, employment, leisure activities) that they require in order to acquire these benefits. Madlalate (2019) defines Apartheid Geography as the presence of racially distinctive spaces that can be tracked back to the colonial encounter, which resulted in the conception and maintenance of racially identified spaces. These were tied up with racial and class-based discrimination and an uneven distribution of social goods and public amenities skewed in favour of white people. While Mbembe (2004) argues that apartheid in South Africa attempted to establish a distinct racial moral order through spatial groupings, the physical distance between races was essentially understood to consecrate the moral

distance between them. The stark inequalities produced through the apartheid legacy have unfortunately persisted and are further replicated in modern-day South Africa. It is evident in the vast variations in service delivery and the quality of services provided to the previously disadvantaged areas (e.g., the townships) as opposed to those provided to the wealthy suburban areas. This has created more problems as people move around searching for a better life in terms of employment and a home, and can be seen in the increase in informal settlements. Establishing Apartheid Geography as a subdiscipline of Geography was motivated by the brutal exploitation of black people's need to access space through racist, social, and economic policies. All these were manifested in an assortment of discriminatory laws. The result was that black people were categorized into a separate group through marginalization, involuntary (forced) migration, a lack of secure tenure, and legal prejudice. This discriminatory form of development is at the core of the current crisis in South Africa and the beginning of dysfunctional service provision. This poor service delivery has further been plagued by the present-day challenges of poor governance, corruption, and financial maladministration. Thus, the city of Ekurhuleni has had to respond to these challenges since they affect the wellbeing of its residents and the development potential of the city.

#### 4. THE STUDY AREA: CITY OF EKURHULENI

The headquarters of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality was chosen as the suitable site for this study. The city of Ekurhuleni served as an ideal case study to investigate its governance practices and implementation of developmental policies because of its unique history. This historic milestone entailed the amalgamation of smaller municipalities to form one large municipality. Ekurhuleni is one of the six metropolitan areas in South Africa and one of the three metropolitan municipalities in Gauteng (Huchzermeyer *et al.*, 2004). Ekurhuleni was previously known as the East Rand and covers a surface area of 1 924 km<sup>2</sup> (SACN, 2004). A flourishing mining industry stimulated the growth of a substantial manufacturing support base in the area (SACN, 2004). Ekurhuleni, which is a Tsonga word which translates as "Place of Peace", was chosen as the study area because of its rich history in manufacturing as an industrial hub and because of its rapid growth in terms of development. However, despite all these promising reviews, the levels of poverty and unemployment in Ekurhuleni are very high (SACN, 2004). With these contrasting fortunes, it provided an interesting perspective for research and for investigating the governance strategy and policies of the municipality. Below are maps of the study area. Figure 1 comprises a South African map illustrating where Ekurhuleni is located. Figure 2 is the actual map of the study area of Ekurhuleni.



Fig. 1 – Map of South Africa.

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, 2025.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

This study followed a qualitative research approach as the aim was to attain a reflective review of sustainable urban development in cities. Qualitative research approaches enable the researcher to gather information while garner a thoughtful understanding of the dynamics of smaller and larger groups, or even the perspective of leaders, such as in government and organizations. The qualitative research technique is defined as a method where the research problem is studied in its innate setting rather than in a research laboratory (Creswell, 2007). Chalhoub-Deville and Deville (2008) maintain that the qualitative approach is used to accomplish a reflective understanding of aspects related to the design, administration and interpretation of text. The study used content analysis by reviewing the strategic documents of the city of Ekurhuleni. Content analysis was used as an analytical technique. Research that uses qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as a medium for communication, with devotion to the content or the contextual meaning of the text (Lindkvist, 1981; McTavish and Pirro, 1990; and Tesch, 1990). Textual data can be in verbal, print, or electronic form and could be gathered from narrative responses, interviews, focus groups, observations, or the print media (e.g., articles, books, or manuals) (Kondracki and Wellman, 2002). Content analysis was used to examine the municipality's Integrated Development Programme (IDP).

