SERVICE DELIVERY PROTESTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES: TRENDS, FACTORS, IMPACTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract
This paper examines the trends, impact and factors contributing to service delivery protests in South African local municipalities. Service delivery protests have become a frequent occurrence in the country, with communities expressing dissatisfaction with the quality and accessibility of basic services. The paper identifies lack of basic services, poor service quality, corruption and mismanagement, ineffective communication, unresponsive officials, socio-economic inequality, and political factors as contributing to service delivery protests. The paper draws on existing literature and reports to analyse each of these factors and highlight their impact on service delivery protests. Different databases like Google, Google Scholar, Scopus, AOSIS, ProQuest, and university repositories are utilised to search data. Themes were developed and used to search the data until completion. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) approach was applied. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory was adopted to understand the factors contributing to service delivery protests. In conclusion, service delivery protests in South African municipalities can have significant negative impacts on socio-economic development. Addressing the underlying factors of these protests, such as addressing service delivery backlogs, improving governance and accountability, and increasing public participation, can help to mitigate the negative impacts on socio-economic development.

Keywords: *Service delivery, Protests, dissatisfaction, socio-economic inequalties/development, South Africa, Municipalities*

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Habib & Safdar (2012) indicate that South Africa has a long history of service delivery protests, dating back to the early 1990s when communities began demanding basic services like water, sanitation, and electricity. These protests have become a regular feature of South African politics, with over 2,500 protests recorded between 2007 and 2011. South Africa is a developing nation, and the people depend increasingly on local government services hence there are rapid protests due to government failure. This is because economies in transition offer fewer economic prospects, which increases social inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Also, in South Africa, socio-economic disparity is persistent, and most people live in poverty and unemployment state (Ngcamu, 2019; Xolani, Mkhize, & Mlambo, 2022). Thus, failure by the local government to afford the people effective and efficient service delivery results in chaos such as protests. Moreover, Masondo (2016) highlights the importance of addressing corruption and mismanagement in local municipalities as a contributing factor to service delivery protests. Municipal IQ (2011) and Masondo (2016) contend that corruption reduces public confidence in the government, obstructs service delivery, and sparks protests. Chitiga-Mabugu & Ntshingila (2018) point out that socio-economic

inequalities contribute significantly to service delivery protests in South African local municipalities. The poorest communities are often the most affected by the lack of basic services, and addressing socio-economic inequalities is critical in reducing service delivery protests.

Protests are legally recognised in South Africa by various pieces of legislation such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, which is the supreme law of the country. In local government, protests are recognised in the Municipal Systems Act which implies that municipalities must develop appropriate mechanisms and structures for public participation. Thus, citizens often use protests as a form of public participation to influence policy and decision-making (Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022). Burns & Moultrie (2017) and Chigumira (2017) concur that service delivery protests have become a common feature of South African local municipalities. Communities often take to the streets to express their dissatisfaction with the quality and accessibility of basic services such as water, sanitation, and electricity. Crisp (2017) and Mamokhere (2020) add that these protests have often turned violent and destructive, causing damage to property and loss of life. Pillay (2019) and Maylam & Ndlovu (2018) state that understanding the factors contributing to service delivery protests is crucial to developing effective strategies to address the root causes of the protests.

With that being said, service delivery protests have been a persistent issue in the country over the years, and their frequency varies across municipalities. The trend of service delivery protests in South African municipalities shows a significant increase in frequency and intensity over the years. The protests have been driven by various factors, including corruption, mismanagement, ineffective communication, and socio-economic inequality. This paper aims to identify and explore the factors contributing to service delivery protests in South African local municipalities.

