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ENHANCING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN RURAL MUNICIPALITIES

Ntokozo GUMBI

Department of Public Administration, University of Limpopo, South Africa, ORCID: 0009-0008-5426-6759

Abstract

Sustainable development requires strong state capacity to ensure equitable service delivery in local government. This study examines the role of state capacity in promoting sustainable development, focusing on the relationship between financial management practices, governance, and service delivery. A government's ability to manage financial resources, enforce laws, provide essential services, and maintain good governance. It examines the role of government capacity in promoting sustainable development, using Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality to highlight the link between financial management, governance, and service delivery. Analysing challenges like non-compliance with financial regulations, limited public participation, and weak internal controls. The study proposes a framework to improve financial management, enhance service delivery, and support sustainable development. It argues that effective government capacity, strengthened through improved financial management and public participation, is crucial for sustainable development in rural municipalities. This qualitative study involved a desktop analysis of financial reports, compliance with the MFMA, and identifying gaps in transparency and internal controls at Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality. The findings revealed weak public participation, financial mismanagement, and governance challenges that hinder sustainable development and service delivery in rural municipalities. The study proposes a framework to improve financial management, governance, and public engagement. The study recommends strengthening internal controls, enhancing transparency, and ensuring compliance with financial regulations. It also highlights the importance of promoting public participation in decision-making. A robust framework for financial accountability can support sustainable development and improve governance.

Keywords: sustainable development, financial management, public participation, local government, governance, service delivery

1. Introduction

In South Africa, enhancing good governance in rural municipalities is crucial for addressing these regions' multifaceted challenges, including economic disparities and inadequate service delivery (Nkgapele, 2024). Rural municipalities often operate under constraints stemming from a significant reliance on intergovernmental transfers, which has led to a fiscal imbalance that undermines their autonomy and efficiency (Thusi and Chauke, 2023). The findings from empirical investigations highlight that the marginal effects of municipal own-source revenues on local expenditure are greater than those of intergovernmental transfers, suggesting that a greater focus on local revenue generation could bolster governance efforts (Thusi, Mahlatse and Matyana, 2023). Moreover, improving governance is not merely about financial management; it also involves addressing the lack of services, which are prevalent in rural municipalities (Sibanda, Zindi and Maramura, 2020). Therefore, a strategic framework must be developed to empower local municipalities, enhance their capacity for self-reliance, and ultimately foster sustainable development in rural South Africa (Monteiro et al., 2021). Sustainable development is an essential goal for all nations, but its realisation is heavily dependent on the capacity of the local municipalities to manage resources and deliver services (Nkgapele, 2024). In South Africa, local municipalities play a critical role in ensuring that water, sanitation, electricity, and waste removal services are provided to the rural communities (Lukman, 2022). However, most rural municipalities like Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality face significant challenges in fulfilling this role (Thusi and Selepe, 2023). Poor municipality capacity, characterised by poor financial management practices, lack of public participation, and ineffective governance, undermines sustainable development efforts (Kgobe, Mabeba and Mamokhere, 2023). This article explores the connection between

sustainable development and state capacity building, focusing on how improving financial management practices in municipalities can contribute to more sustainable outcomes (Mashabela and Thusi, 2024). It also discusses how improving governance structures, promoting transparency, and fostering citizen engagement can enhance the capacity of municipalities to achieve sustainable development goals (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2024). Therefore, a strategic framework must be developed to empower rural municipalities to enhance their capacity for self-reliance and foster sustainable development in rural South Africa.

2. Methodology and Research Design

The research methodology employed in the paper is a qualitative case study approach, focusing on Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality as a representative rural municipality in South Africa. This approach enabled the exploration of challenges and opportunities for enhancing good governance, particularly in relation to financial management, accountability, and sustainable service delivery. This methodology is suitable for in-depth exploration of specific issues in a local municipal context rather than seeking to generalise findings across different settings (Kumar, 2019). The study employed document analysis to examine municipal financial reports and governance frameworks, including compliance with the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA), to identify gaps in financial transparency and internal controls (Gumede, 2021). The analysis also highlights the municipality's struggles with limited public participation in financial decision-making, which affects the alignment between budgets and community needs. It adopts a problem-based methodology to diagnose issues such as financial mismanagement, weak governance, and lack of transparency, which hinder the municipality's capacity for sustainable development (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2018). Based on these findings, the paper proposes a normative framework aimed at improving municipal capacity, focusing on improving financial management practices, enhancing public participation, and improving governance structures (Mhelembe and Mafini, 2016). Secondary data from existing academic literature, reports, and case studies of other municipalities are also used to contextualise the findings (Kumar, 2019). The study employs interpretive analysis to understand the relationship between municipalities' capacity and sustainable development, interpreting how improved governance and financial management practices can lead to better service delivery and contribute to long-term development goals in rural municipalities (Akhtar 2016).