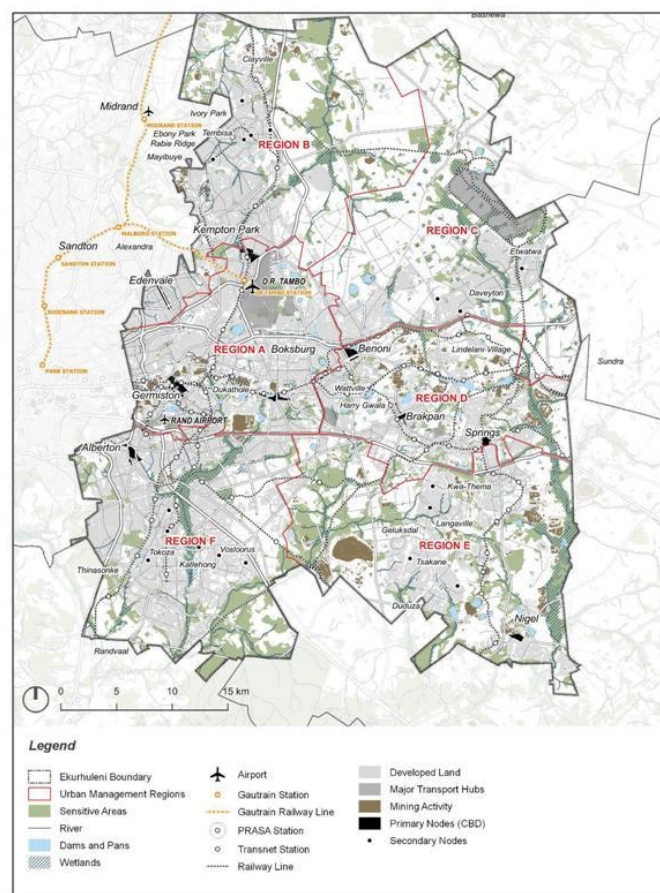


Fig. 2 – Map of Ekurhuleni.

Source: Ekurhuleni, 2016.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research technique that researchers use to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets (Dawadi, 2020). The documents of the strategic framework, termed Growth and Development Strategy (GDS) 2055, were used as part of the investigation into sustainable urban development and governance. The analysed IDPs were for the years 2011, 2016, and 2021. Convenience sampling was used to select these strategic documents because of its practicality and ease of access. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling whereby the cohort of the target population meets a certain criterion (e.g., easily accessible, in close geographical proximity and availability) in the study (Dornyei, 2007). The investigation probed and reviewed their content to ascertain how sustainable urban development and governance are shaping up in the city Ekurhuleni. Thematic analysis is a continuous comparative process that comprises reading and reviewing the transcripts in a systematic way (Cavendish, 2011). The most critical aspect in the thematic analysis is that the analysis process should be methodical so that the final product is of good quality. Inductive content analysis is used when the existing knowledge about the phenomenon is limited or fragmented (Elo and Kyngas, 2008). For this research project, the conventional content analysis approach was followed up with information collected through an analysis of textual data from strategic documents. Conceptual analysis, also known as thematic analysis, was also undertaken. The process included the analysis of concepts and themes that appeared across several texts. It contributed to a description and interpretation of data relating to the respective issues that kept coming up in textual data from the IDPs and the GDS 2055 documents. The researcher arranged the data into themes which were informed by the research objectives. Key themes were then derived from the research objectives which influenced the angle (perspective) and direction of the type of data to be extracted from the strategic documents. The data were then arranged and encoded into different themes using the Atlas TI software. For analysis and interpretation, the data were extracted from the Atlas TI software, where encoding was performed according to the determined themes. A theme that applied to the first research objective is governance in local municipalities. For the second objective, the established theme was governance and governmentality. Qualitative data analysis requires that the researcher possess some smart sense of innovation in organizing the raw data since the entire process of analysing the data entails a breaking down of the raw data into manageable segments (Shava *et al.*, 2021). Upon completion of this process, the researcher was able to derive themes and codes for a systematic data analysis approach. To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of this exercise, the researcher used parallel coding. Headings, themes, numbering, and classification were used to organize the different data sets, which were grouped accordingly and analysed. In this process, the researcher used the seven steps of the thematic analysis flow chart as designed by Kadir (*et al.*, 2021), illustrated in Figure 3 below. Effective qualitative data analysis plays a critical role in achieving research outcomes. Efficiently designed qualitative data analysis techniques involve the use of computer packages to enhance credibility and trustworthiness in such research (Shava *et al.*, 2021).