2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite many legislations emphasising the provision of service delivery to citizens, sustainable service delivery remains the challenge of the 21st century. Many municipalities are still failing to provide adequate and sustainable service delivery to their constituencies and this trickers communities into protests expressing their dissatisfaction with and poor quality of services they receive from their municipalities (Mathebula, 2018; Mamokhere, 2020). South African municipalities have been experiencing service delivery protests for decades, with demands for basic services like water, sanitation, and electricity being the main driving force behind these protests. The protests have become gradually violent, causing damage to property, loss of lives, and arrests (Habib & Safdar, 2012). Naidoo & Maharaj (2015) and Mngadi (2021) argue that poor planning, lack of consultation, and communication breakdown between local government officials and communities are also contributing factors to service delivery protests in South African municipalities. They suggest that effective communication, consultation, and community participation in decision-making processes can help prevent service delivery protests.

While many studies have been conducted on service delivery protests in South Africa, the author(s) of this paper argues that little is known about the real factors that contribute to these protests in local municipalities. Therefore, there is a need to identify and understand the factors that contribute to service delivery protests in South African municipalities to develop effective strategies to prevent them. Therefore, this paper aims to identify and explore the factors contributing to service delivery protests in South African local municipalities. The paper will draw data from existing literature to realise the aim of this paper.

3 RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS

The paper heavily relied on existing literature to achieve its objectives, utilizing different research databases such as Google, Google Scholar, Scopus, AOSIS, ProQuest, and universities' repositories to search and review the existing literature. The existing literature was analysed to identify the trends, factors and impacts of service delivery protests in South African municipalities. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) approach was applied to analyse the existing literature based on the developed themes. The paper specifically focused on service delivery protests in local government, which is responsible for providing basic services to the communities. The high frequency of service delivery protests in South African municipalities is a clear indication of the current service delivery challenges faced by the country, especially considering that a significant portion of the population depends on municipalities for essential services due to high levels of poverty, unemployment, and the impact of corruption. Based on this argument, the paper explored the various factors contributing to service delivery protests in South African local government.

4 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW
a.   THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This paper used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, which Abraham Maslow first put forth in his 1943 work "A Theory of Human Motivation". According to the psychological theory known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs,

people have varying levels of requirements that must be met in a specific order, with the lower wants being satisfied before the higher ones (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1987:68) also suggested that the hierarchy's structure order "is not nearly as rigid." McLeod (2018) states that the Maslow hierarchy of needs may be rigid or fluid depending on personal preferences and environmental factors. Thus, the hierarchy is often depicted as a pyramid, with the most basic needs at the bottom and the highest needs at the top. Figure 1 below, depicts Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Need Theory

Source: McLeod (2018)

In the context of service delivery protests by communities, Mamokhere (2021) indicated that Maslow's theory can provide some insight into the factors that contribute to these protests. Here's how the theory might apply in this study context:

1. **Physiological Needs**: At the most basic level, citizens need food, water, shelter, and other necessities to survive (Maslow, 1943; Maslow, 1987; McLeod, 2018). In the context of service delivery protests, Mamokhere (2021) implies that communities often protest due to a lack of access to physiological needs like water, food, and shelter. For example, they may be protesting because they don't have access to clean water, or because their homes are not safe.

2. **Safety Needs**: Once people's physiological needs are met, they need to feel safe and secure (Maslow, 1943). In the context of service delivery protests, communities may be protesting because they don't feel safe in their neighbourhoods, or because they feel that their safety is being compromised by the lack of essential services such as policing and emergency services (Ntsala & Mahlatji, 2016; Mamokhere, 2021).

3. **Love and Belonging Needs**: After their physiological and safety needs are met, people need to feel that they belong and are loved (Maslow, 1943; Maslow, 1987). In the context of service delivery protests, communities may be protesting because they feel neglected or ignored by their local government, or because they feel that their concerns are not being heard in the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) as indicated in the study by Mamokhere & Meyer (2022).

4. **Esteem Needs**: Once people feel a sense of belonging, they need to feel respected and valued (Maslow, 1947). In the context of service delivery protests, communities may be protesting because they feel that they are not being respected or their inputs are not valued by their local government, especially during the IDP meetings and other forums for participation. If communities' inputs are not valued and respected, they will feel unfairly treated and may resort to protesting (Ntsala & Mahlatji, 2016; Mamokhere, 2021; Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022).