3. Theoretical Frameworks for Rural Governance

Theoretical frameworks provide essential insights into how municipal officials interact with communities, manage resources, and implement policies. Stewardship theory posits that municipal officials act as stewards of public resources, prioritising community interests over personal gain, and is supported by legal frameworks such as the MFMA and Municipal Systems Act (MSA) (Sipahutar et al., 2025). Through stewardship, municipalities can enhance accountability, transparency, and responsibility, which are critical for sustainable development (Shozi, 2023). Key governance principles derived from stewardship theory include participation, transparency, rule of law, effectiveness, efficiency, responsibility, and accountability (Madison, Holt and Kellerman, 2016). Participation is enabled through legal provisions in the Municipal Systems Act (Act No. 32 of 2000) (MSA), which institutionalise public involvement via ward committees and community consultations, though resource limitations may constrain meaningful engagement (Kgobe, Mabeba and Mamokhere, 2023). Transparency is promoted by the Municipal Financial Management Act, 2003 (Act No. 56 of 2003) (MFMA)'s requirements for financial reporting and disclosure, while weak enforcement or inaccessible reporting can limit its effectiveness (Ntuli and Nzuza, 2024). The rule of law ensures municipal actions comply with statutory requirements, yet inconsistent application can hinder governance outcomes (Alfasi, 2021). Effectiveness and efficiency are enhanced through structured planning, budgeting, and resource allocation frameworks, while responsibility and accountability are reinforced through clearly defined roles, reporting mechanisms, and performance evaluations (Solomon and Steyn, 2017). Agency theory complements stewardship theory by emphasising the relationship between citizens (principals) and municipal officials (agents), highlighting the need to align interests (ab-Stadler and Pérez-Castrillo, 2021). Legal frameworks regulate agent behaviour, prevent misuse of resources, and promote alignment between officials' actions and community priorities (Sipahutar et al., 2025). Thus, state capacity is strengthened through strategies that monitor, incentivise, and enforce performance in rural municipalities.

3.1 Legislative Framework

Legal frameworks establish the formal rules that guide municipal governance, resource management, and service delivery, acting as both enablers and constraints depending on their implementation.

- The **Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA, Act No. 56 of 2003)** provides guidelines for budgeting, financial planning, and reporting to ensure transparency and accountability in municipal finances (Mngomezulu,

2020). When properly implemented, it enables rural municipalities to manage scarce resources effectively, though weak oversight or limited capacity may constrain its impact.

- The **Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996)** provides the foundational rights of citizens and the responsibilities of municipalities, empowering local governments to deliver basic services and uphold equity (Breakfast, Normarwayi and Bradshaw, 2020). However, capacity gaps and citizen unawareness can limit the Constitution's practical effect on governance.

- The **Municipal Systems Act (MSA, Act No. 32 of 2000)** mandates integrated development planning, public participation, and performance management, giving citizens formal mechanisms to influence governance (Mamokhere, 2021:87). Limited training and insufficient community awareness, however, may reduce its effectiveness.

- The **Municipal Structures Act (Act No. 32 of 2000)** clarifies political and administrative structures, defining roles and responsibilities to support effective decision-making (Magagula, Mukonza, Manyaka and Moeti, 2019). Political interference or structural inefficiencies, however, can impede service delivery.

- The **Municipal Property Rates Act (Act No. 6 of 2004)** regulates property taxation to generate revenue for local development initiatives, supporting sustainable growth (Rodseth, 2018). Constraints such as outdated property valuations, non-compliance, or weak enforcement can reduce its impact on municipal development.

These legal frameworks provide the structural and procedural mechanisms necessary to enhance municipal capacity, promote accountability, and facilitate sustainable development (Ndebele and Lavhelani, 2017:342). Weaknesses in implementation, oversight, or institutional capacity can constrain their effectiveness, highlighting the need for continuous capacity-building, public engagement, and institutional improvement in South African rural municipalities.