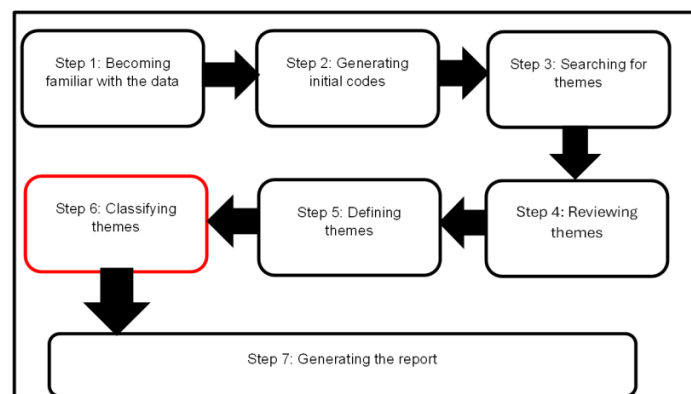


Fig. 3 – The seven steps in the Thematic Analysis.  
Source: Kadir *et al.*, 2021.

## **6. RESULTS**

### **6.1. The role of good governance in local government**

Good governance is a set of processes that is used to ensure that the alignment of the sovereign power of command is structured in order to achieve the primary objective of government, namely that of securing the health, wealth, and happiness of the population (Chamberlain, 2014). Governments are put into power by people. Therefore, they ought to serve all the people, especially the destitute. Government programmes should be people-centric and driven by the needs of the society, where the collective goal is to improve social and economic development. In recent years, several sovereign states have had their governance mandate side-tracked by the corruption, party politics, and grandiosity that they live in once they come into power. The art of good governance lies in the government being able to achieve a balance in the fiscus and the responsible use of power (Jessop, 2007). Fukuyama (2013) defines good governance as the government's ability to make and enforce rules and to deliver services, regardless of whether it is democratic or not. Importantly, governance is about the state performing its directive by carrying out the wishes of the electorate and not about the goals set by the sovereign power (Harrison, 2004). Governmentality focuses on the ability of the government to ensure the welfare of people, that people are governable, and that the code of conduct is adhered to (Chamberlain, 2014). Governmentality is about holding government accountable for its decisions and shortfalls regarding the security and welfare of the electorate, and the delivery of services to them. South African municipalities are struggling to provide quality and efficient service delivery to their communities. Administrative challenges include corruption which emanates from poor governance, corruption, and maladministration, all of which have a negative impact on the delivery of services. The constitution of the country clearly proclaims that municipalities should prioritize and accelerate their provision of services to serve the basic needs of their communities and ensure that they have access to municipal services (Mafunisa, 2008). This is due to the high poverty levels and the constitutional provisions put in place to deal with that issue. They reason that service delivery in South Africa is perceived as an instrument and a social agreement to create social inclusion and raise the living standards of the poor majority, previously excluded by the apartheid government. Furthermore, development in South African cities should be guided by sustainable practices. In fact, it is important that while addressing this historical issue, the structural challenges are conducted in such a way that they will not compromise resources for the future.

### **6.2. Sustainable cities and urban development**

Cities are vital to global sustainability as they accommodate huge populations and economic activities, but most world cities are faced with the challenges of urbanisation and poverty. The Sustainable Cities Index (2015) defines sustainability in the same words as the United Nations, as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. With growth in population numbers, resource depletion can easily accelerate if no proper sustainable measures are put in place. As a result of rapid population growth, cities are under immense pressure to provide adequate housing. There is a huge demand for housing in most African cities which has resulted in the mushrooming of informal settlements. These informal settlements do not have piped water, sanitation, and waste removal services; they are also lacking in health services and in access to public transport. Consequent to the snowballing population and migration, rapid urbanisation has resulted in an overflow of populated cities. This is specifically experienced in developing nations, and informal settlements have become a dire issue of urban life (Kufeoglu, 2012). A city is considered as "smart" when investments in human and social capital, communication technologies and infrastructure