5. **Self-Actualization Needs**: The final level of needs is self-actualization needs, which include the need for personal growth and self-fulfilment. In the context of service delivery protests, these needs may relate to the provision of opportunities for education and skills development. Communities may protest when they feel that they are being denied access to education opportunities by their local government such as learnership or when they feel that the government is not doing enough to promote lifelong learning and personal growth. This was witnessed in 2015 on #feesmustfall under the regime of former President Jacob Zuma (Mamokhere, 2020; Ntsala et al., 2016).

By analysing the above, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory helped us understand the underlying motivations behind service delivery protests by communities. By addressing these needs at each level of the hierarchy, municipalities and policymakers can work to address the root causes of these protests and promote greater social cohesion and well-being. The next section discusses relevant literature on the factors that contribute to service delivery and the impact thereafter is outlined.

b.   LITERATURE REVIEW

i.   TRENDS OF SERVICE DELIVERY PROTESTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

Service delivery protests have been on the rise in South African municipalities over the years, with an increase in both frequency and intensity since the 2000s. According to the South African Police Service, the number of

service delivery protests surged from 766 in 2007/2008 to 3,988 in 2013/2014 (South African Police Service, 2014). Ngcamu (2019) indicates that the protests have occurred in all provinces of South Africa, with some areas being more affected than others. Gauteng, Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal are among the provinces that have experienced the most service delivery protests. These protests are predominantly in urban areas, where the population is higher, and demand for services is greater. The statistical trend of service delivery protests in South African municipalities shows an upward trajectory over the past decade. According to data collected by the Municipal IQ (2011) which is a hotspots monitor and tracks service delivery protests in South Africa, there were 218 protests recorded in 2010, with the number steadily increasing to 237 in 2011 and 272 in 2012. The number of protests increased sharply to 480 in 2013 and peaked at 704 in 2014. In 2015, the number of protests decreased slightly to 570 before increasing to 702 in 2016. In 2017, there were 389 protests, and in 2018, there were 198 protests. On the other hand, Chigwata, Donovan & Powell (2017) directly stated that "the number of civic protests in South Africa increased to 204 in 2009, then remained stable at 176 in 2014, and subsequently decreased to 126 in 2015, based on data from the Civic Protest Barometer (CPB). The highest number of protests occurred in eight metropolitan municipalities, including Cape Town (17%), Johannesburg (14%), eThekwini Municipality (8%), Tshwane (7%), and Ekurhuleni (4%). The protests were categorized according to the type of violence reported, with intimidation (33%), personal attack (27%), property damage (19%), arson (14%), and looting (7%) being the most common. From 2012 to 2016, municipal services (58%) were the primary cause of grievances cited during protests, followed by party politics (15%), governance (14%), and socio-economic challenges (12%), as reported in popular media" (Chigwata et al., 2017; Ngcamu, 2019). Similarly, Alexander et al. (2018) conducted a desktop study that examined the protests held from 2005 to 2017, and the authors discovered an increase in the number of community protests, which were characterized as unruly, disruptive, and violent.

To thoroughly understand service delivery protest trends. The below figures depict the trends as per the studies conducted by Municipal IQ which is a hotspot monitor in South Africa about the protests. Firstly, the trends in service delivery protests and the results are outlined in both years and provinces.