4. Literature Review

Good governance in the context of rural municipalities in South Africa is characterised by the pursuit of transparency, accountability, and community engagement, all of which are essential for effective service delivery (Mabizela, 2023). Good governance in rural municipalities is crucial for effective service delivery, community engagement, and sustainable development (Guterres, 2023). With many rural municipalities heavily reliant on intergovernmental transfers, these regions often experience a fiscal imbalance that complicates governance efforts (Shava and Oladejo, 2025). In South Africa, municipalities face challenges such as fiscal imbalances, governance inefficiencies, and socio-economic disparities, which hinder service provision (Gumede, 2021). The fiscal structure in South Africa poses challenges, as the disparity between expenditure responsibilities and revenue generation raises concerns about the sustainability of governance practices at the municipalities (Basia, 2023). Historical and structural challenges further impact governance practices, necessitating a comprehensive review of literature to identify best practices, challenges, and strategies for improvement (Makhaye, Subban and Proches, 2021). Addressing these challenges through strategic governance initiatives is essential to foster resilience and enhance the efficacy of rural municipalities in South Africa (Sigola, 2025). This study explores governance frameworks, transparency, accountability, and public participation while examining governance strategies, including fiscal sustainability and participatory governance models (Ntuli, Nzuza and Mbambo, 2025). The review establishes a theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding governance in South African rural municipalities and provides insights for developing a more resilient and sustainable governance framework (Lukman, 2022).

4.1 Key Barriers to Effective Governance in Rural Municipalities

The challenges to good governance in South African rural municipalities are multifaceted, often rooted in economic, social, and infrastructural deficiencies (Shava and Oladejo, 2025). Given that these municipalities frequently grapple with limited resources, the provision of essential services remains inconsistent, leading to widespread dissatisfaction among the rural municipalities (Basia, 2025). Improving governance in South African rural municipalities depends on resolving major barriers to service delivery (Nkgapele, 2024). Addressing these challenges requires an integrated strategy that combines financial management with stronger institutional governance (Thusi and Selepe, 2023). Limited resources, weak infrastructure, and socio-political challenges intensify governance inefficiencies, hindering effective service delivery in municipalities (Abdo, Owusu and Mangena, 2023). Historical governance legacies have fostered deep-rooted mistrust between local authorities and communities, hindering public engagement (Desmalita and Setyadi, 2025). Governance reforms led by organisations like the Commonwealth Local Government Forum prioritise citizen participation to enhance transparency and accountability (Kgobe, Mabeba and Mamokhere, 2023). Similarly, organisations such as United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLG Africa), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the

African Union, and Transparency International have advanced initiatives aimed at strengthening decentralisation, accountability, and service delivery within local municipalities (Ntsala and Mahlatji, 2016). Ultimately, overcoming these obstacles is crucial for fostering a responsive and accountable local governance framework that can genuinely serve the needs of rural populations. These improvements aim to strengthen governance frameworks, enabling them to effectively address the evolving challenges faced by rural municipalities (Tshoshi, 2022).

4.2 Strategies for Enhancing Good Governance in Rural Municipalities

Effective strategies for enhancing good governance in South African rural municipalities require a multifaceted approach that addresses both operational efficiency and community engagement (Madison et al., 2016). Fostering transparency and accountability within local governance structures is essential for building trust between citizens and their leaders, thereby promoting public participation (Schillemans and Bjurström, 2019). Training municipal officials in best practices, as outlined in the Commonwealth Local Government Forum program, can significantly improve service delivery and governance quality (Shozi, 2023). Reinforcing the social contract between government and the community enhances good governance by strengthening legitimacy, promoting accountability and transparency, improving service delivery, and fostering trust, which collectively contribute to more sustainable and responsive local municipal governance (Torfing and Bentzen, 2020). Community engagement plays a key role in strengthening the social contract between the government and its citizens (Chili et al., 2023). Efficient financial management practices ensure that municipal resources are allocated efficiently, reducing waste and strengthening accountability mechanisms (Sibanda et al., 2019). Improved collaboration between local municipalities and community members can further enhance service delivery and ensure that development initiatives respond to the specific needs of rural communities (Cloete, 2018). Participatory monitoring and evaluation processes enable citizens to actively assess municipal performance, thereby reinforcing transparency and fostering a culture of accountability (Gumede, 2021). Integrating operational efficiency, community engagement, and strong institutional capacity provides a holistic approach to promoting sustainable development and improving the quality of life in rural municipalities (Khambule, 2021). Therefore, a strategic framework must be developed to empower local municipalities, enhance their capacity for self-reliance, and ultimately foster sustainable development in rural South Africa (Monteiro et al., 2021).