actively foster sustainable economic development. This includes a high standard of living, with wise resource management exercised through an open and excellent government (Smart Cities Study, 2019). SDG 11 is a spatially planned development framework which aims to address several correlated issues by concentrating on urban sustainability (Chatterji, 2020). Sustainable Development Goal 11 seeks to ensure inclusive, safe, resilient, sustainable urban and human settlements by removing slum-like situations, while also providing inexpensive transit solutions, reducing urban sprawl, improving urban governance involvement, safeguarding access for all to safe public places and strengthening urban management through enhanced urban rules and regulations (Franco *et al.*, 2020). Like other SDG goals and targets, goal 11 is grounded on the systems approach with the prominence on cross-linkages with other developmental priorities and objectives to achieve the desired levels of outcome by 2030. This will be achieved through a set of manageable targets and indicators intended to lead policy actions at local level (Chatterji, 2020). A smart city is an integrated system, using technology-based solutions, in which human and social capital interact (Nkhumeleni, 2017). The objective of a smart city is to cost-effectively achieve sustainable and flexible development, and a high standard of living based on a multi-stakeholder, municipality-centred partnership (Lee, Gosling and Irvin, 2008). A smart city is one that aims to build an inclusive city which allows all citizens access to services and amenities equivalent to those of a global city. This is inclusive of opportunities to participate in the economy and to benefit from the amenities. Under such circumstances, inclusivity is important as it allows people to participate in the economy and thus become independent and able to make a living, the end result being reduced poverty (Ekurhuleni GDS, 2015). The new global trend is to design smart, digital, and sustainable cities that embrace technology and promote green city development. The concept of a green infrastructure has developed internationally as a way of knowing how green assets and ecological systems function as part of the infrastructural foundation that supports and sustains society. It is intended to build resilience and secures the provisioning of ecosystem services in human-dominated city landscapes (Colding, 2011; Harrison *et al.*, 2014). Urban green infrastructure plays a vital role in providing ecosystem services to cities. These services benefit urban dwellers directly but are also key to the climate change adaptations and alleviation strategies that cities are facing because of the increase in climate-related risks within cities (Pasquini and Enqvist, 2019). The city of Ekurhuleni has been working on a smart and sustainable comprehensive urban development termed the Growth and Development Strategy 2055 (GDS).

### **6.3. The city of Ekurhuleni's growth and development strategy**

The city of Ekurhuleni developed a strategic framework named the Growth and Development Strategy 2055. This is a comprehensive, firmly managed, empowered, and resourced EMM organization that will be able to rise to the challenge of delivering services that are nationally competitive, consistent, financially sustainable, competent, and innovative. This strategic technique consists of a phased development approach. The phased development approach is divided into three segments or phases which are meant to address spatial, economic, and social inequalities. The three phases of the GDS 2055 are the Delivering City (2012–2020), the Capable City (2020–2030), and the Sustainable City (2030–2055). The Ekurhuleni GDS (2015) defines a delivering city as a comprehensive, firmly managed, empowered, and resourced EMM organization that will be able to rise to the challenge of delivering services that are nationally competitive, consistent, financially sustainable, competent, and innovative. The city of Ekurhuleni plans to achieve these developmental targets through five strategic principles, namely, Re-urbanize, Re-industrialize, Re-generate, Re-mobilise, and Re-govern, as shown in Figure 4 below.

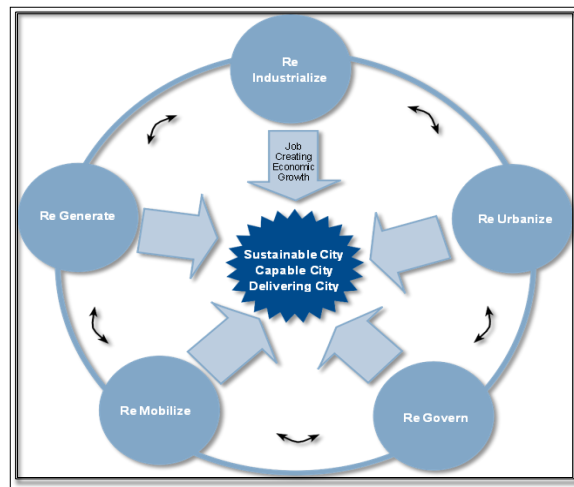


Fig. 4 – The five strategic imperatives of GDS 2055.

Source: City of Ekurhuleni, 2021.