Figure 2: Major service delivery protests by year (2004 –2022*)
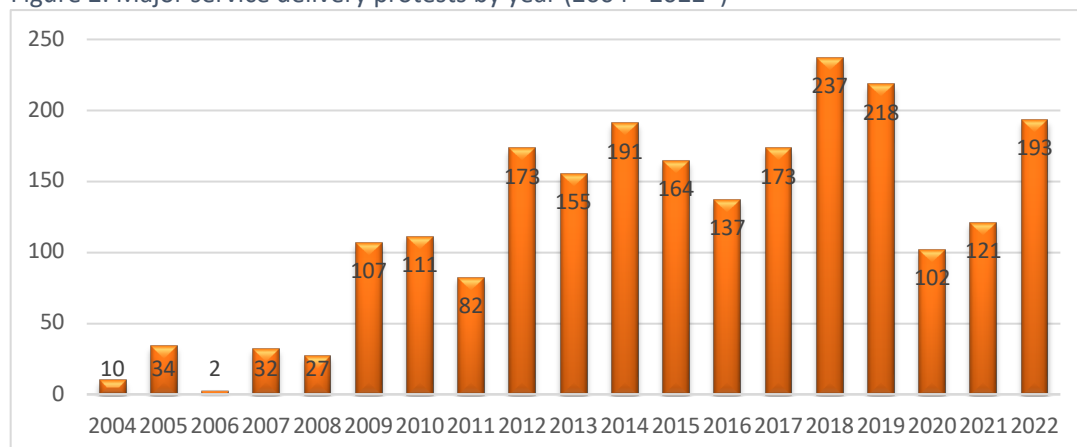
Source: Municipal IQ Municipal Hotspots Monitor (2023)

Figure 3: Service delivery protests by province, 2022
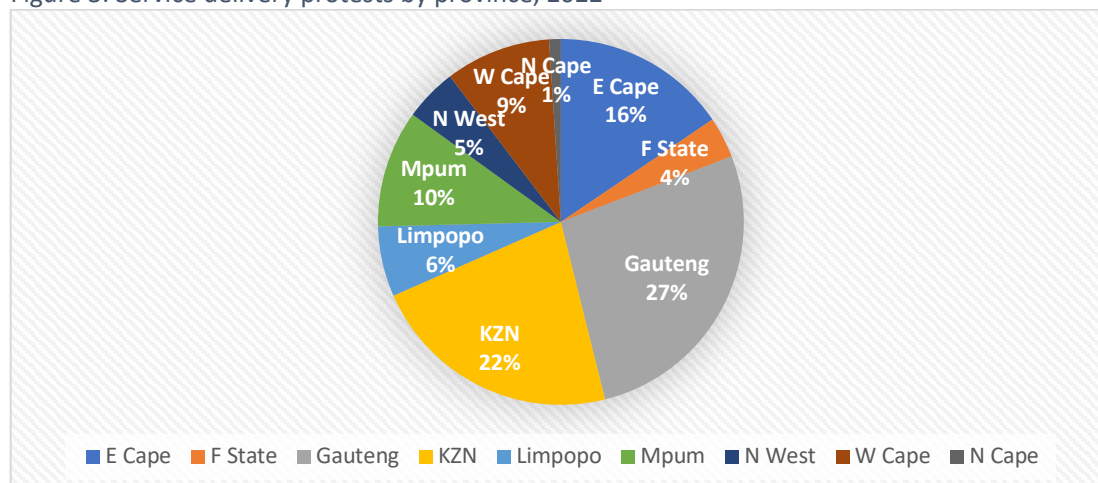
Source: Municipal IQ Municipal Hotspots Monitor (2023)

The total number of protests for 2022 was 193. "It is clear now that the number of protests for 2022 is rising, although significantly higher than 2020 and 2021, have not matched the record protest levels of 2018 and 2019 as per Figure 2. This is the highest number since post-COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. Figure 3 indicates that Gauteng with 27% of all protests in the country is the most prominent site of service delivery protests for 2022, as it has been historically. It is followed by KZN with 22% of protests and the Eastern Cape with 16%. Gauteng remains the most protest-aggrieved province, although KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape also have high numbers of protests". In that regard, Mamokhere (2020) indicates that the factors for the protests have also changed over time, with issues related to housing, water, and sanitation being the most prevalent in the early 2000s. In recent years, protests have shifted to more systematic issues, such as corruption, maladministration, and political interference in service delivery. Xolani et al. (2022) also imply that the causes of the protests are diverse and complex, as outlined in previous research, and include socio-economic inequality, corruption, and poor service delivery. Thus, these challenges are deeply rooted and require sustained efforts to address them. Therefore, the next section focuses on different factors that contribute to service delivery protests in South African municipalities.