4.3 Community Engagement and Participation Initiatives in Rural Municipalities

The successful implementation of community engagement and participation initiatives is crucial for improving governance in South African rural municipalities (Zweni et al., 2023). Community involvement in decision-making promotes accountability and reinforces the social contract between the municipality and its communities, resulting in improved service delivery and community satisfaction (Nthenge and Ringera, 2017). The benefits of community involvement in governance are demonstrated by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), initiatives which guarantee that services are customised to meet the rural community's needs (Ngubane and Wotela, 2024). In rural municipalities, social justice, sustainable development, and local democracy all depend on efficient municipalities (Anđelković, 2023). By prioritising community participation and good governance, South African municipalities can unlock the potential of their rural communities and promote sustainable development growth (Rijal, 2023). Effective community engagement strengthens municipal accountability by enabling citizens to monitor municipal performance and hold municipal officials responsible for decision-making and service delivery (Gumede, 2021). The collaboration between municipal officials and community members ensures that all development initiatives are relevant, inclusive, and aligned with the specific rural communities' needs (Nzimakwe and Utete, 2025). Embedding participatory planning and feedback processes fosters a sense of ownership among community members, encouraging active public participation and sustaining long-term service delivery outcomes (Torfing and Bentzen, 2020). When combined with capacity-building programs for municipal officials, these engagement initiatives can enhance institutional efficiency, transparency, and trust between rural communities and their local governments (Shozi, 2023). Consistent communication channels, such as community forums and meetings, create a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution, reducing the likelihood of service delivery protests (Masiya, Davids, and Mangai, 2019). Empowering citizens with access to information ensures informed public participation, thereby strengthening transparency and reducing opportunities for corruption (Ndevu and Muller, 2018). Inclusive community engagement fosters resilient governance structures capable of withstanding political, financial, and social pressures in rural municipalities (Matloga et al., 2019).

4.4 The Importance of Sustainable Governance Practices for Future Development

Sustainable governance practices are essential for the future development of South African rural municipalities as they foster a framework for effective and inclusive decision-making processes (Anđelković, 2023). By integrating

the principles of mutual accountability and tailored policies, rural municipalities can address the unique challenges faced by these communities, ensuring that their development agendas are both relevant and equitable (Smoke, Parker and Munawwar, 2017). As highlighted in the post-2015 Development Agenda, there is a critical need for Africa to establish common plans and collaborative strategies that support sustainable development approaches (Munawwar, 2017). Initiatives aimed at improving local governance and service delivery have gained traction in various regions, such as those implemented by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum in Southern Africa (Guterres, 2023). These efforts underscore the importance of adaptive governance strategies that not only enhance service delivery but also empower communities to participate actively in sustainable development plans (Nzimakwe and Utete, 2025). Sustainable governance is crucial for the long-term development of rural municipalities, as it fosters inclusive decision-making processes and equitable policy implementation (Thusi and Chauke, 2023). The post-2015 Development Agenda emphasises the need for African nations to adopt common strategies and collaborative strategies that support sustainable development (Khambule, 2021). Governance initiatives, such as those led by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, play a pivotal role in enhancing service delivery and promoting community participation in local governance (Smoke, Parker and Munawwar, 2017). Sustainable governance practices also help to build institutional resilience, enabling rural municipalities to adapt to emerging challenges such as resource constraints, population growth, and climate change (Madison et al., 2016). By promoting transparency, accountability, and participatory planning, these governance practices strengthen public trust and public participation in sustainable development programmes (Schillemans and Bjurstrøm, 2019). Capacity-building programs for municipal officials ensure that governance structures are equipped to implement sustainable policies effectively, thereby improving service delivery and community well-being (Shozi, 2023). Integrating sustainability into governance frameworks ensures that rural municipalities can achieve efficient and equitable development goals, fostering socio-economic growth for future generations (Rijal, 2023).