#### 6.3.1. Re-urbanise

The idea of the *Re-urbanize* theme is that it is entrusted with driving the process of the re-urbanization of highly connected and networked spaces to guarantee a compact and sustainable city. It will also include the revitalization of the neglected and deteriorating areas of the city, supervising and guiding growth, while facilitating upward mobility in the formal and informal housing sectors. Importantly, it is aimed at providing affordable accommodation in well located areas and effective and reasonable access to places of work, shopping nodes and facilities within the city (Ekurhuleni GDS, 2015). Re-urbanizing is a critical part of service delivery which can be used to address the demand for human settlements and find a way of addressing spatial inequalities. The livelihood of scores of people will improve with the availability of water, sanitation services and electrification. This will make life more manageable for the poor and unemployed, particularly for those living in the informal settlements. The principle of Re-urbanizing the city is crucial as it seeks to achieve the integration of human settlements. This will incorporate promoting safer communities, protecting the natural environment and the sustainable use of resources, and creating an inclusive environment that will enable inclusive growth and job creation (Ekurhuleni, 2021). Importantly, the design and building of smart cities is a step in the right direction. Globally, cities are incorporating innovative digital systems that enhance their provision of services and are responsive to the needs of their people. All of this has to be done in a sustainable manner and with care for the environment so as to ensure environmental wellness.

#### 6.3.2. Re-generate

This is where the idea of regenerating the city comes in to ensure that the environment is protected and taken care of while the city develops and grows. *Re-generate* focuses on environmental wellness, the protection of the natural environment, and the advancement of resource sustainability. South Africa as a country is faced with water scarcity and the absence of clean and reliable energy, issues which are further compounded by the challenges of pollution and the over-consumption of these resources. Water is a valuable resource and if managed effectively and equitably, it can play a crucial empowering role in bolstering the resilience of social, economic, and environmental systems in the light of rapid and unstable changes (United Nations, 2015). The city of Ekurhuleni has put measures in place to promote sustainable water use, which includes the reclamation and reuse of wastewater and the harvesting of rainwater (Ekurhuleni, 2021). Hendriks (2018) argues that water is the foundation of sustainable

development and is essential for reducing the global burden of disease and developing the health, wellbeing, and productivity of populations. Cities are further guided by the SDGs, with Goal Number 6 emphasizing that states should ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation services for all. The city has improved access to water and waste management. This has been facilitated through the re-blocking of informal settlements. The demand for waste removal has increased rapidly in line with population growth, which has resulted in an increase in backyard rooms and informal settlements.

#### 6.3.3. *Re-mobilise*

*Re-mobilising* the city aims to accomplish social empowerment with an objective to promote safe, healthy, and socially empowered communities. One of the social empowerment initiatives of the city has been to build its own science university to empower and facilitate capacity and skills development among the younger generation. Universities play a significant role in that they have a positive impact on the growth and development of the city in which they are located. They provide human capital, science, innovation, and support for democratic values (Valero and Van Reenen, 2019). As a developing country, South Africa needs to invest in more educational institutions which will promote science, innovation, and academic excellence. All of these are crucial for solving some of the challenges that trouble the country, such as poor governance, lack of leadership and accountability, corruption, nepotism, alongside developmental challenges like poverty, unemployment, or inequality. Universities are the creators of human capital, and skilled workers are more productive than unskilled workers. Universities can help industries directly by collaborating with them. Their main mission is the training of a highly skilled labour force, which qualifies organizations to process and use knowledge, and subsequently compete in the knowledge-based economy (Valero and Van Reenen, 2019; Charles, 2006; Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 1995). Having a university in Ekurhuleni will be beneficial to the city, as it will aid in skills development and in stimulating economic development through collaborations with different institutions. More people will be permitted to participate in the economy.

#### 6.3.4. *Re-govern*

*Re-govern* focuses on political governance and is aimed at supporting participatory development in the local government. The city is pushing for a system that will promote accountability and responsiveness through the important quality of transparency that it is striving for in all its municipal processes (Ekurhuleni, 2021). Lack of good governance has made it difficult municipalities to be efficient, accountable, and transparent. Over the years there has been an increase in service delivery protests which have rendered some parts of the country almost ungovernable (Mfene, 2009). Municipalities in South Africa are also faced with a lack of good governance, which impacts the delivery of services. Poor governance leads to municipalities failing to efficiently operate and maintain their service infrastructure in a cost-effective and sustainable way (Beyers, 2016). The city of Ekurhuleni has been strategically using the Separation of Powers model to ensure that service delivery and governance are effective. The Separation of Powers doctrine is based on the need to preserve and uphold the freedom of the individual. This mechanism advocates for dividing and distributing the power of the government to prevent dictatorship, arbitrary rule, and other forms of abuse of power (Lekalakala, 2022). The Separation of Powers model ensures that the legislative and executive branches have their own responsibilities within the council and that everyone is held accountable for their actions.