ii.   FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SERVICE DELIVERY PROTESTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

Service delivery protests in South African local municipalities have become a frequent occurrence over the years, with communities expressing their "dissatisfaction" with the quality and accessibility of basic services like electricity, sanitation, and water. Several systematic factors contribute to these protests, and some of them are outlined below:

- *Lack of basic services*

One of the primary factors contributing to service delivery protests in South African local municipalities is the lack of basic services. Communities feel neglected and marginalized when they do not have access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and electricity. The African National Congress (ANC) led local government is facing protests related to a perceived lack of basic services (Breakfast, Bradshaw & Normarywayi, 2019). The lack of services in municipalities remains severe and has led to most of the poor people being doubtful about the ability of local governments to deliver services and therefore led to mass protests against the lack of service delivery (Mashamaite, 2014).

- *Poor service quality*

Even when services are provided, the quality is often poor, leading to frustrations and dissatisfaction among the communities. Poor road infrastructure, inadequate waste management, and uncollected refuse also contribute to service delivery protests (Shah, 2011). Also, Thobakgale & Mokgopo, (2018) and Mashilo & Kgobe, (2021) argue that corruption is one of the factors that affect the value for money and quality of public services delivered by local government. Corruption in the tendering robs citizens of quality services (Mpehle, 2012). It is believed that modern South African democracy has inherited a tarnished public service, which could negatively affect the quality of service delivery and professionalism (Ngwakwe, 2012). Kgobe (2020) argues that people love the local government led by the African National Congress (ANC), but it keeps disappointing them with poor service delivery hence service delivery protests occur.

- *Corruption and mismanagement*

Ambe (2013) argues that corruption and mismanagement are repeatedly alleged in procurement processes. The significant number of protests in South African municipalities related to service delivery demonstrates the prevalence of dissatisfaction with basic services provided (Mashilo & Kgobe, 2021). Corruption, fraud, and nepotism have a detrimental impact on the quality of public service delivery (Zitha & Mathebula, 2015). Corruption and mismanagement in communities have been identified as contributing factors to service delivery protests. Communities become disillusioned and angry when they perceive that officials are enriching themselves at the expense of providing services to the population. According to the Auditor General of South Africa (2021) report on the "MFMA 2020-21 Consolidated General Report on Local Government Audit Outcomes," 64 municipalities are dysfunctional, and the main causes of dysfunctionality are poor governance, weak institutional capacity, poor financial management, corruption, and political instability. According to the Auditor General of South Africa 2021, 8 municipalities were under provincial management or intervention in June 2017, while 21 municipalities were under provincial management or intervention in June 2021, increasing to 33 municipalities in February 2022. Lastly, it is found that there is corruption and favouritism in the distribution of RDP houses at Duncan Village in Eastern Cape province hence the province has been experiencing several violent service delivery protests (Ndasana, Vallabh & Mxunyelwa, 2022).

- *Lack of Accountability and Unresponsive Officials*

When political office-bearers and officials in local municipalities fail to respond to complaints and queries from communities, it creates a sense of neglect, and frustration and often leads to protests (Mamokhere, 2020).

Mashamaite (2014) posits that the exclusion of communities from decision-making processes blurs the boundaries of accountability, transparency, ownership, and responsiveness, leaving communities with no choice but to resort to mass protests. Financial accountability and service delivery are hampered by a lack of financial capability, corruption, and opaque transparency in public financial management (Ngwakwe, 2012). Shava & Mubangizi (2019) indicated that the poor basic service delivery in many South African municipalities has led to communities being forced to organise service delivery protests to demand accountability from government officials. Many local government officials struggle to maintain public accountability because they are unfamiliar with the concept and unwilling to hold communities accountable for how public funds are spent (Lebotsa, 2022).