4.5 Municipal Capacity and Sustainable Development

Municipal capacity refers to the ability of the municipality to design, implement, and manage policies and programs effectively (Sipahutar et al., 2025). Strong municipal capacity enables local governments to allocate resources efficiently, deliver essential services, and respond to the specific needs of their communities (Shozi, 2023). It also ensures that long-term development strategies are planned and executed in a manner that balances economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability (Mlambo and Maserumule, 2023). Weak municipal capacity, on the other hand, often results in poor service delivery, mismanagement of resources, and limited progress toward sustainable development objectives (Nkgapele, 2024). By strengthening institutional structures, providing capacity-building programs for municipal officials, and integrating participatory governance mechanisms, rural municipalities can enhance their effectiveness and ensure that development initiatives are inclusive, equitable, and sustainable (Gumede, 2021). Improving municipal capacity is therefore critical for achieving long-term, equitable, and inclusive development outcomes in rural areas (Smoke, Parker and Munawwar, 2017). Investing in human capital and providing continuous training for municipal officials strengthens institutional capacity, enabling municipalities to respond effectively to emerging development challenges (Shozi, 2023). Integrating participatory governance strategies allows citizens to contribute to decision-making, which enhances transparency, accountability, and the alignment of municipal initiatives with community needs (Torfin and Bentzen, 2020). Effective coordination among municipal levels and partnerships with organisations further enhances municipal capacity, ensuring that development programs are implemented efficiently and sustainably (Gegana and Phahlane, 2024). Enhancing municipal capacity not only improves service delivery but also creates the foundation for long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability in rural communities (Khambule, 2021). Adopting innovative technologies and digital platforms can modernise municipal operations, making service delivery more efficient and accessible to rural communities (Nzimakwe and Utete, 2025). Implementing sound financial management frameworks is equally important, as it enables municipalities to mobilise resources, minimise wastage, and invest in sustainable infrastructure projects (Chili, Akbar and Mbonye, 2023). Strengthening municipal capacity results in rural transformation, positioning municipalities as key drivers of inclusive growth and sustainable development (Shava, Muringa and Oladejo, 2025).

4.6 Challenges of Financial Mismanagement in Rural Municipalities

Financial mismanagement remains one of the most persistent challenges undermining governance and service delivery in South African rural municipalities (Gegana and Phahlane, 2024). Non-compliance with financial legislation, such as the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA), often results in irregular expenditure, wasteful procurement practices, and the diversion of funds away from critical service delivery projects (Thusi,

Mahlatse and Matyana, 2023). Poor budgeting processes and inadequate financial reporting practices limit transparency, weaken accountability, and erode public confidence in local governance (Lukman, 2022). Weak internal controls and insufficient oversight by audit committees and municipal councils exacerbate the risks of corruption and resource leakage (Rijal, 2023). The consequences of financial mismanagement extend beyond fiscal inefficiency; they directly hinder municipalities' ability to deliver essential services such as water, sanitation, and electricity, particularly in rural areas where resources are already scarce (Shozi, 2023). The misuse of funds reduces municipalities' capacity to invest in long-term infrastructure and development initiatives, thereby compromising both social equity and economic growth (Mlambo and Maserumule, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires not only stricter enforcement of financial regulations but also a shift toward ethical leadership, transparent procurement processes, and stronger participatory budgeting practices that involve citizens in monitoring resource allocation (Gumede, 2021). Curbing financial mismanagement is essential for enhancing accountability, rebuilding citizen trust, and promoting sustainable governance in rural municipalities (Zweni et al., 2023). Many rural municipalities rely heavily on external consultants to perform financial management tasks due to limited in-house expertise, which can increase costs and reduce internal accountability (Ndevu and Muller, 2018). Audit findings by the Auditor-General frequently highlight irregular, unauthorised, and wasteful expenditure, as well as weak compliance with financial regulations, confirming the systemic nature of financial mismanagement in these municipalities (Auditor-General South Africa, 2023). These audits underscore the need to strengthen internal financial controls, build municipal staff capacity, and reduce over-dependence on consultants to ensure sustainable, accountable, and transparent financial management (Kgobe, Mabeba and Mamokhere, 2023).