#### 6.3.5. *Re-industrialise*

*Re-industrialise* focuses on job creation and economic growth. South Africa has been in a low-growth trap since the beginning of the democratic rule in 1994. This has resulted in an insignificant reduction in household poverty levels, linked with high levels of inequality that are on the rise (Allen *et*

*al.*, 2021). The rate of inequality has risen exponentially and has resulted in more people being trapped in poverty and unemployment, which has also been compounded by the rapid growth of the population. Faulkner *et al.* (2013) argues that for South Africa to become more inclusive, more people need to work. An increase in the percentage of people employed will have a substantial impact on overall poverty and the distribution of income. The City of Ekurhuleni is also plagued by a high unemployment rate and the municipality has drafted a 10-point economic revival plan to mitigate the challenges of inequality, unemployment, and poverty. Figure 5 shows what is envisaged in the economic revival plan.

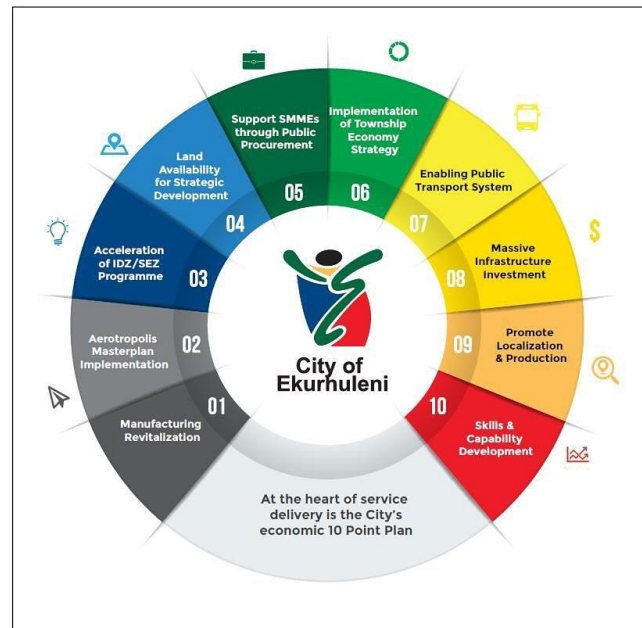


Fig. 5 – 10-Point Economic Revival Plan.  
Source: Ekurhuleni, 2021.

The revival plan focuses on different aspects to stimulate economic development in the city. Specific initiatives that stand out include manufacturing revitalisation, making land available for strategic development, enabling public transportation and skills, and capability development. Manufacturing plays a critical role in enhancing the economy and also creates job opportunities, both of which will have a positive impact on economic development. The revival plan seeks to revitalize this manufacturing industry, which will also rekindle the economy of the city and generate job opportunities. The city has also made land available for strategic development.

#### 6.4. Building a capable city

With the developmental deficit in the country, it is important that the building of metro lines does not get out of hand and that there is no rush to accelerate the development of their infrastructure. Authorities should first consider the spatial, climatic, and environmental impacts. Development should be driven by principles of sustainability which are key to long-term growth and expansion. Future development is also reliant on spatial quality, as the quality of a space determines the level of development that will take place there. Building a capable city will require a focus on economic development which will incorporate addressing poverty and unemployment. Addressing poverty correlates with service provision. Consequently, the city of Ekurhuleni must accelerate and master

efficient service delivery to its communities. While promoting development, service delivery improves the welfare of people and bridges the poverty gap. A large number of South Africans live in abject poverty and depend on service delivery for survival, which is what makes public perceptions of service delivery critical. With a working population and efficient service delivery, municipalities have an opportunity to increase their revenue to make them sustainable and competitive. To achieve this, the city of Ekurhuleni needs to create an environment conducive to economic growth. A capable city requires a well-governed municipality so that it can play a role in prioritising the developmental objectives (National Planning Commission, 2013). South African cities are plagued by service delivery backlogs, which are commonly tied to a lack of proper governance and accountability, which perpetuates social inequalities.