- *Socio-economic Inequality*

Makgetla (2020) and StatsSA (2020) indicate that South Africa is one of the most unequal societies globally, with a significant wealth gap between the rich and the poor. Socio-economic inequality contributes to service delivery protests as the poorest communities are often the most affected by the lack of basic services from local municipalities. Based on the study by McLennan, Noble & Wright (2015) there are high levels of poverty, deprivation, and income inequality in South Africa, as well as high levels of violent crime and social unrest. Socio-economic inequalities are blamed for escalating service delivery protests (Alexander, 2010; McLennan *et al.* 2015).

- *Political factors/Politics-administrative dichotomy*

Pretorius (2017) imply that political factors or politics-administrative dichotomy, including factionalism and instability within the ruling party, have also been identified as contributing to service delivery protests. Political interference in the appointment of officials and the allocation of resources can result in dissatisfaction and frustration among communities. Local government dysfunctionality in South Africa has taken various forms, most notably a lack of political and managerial will to make sound appointments, act decisively on contentious issues, fail to adopt municipal budgets, fail to obtain qualified audits, and fail to communicate with and respond to the needs of local communities (Reddy, 2016; Vilakazi & Adetiba, 2020). Reddy (2016) further argues that political infighting and disputes between the political and administrative components of South African local government have affected municipal service delivery. Bad administrators entail bad politicians, and both undermine the ability of local governments to deliver equitable services (Sebola, 2014). Even in the post-COVID-19 era, the separation of politics and public administration remains a source of contention (Cheung, 2022).

- *Lack of community participation in municipal planning*

Municipalities are unable to provide communities with meaningful participation and influence in decision-making (Mashamaite, 2014). The lack of community participation in municipal affairs has also exacerbated the persistent backlog in service delivery, leaving them frustrated, and dissatisfied and resorting to protests. Lack of transparency and community participation in service planning, especially in public budgeting, serves as a springboard for officials to manipulate public finances (Ngwakwe, 2012). The literature on southern communities shows that community participation at the local level continues to decline, often resulting in poor service delivery (Masiya, Davids, & Mazenda, 2019). Tensions between decision-makers and communities lead to violent protests due to unfulfilled service delivery as people feel excluded. According to a study by the South African Local Government Association (2015:48), 51% of respondents felt that local governments need to improve protocols and systems for meaningful public participation. Masiya et al. (2019) indicate that the low public participation is the result of limited or no collaboration between municipalities and local government officials in integrated development planning. Citizens believe that municipal decisions do not adequately address the needs and values of communities, particularly the poor and disadvantaged sectors, to the extent that planning, including budgets and Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), does not reflect community needs (Madzivhandila & Maloka 2014). Community exclusion from IDP leads to service delivery protests as communities feel unvalued, disrespected and do not belong (Ntsala et al., 2016; Mamokhere, 2021).

- *Ineffective Communication strategies*

Citizens are unable to hold public officials and political office-bearers accountable for poor service delivery due to lack of access to information and ineffective communication strategies, which has led to protest actions (Semberya, 2011). According to the available research, municipal officials tend to act as gatekeepers and controllers rather than mediators who help communities better understand municipal issues through effective communication strategies. The frequency of protests and the violent incidents that accompany them demonstrate the extent to which communication channels between local government and communities have broken down. Local government officials have made no conscious effort to educate the public about the conditions under which they operate (Okon, 2017). Poor communication between local governments and their constituents often leads to misunderstandings and frustrations that can result in service delivery protests. The protests could have been avoided with an appropriate and effective communication strategy that would have informed people about the problems local governments face in delivering services (Mkhatshwa-Ngwenya & Khumalo, 2020). Ndasana,

Vallabh & Mxunyelwa (2022) state that community members in Duncan village complain about not receiving feedback from the meetings they held with their ward councillors and further assert that the government officials communicating empty promises hence violent protests occur to hold them accountable.