5. Research Findings

The study highlights several challenges affecting state capacity in rural municipalities (Anđelković, 2023). Non-compliance with financial regulations, particularly the MFMA, results in misallocation of funds, inefficiencies in service delivery, and erosion of public trust (Thusi, Mahlatse and Matyana, 2023). Weak financial management frameworks, including unclear budgeting and reporting mechanisms, limit transparency and accountability, further reducing citizen confidence in local governance (Lukman, 2022). Mismanaged resources and limited citizen engagement hinder the delivery of essential services and the achievement of long-term social, economic, and environmental goals (Shozi, 2023). Public participation in financial decision-making is minimal, leading to poor alignment between municipal budgets and community priorities (Thusi and Chauke, 2023). Ineffective internal controls and the absence of oversight mechanisms, such as audit and oversight committees, increase the municipality's vulnerability to corruption and inefficiency (Rijal, 2023). Mismanaged resources and limited citizen engagement hinder the delivery of essential services and the achievement of long-term social, economic, and environmental goals (Shozi, 2023). Political interference and patronage further compromise objective decision-making, often diverting resources from developmental priorities to serve narrow political interests (Breakfast, Nomarwayi and Bradshaw, 2020). These challenges not only weaken the municipal capacity but also undermine efforts toward sustainable development (Laurian and Slotterback, 2021). Strengthening financial management, improving compliance with legislation, and enhancing participatory mechanisms are therefore critical for building robust municipal capacity that can support sustainable development in rural municipalities (Sipahutar et al., 2023). Capacity constraints such as inadequate staffing, lack of technical expertise, and poor training opportunities exacerbate governance failures and reduce institutional efficiency (Madumo, 2020). Many municipalities rely heavily on external consultants to perform technical and financial tasks due to limited in-house expertise (Breakfast, Nomarwayi and Bradshaw, 2020). While consultants provide essential skills, over-reliance can increase costs, reduce internal accountability, and prevent municipal officials from developing the capacity to manage financial systems independently (Gumede, 2021). This dependency often leads to poor coordination between municipal management and service delivery programs, further slowing the implementation of developmental frameworks (Thusi and Chauke, 2023). Audit findings consistently reveal irregular, unauthorised, and wasteful expenditure, highlighting weaknesses in financial controls, compliance, and overall governance structures (Auditor-General South Africa, 2023). These audits often point to excessive reliance on consultants as a contributing factor, showing that critical financial processes are outsourced without adequate oversight, leaving municipalities vulnerable to errors, inefficiencies, and corruption (Kgobe, Mabeba and Mamokhere, 2023). Strengthening internal audit functions, oversight committees, and municipal staff capacity, while reducing over-reliance on consultants, is therefore critical to improving transparency, accountability, and service delivery outcomes in rural municipalities (Rijal, 2023). Financial mismanagement, coupled with consultant dependency and weak audit responses, directly affects service delivery, causing delays, incomplete projects, and inequitable access to essential services such as water, sanitation, and electricity, especially in rural communities (Shozi, 2023). When these frameworks are integrated, municipalities can enhance financial governance, ensure effective resource

allocation, and restore citizen trust, thereby mitigating the negative impacts of financial mismanagement on service delivery (Sipahutar et al., 2023).

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Building state capacity is essential for sustainable development in rural municipalities. The key identified challenges include non-compliance with financial regulations, limited public participation, and weak governance, highlighting the need to strengthen municipal capacity for equitable service delivery. Improving financial management, enhancing public participation, and reinforcing internal controls are critical strategies that can assist municipalities in building the capacity required for sustainable development. Compliance with the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA), regular audits, and enforcement of penalties will reduce mismanagement. Participatory budgeting and community engagement ensure that municipal budgets align with local needs, promoting transparency and accountability. Independent oversight committees and capacity-building programs for municipal officials further improve municipal governance. Collaboration among stakeholders fosters collective responsibility and efficient resource use, while prioritising equitable service delivery improves access to water, sanitation, and electricity services. Integrating financial management, governance, and service delivery into a long-term strategic framework will support sustainable development and enhance community well-being. Enhancing good governance in rural municipalities requires not only the strengthening of institutional capacity but also the cultivation of a culture of accountability, transparency, and active citizen participation. Effective governance ensures that resources are allocated efficiently, development priorities reflect community needs, and public trust in local authorities is reinforced. Sustained commitment to these strategies can empower rural municipalities to overcome historical governance challenges, promote social equity, and create resilient communities capable of achieving long-term sustainable development objectives.

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