### **6.5. Good governance as a developmental tool**

South African cities are plagued by service delivery backlogs, which are commonly tied to a lack of proper governance and accountability which perpetuates social inequalities. Gumede (2017) argues that development in Africa entails more than good economic management, and that building state capacity in the quest to achieve wider human development goals urgently requires an efficient democratic developmental state. Such a developmental state should address not only economic issues, but also social development issues. South Africa is weakened by its incapacity of not possessing a good governance structure to provide an environment that is transparent and accountable. In local government spaces like the city of Ekurhuleni, good governance can be gauged through the success or failure of the implementation of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). The Local Government Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) for operative purposes defines the IDP as a plan which must be implemented by each municipal council within a recommended period subsequent to the commencement of its election term. IDPs are in place to assist municipalities in coordinating development in a systematic way. Mathebula (2018) argues that the appropriate, efficient, and effective implementation of the IDP in a municipal environment warrants the acceleration of service delivery from a government, as anticipated by the citizens. While the city of Ekurhuleni has been providing services to people, the provision of these services has been fragmented, which has left some areas poorly serviced and has led to dissatisfaction from communities. The city of Ekurhuleni has the depth and capability for the proper implementation of the IDP. However, there is a need a betterment of the internal system and work processes, external relations and commitment to the residents, and improvement of the management practices (Molekwa, 2021). Without proper governance, the city of Ekurhuleni cannot effectively provide successful developmental interventions as incorporated in the IDP, that will fast-track growth and respond adequately to the needs of the electorate. Good governance upholds the rule of law and strives to minimize corruption while in its decision-making process. It is also understanding of the views of the minority and the helpless, and, significantly, receptive to the present and future needs of the general public. The city of Ekurhuleni government has come short in practising and displaying the principles of good governance which are the building blocks for strong and clean governance. The principles of good governance are accountability and transparency, and that the government be consensus-driven, favour equity, inclusivity, and participation (UN, 2015). The city has been demoralized by serious moral challenges, which signify that the developmental interventions have been motivated by greed, are submerged in corruption, and financial mismanagement. It is universally acknowledged that good governance is essential at all levels, for fostering stability, endorsing progress, and establishing sustainable communities.

### **6.6. The link between good governance and sustainability**

Good governance entails various approach combinations (e.g., participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective, and competent, equitable, comprehensive, and following

the rule of law) (Sutcliffe, 2020). Governance is what the government and its partners do; it is the application of leadership, management, power, and policy. Significantly, good governance refers to the capacity of city councils and their partners to articulate and implement sound policies and systems that reproduce the interests of local citizens in a way that is transparent to and inclusive of those with the least authority and resources (SACN, 2015). With the establishment of SDGs, it has become mandatory for the implementation and administration of development interventions to be sustainably governable. Scholars have explicitly stressed the significance of participation in policymaking and implementation (Glass and Newig, 2019). This stresses the importance of a comprehensive collaborative nature that has grounded the core foundation of sustainable development initiatives. Glass and Newig (2019) posit that sustainable development is anchored in four aspects of governance, namely: participation, policy coherence, reflexivity and adaptation, and democratic institutions. Scholars have argued that multifaceted challenges in particular, such as the challenges posed by interconnected SDGs, require representation, participation, and stakeholder commitment due to the diverse interests and potential trade-offs at stake (Meuleman and Niestroy, 2015; Meadowcroft, 2011; Jordan, 2008; Enroth, 2011; Emerson *et al.*, 2012). Participation in governance entrenches some form of accountability within the different stakeholders which would ensure a symbiotic and sustainable governance. Additional policy should be coherent and consistent with the developmental initiatives. As a consequence of interrelation of the various factors of sustainable development, academics argue that an integrated and coherent approach is required to successfully tackle the complex issues at hand (Stafford-Smith *et al.*, 2017; Meuleman and Niestroy, 2015; Meadowcroft, 2011; Jordan, 2008). Furthermore, Feindt and Weiland (2018) add that reflexive governance allows local government institutions to be reflexive and adaptative to rules and procedures. This is essential for governing sustainability problems that are characterized by their dynamic, long-term and systemic nature. Finally, democratic institutions are required to facilitate and foster progress towards attaining sustainable development goals which require good governance to be in place and in practice.