- *Rising Unemployment and Poverty in the Local Sphere of Government*

Ndasana et al. (2022) state that poverty and unemployment were identified as major challenges facing residents in Duncan Village. The findings from community perspectives are as follows "We do not have food to eat, no jobs available; it is painful to be poor, and the ANC does not care about us". In this context, it is clear that the level of unemployment rate and poverty in South African municipalities is one of the contributing factors towards service delivery protests. South Africa is one of the countries with the highest jobless rate globally. According to StatsSA (2022), South Africa's unemployment rate decreased by 0,2 of a percentage point to 32.7% in Quarter 4: 2022 compared to Quarter 3: 2022. According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) for the fourth quarter of 2022, there were about 28 thousand more people who were unemployed than in Quarter 3: 2022. In the fourth quarter of 2022, South Africa had 7,8 million persons who were without work, looking for work and available to work, of which 6,1 million were in long-term unemployment and 1,7 million in short-term unemployment. Findings from Quarter 4: 2022 show that long-term unemployment has almost doubled since Quarter 4: 2012, while short-term unemployment has increased by 0,2 million persons. Therefore, the authors of this paper somehow concur that protests in South Africa as justifiable because many people are unemployed, and have no access to basic food and proper education. Mamokhere (2021) indicate that unemployment and poverty are significant contributors to service delivery protests in South African municipalities. High levels of unemployment and poverty result in a lack of access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation, electricity, and housing. This, in turn, leads to frustration and discontent among citizens who feel that their basic needs are not being met by the government. When citizens are unable to access essential services, they often resort to service delivery protests as a means of expressing their grievances and demanding action from their local authorities. Additionally, unemployment exacerbates poverty and inequality, leading to social unrest and an increased likelihood of protests.

- **Ineffective Leadership**

Kalonda & Govender (2021) survey results revealed that around 50% of the participants agreed that the Council's ineffective leadership is responsible for poor service delivery and often communities protest due to dissatisfaction. The root causes of this issue are infighting among leaders, personal interests, lack of vision, and poor planning, which have hindered development and negatively impacted service delivery. Several scholars, including Oberholzer (2012), Meyer & Venter (2014), and Nefale (2018), have highlighted that inadequate leadership in municipalities results in ill-defined goals, weak communication, lack of teamwork, misuse of resources, abuse of power, and corruption in recruitment processes. Despite political leadership playing a crucial role in improving local government and leadership since independence, as noted by Majekodunmi (2012), many councillors still lack leadership skills. Ineffective leadership can contribute to service delivery protests in South African municipalities in several ways. Firstly, when leaders fail to provide basic services such as water, electricity, and sanitation to their communities, citizens are left with no other option than to take to the streets to demand their rights. Secondly, corrupt, and inefficient leadership can lead to mismanagement of resources, which in turn can result in delays in service delivery, poor quality of services and even complete service failure. This can lead to frustration and anger among the public, which can manifest in the form of protests. Thirdly, when leaders are unresponsive to the needs and concerns of their constituents, it can create a sense of alienation and lack of trust, making people feel like their voices are not being heard, which can result in protests as a way to make their grievances heard. Overall, ineffective leadership can exacerbate existing problems and lead to social unrest in municipalities in South Africa (Meyer & Venter, 2014; Nefale, 2018; Kalonda & Govender, 2021).

iii.   **IMPACTS OF SERVICE DELIVERY PROTEST ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES**