### 6.7. Governance in Ekurhuleni

Local government bears the responsibility of ensuring the quality provision of services to its communities in a sustainable manner, promoting social and economic development and a safe and healthy environment. Political squabbles have had a negative bearing on good governance at the local government level, an observation made with the advent of the coalition government. Over the years, the maturity of the South African democracy and the flexibility of political changes have opened a door for coalition governments to become a fashionable form of government (Mofokeng *et al.*, 2024). The coalition government has totally changed the political landscape of the country and the way local municipalities are run. Coalitions are viewed as political power sharing and are the result of the lack of an outright winner of elections. Empirical evidence in coalition governments demonstrates that coalition partners find it challenging to co-exist amicably without trying to over-shadow each other, which leads to the collapse of service delivery (Mofokeng *et al.*, 2024). The greatest challenge presented by a coalition government is its unpredictable nature, which could have far-reaching impacts on local governance and disrupt the efficacy of service provision, fiscal management and the sustainability of the city. Political factionalism and polarization have contributed to the weakening of municipal functionality. In the midst of all the complications brought about by the coalition government, the city of Ekurhuleni still has not managed to effectively address spatial inequalities, fragmented development and the challenges emanating from the provision of services. This demonstrates that there have been shortcomings in the city in terms of its governance. Greater efforts are needed to ensure that the developmental deficit and the vast service delivery backlogs, which can be attributed to bureaucracy, are efficiently addressed in Ekurhuleni. A reasonable approach to tackling these issues could rest in adopting a network model, where formal and informal relationships with different stakeholders can be

established, which can then be called upon in times of crisis. As discussed earlier, the proper implementation of the Separation of Powers policy will also help with this uncertainty of changing political leadership. The legislature will continue running the municipal duties without the interference of the political office. Given this collaborative stance, both sides can hold each other accountable and work towards making the city great. Gulati *et al.* (2018) argue that a strategic network can provide an organizational structure that provides access to data, capital, markets, and technologies.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

There is a need for a continuous process to plan and design sustainable policies that will drive development in the city of Ekurhuleni. Policies that will integrate city planning to ensure that development is guided by a smart city design, spatial inclusiveness and sustainable development are required. Governance researchers observe that the public sector's incapacity to deal competently and efficiently with social challenges stems from the fact that the political decision-makers and other public authorities know too little about the problems they set out to solve and the real impact of the respective governance initiatives (Kooiman, 1993; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004; Torfing *et al.*, 2012). Sustainable policies can only be designed when there are proper consultations and collaborations with different stakeholders, which include communities, researchers and the business community. Good governance lies in collaboration, and the way to effectively govern involves collaborating with different stakeholders which would then also guarantee accountability and transparency. There is also a great responsibility of localising the SDGs to ensure that they are meaningful. South Africa has an important role in ensuring that it aligns its development objectives with those of the SDGs, which must be filtered through the National Development Plan (NDP) to accelerate development and respond to the needs of communities. These should further be aligned and embedded on the municipal IDP. Aligning the national development plans with local plans will ensure that development is streamlined country wide. This will also help in addressing the current trends of fragmented development that is encountered by South Africans. Ansell and Gash (2008) meticulously define collaborative governance as a governing arrangement where one or more public institutions openly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is official, consent-oriented, purposeful, and aims to implement public policy or manage public programmes or assets. Todaro and Smith (2011) argue that development must therefore be conceived of as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty. More emphasis should also be put on dealing decisively with corruption and enhancing the capacity of the public sector. According to the World Bank (2020), cultivating transparency and efficiency of the procurement system, overcoming opposition to change, and channelling stakeholders in private and civil sector is key to achieve these outcomes. Dealing with corruption needs a concerted effort and one of such effort entails changing the organizational culture. Digitalization and e-governance are some of the new initiatives of addressing corruption in the private sector, fostering transparency and accountability. Digital solutions such as blockchain, e-governance systems, and data analytics have surfaced as functional mechanisms in reducing corrupt practices by enhancing transparency in public procurement, financial transactions and service delivery (Habiburrochman *et al.*, 2024). E-government systems modernise bureaucratic processes, decreasing opportunities for corruption by limiting human interaction (Habiburrochman *et al.*, 2024). Development, in its essence, must represent a comprehensive change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse basic needs and evolving aspirations of individuals and social groups within the system, moves away from a condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better. Currently, the city of Ekurhuleni is being overwhelmed by spatial inequalities and a fragmented development, both of which

reinforce marginalization and a separate development. There is a need for a comprehensive spatial development policy that will address the inequalities clearly evident in the spatial setting of the city. To achieve such development, collaboration will need to play a vital role in ensuring that all aspects of the process are covered. Collaborations between academics, researchers, engineers, and town planners are, in fact, essential for addressing the prevailing spatial challenges that are affecting developments in the city. Furthermore, the localization of SDGs is crucial as this will provide a valuable foundation for the incorporation of existing and scheduled local processes and priorities in line with the local government obligations, which are captured in the SDG targets and indicators.

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