Service delivery protests as legally recognised in South Africa, present both positive and negative impacts on socio-economic development. Matebesi (2017) indicate that While service delivery protests in South African municipalities are often associated with violence and destruction, they can also have some positive impacts. One of the positive impacts of service delivery protests is that they can bring attention to the needs and concerns of communities that have been neglected by their local authorities. Protests can also pressure local governments to address the issues that are causing unrest and improve the delivery of essential services such as water, electricity, and housing (Mamokhere, 2021). Additionally, service delivery protests can create a sense of community empowerment and solidarity, as people come together to demand change and work towards a common goal. Ultimately, while the negative impacts of service delivery protests cannot be ignored, they can also serve as a catalyst for positive change and progress in South African municipalities (Lolwana, 2016; Matebesi, 2017;

Mamokhere, 2021). Ngcamu (2019) implies that the impact of service delivery protests on communities and local municipalities is significant, with economic losses resulting from the destruction of public properties and the disruption of essential services. The protests also erode trust between communities and local government, making it harder to implement effective service delivery programs in the future. Du Plessis & Andries (2018) indicate that service delivery protests can lead to the disruption of basic services such as water and electricity, which can have negative impacts on the socio-economic development of the affected communities. For instance, disruptions in water supply can lead to health problems and the closure of businesses that rely on water for their operations.

Tshitangano & Mashau (2021) explain that during service delivery protests, protesters may damage public and private infrastructure such as roads, buildings, and vehicles, which can have negative impacts on the socio-economic development of the affected communities. Equally, Olawale & Garwe (2020) speak from an economist perspective that service delivery protests can discourage potential investors from investing in the affected communities, which can limit economic growth and job creation. Mashau & Chireshe (2018) argue that service delivery protests can create a sense of lawlessness and insecurity, which can lead to an increase in crime (looting of local shops and supermarkets) and negatively impact socio-economic development. Lastly, Schoeman & Olivier (2019) indicate that service delivery protests can create political instability, which can negatively impact the governance of the affected municipalities and the socio-economic development of the area.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper has explored the systematic factors contributing to service delivery protests and further explored the impacts. In conclusion, service delivery protests in South African municipalities can have significant negative impacts on the socio-economic development of the affected communities. Addressing the underlying causes of these protests, such as addressing service delivery backlogs, improving governance and accountability, and increasing public participation, can help to prevent or mitigate the negative impacts on socio-economic development. The paper recommends that addressing these factors requires a multi-pronged approach that involves effective communication, good governance, improved service delivery, and addressing socio-economic inequalities. The following recommendations are further suggested in this paper:

- Municipalities to adopt effective complaints-handling mechanisms and customer care strategies.
- Municipalities in South Africa should be more responsive and proactive about communication. They must communicate their challenges to their constituents in a timely and appropriate manner, using channels such as citizens' meetings, official circulars, memoranda, and the mass media and participative integrated development planning.
- The paper recommends addressing unemployment and poverty through job creation and social protection programs can help improve living standards and reduce social unrest. Local governments must increase their investment in African Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to accelerate the radical economic transformation that will end economic inequalities and ultimately create employment opportunities and reduce poverty.
- Inclusion of the excluded stakeholders in local government policy and decision-making. Thus, engaging and involving citizens in local decision-making processes can increase transparency and reduce opportunities for corruption. This can be achieved through mechanisms such as public consultations, citizen committees, and participatory budgeting. Increasing citizen engagement and participation in decision-making processes can help ensure that community needs and concerns are addressed and that local officials are held accountable for delivering services.
- The paper recommends enforcing consequences for corrupt behaviour as it is critical in reducing corruption in South African municipalities. This includes ensuring that those found guilty of corruption face appropriate legal penalties, including imprisonment and asset forfeiture. Also, promoting transparency and accountability in municipal governance can help reduce corruption and ensure that resources are allocated fairly and efficiently.
- To reduce the underlying factor of service delivery protests, the municipalities can improve service delivery by investing in infrastructure and resources, such as water and sanitation facilities, housing, and transportation, which can help address the underlying issues that contribute to protests.
- Lastly, it recommends strengthening inter-governmental coordination and cooperation to assist the municipalities to have the necessary support and resources to deliver services efficiently and effectively.

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