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## Abstract:

*This paper examines the challenges encountered during the implementation of the Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP) within the uPhongolo Local Municipality. The paper adopted New Public Management (NPM) theory as the theoretical framework that offers insights into organisational capabilities and resources relevant to this study. The paper utilises a qualitative methodology, which combines an extensive evaluation of existing literature with primary research methods such as interviews conducted with municipal personnel. The study sample was 9 participants. The present study aims to expand the existing knowledge on the obstacles encountered in municipal government and offers practical strategies to improve the execution of the Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP). These findings have the potential to be relevant to other municipalities experiencing similar concerns. The primary obstacles that have been highlighted include limitations in resources, hurdles to effective communication, and the resulting consequences on the provision of services and public perception. The paper's findings indicate that the issues result in project execution delays, which have a detrimental impact on the municipality's capacity to achieve its strategic goals and undermine public confidence. Moreover, the research emphasises the significance of community involvement in local government administration and the potential advantages of using digital technologies to improve operational effectiveness. The report presents a series of practical suggestions based on the aforementioned results. The recommendations include enhancing resource management practices, using digital project management tools, and establishing periodic community involvement forums.*

## Keywords:

*Community engagement, good governance, local government, service delivery.*

# CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SERVICE DELIVERY AND BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION PLAN IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF UPHOLONGO LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

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## **Introduction and background**

Implementing Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plans (SDBIPs) holds significant importance in municipal management in South Africa. Nevertheless, the execution of SDBIPs frequently confronts diverse obstacles, which can compromise their efficacy and subsequently influence the standard of service provision (Sebake and Mukonza, 2020). The uPhongolo Local Municipality is experiencing pronounced challenges in implementing the SDBIP. The SDBIP, a crucial component of the municipal management framework in South Africa, offers a comprehensive analysis of the municipal budget allocated for a given fiscal year (Asha and Makalela, 2020). This process enhances the conversion of Integrated Development Plans into tangible, implementable initiatives, thereby fostering adequate service provision and optimal allocation of resources (Mkhize, 2019). Despite their significant importance, the implementation of SDBIPs is frequently hindered by various obstacles. Previous research has identified several common challenges in the performance of the SDBIP. Nevertheless, there is a lack of comprehensive exploration regarding the intricacies of these matters and their potential consequences on the provision of services. This study aimed to fill the existing research gap by examining the obstacles encountered during the implementation of the SDBIP in uPhongolo Local Municipality. Additionally, this research proposes potential remedies to overcome these challenges. Since the demise of apartheid municipalities in South Africa have served as development agencies (Kaywood, 2021). The author also argues that establishing the new developmental role was achieved through creating Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). Every municipality was mandated to formulate its developmental vision and mission and identify specific programmes and projects linked to their effective implementation. As per Section 25 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000, it is mandatory for every municipality to establish a comprehensive strategic plan aimed at promoting the progress of its jurisdiction. Theron (2017, p. 80) asserts that the IDP functions as a strategic instrument for municipal administration and strategic planning, aiming to achieve the municipality's developmental

aspirations and targets. The document comprehensively covers a municipal council's development priorities, strategies, objectives, and financial plan (Nealer, 2018). On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2009, the national government approved implementing the Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS). One of the primary strategic objectives of this initiative is to improve the operational effectiveness of municipalities within their respective domains of authority. According to LGTAS (2009, p. 2), this involves establishing and operating essential administrative and institutional systems. The main goal of this initiative is to focus on the necessity of improving the operational efficiency of local government entities. According to Utama, Evana and Gamayuni (2019, p. 199), stated that performance is the administration achievement from an activity/program/policy to realize target, aim, mission and vision of an organization. Additionally, the author posits that the rationale behind undertaking this measurement stems from the close relationship between performance and the institution's strategic objectives.

The current body of literature on strategic management asserts a notable association between strategic plans and performance measures (Brown, 2022). According to Minnaar and Bekker (2005, p. 125), a crucial aspect of incorporating modern strategic management methodologies is their capacity to enhance organisational performance. Performance evaluation is contingent upon the benefits an institution generates for its clientele. Van der Walddt (2019, p. 8) argues that IDP helps align financial and other resources with service delivery objectives. The services offered within this context include providing water, electricity, sanitation, waste management, and road infrastructure. Furthermore, the scope of development concerns includes land reform, tourism promotion, and local economic growth facilitation.

## **Theoretical underpinning - New Public Management**

The study is grounded in the New Public Management (NPM) theory, which provides the framework for analysing and interpreting administrative practices in public institutions. The emergence of the NPM theory can be attributed to the desire to address the perceived

inefficiencies associated with traditional public administration models. Neoliberal economic principles influenced the paradigm shift in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and drew inspiration from private sector management practices. The genesis of this concept can be traced back to the desire for improved public services that are more efficient, effective, and customer oriented. Tompkins (2023), extensively examines this idea in his analysis of organisational theory and public management. As a new approach in public administration, NPM emphasises market-oriented methods and efficiency. NPM aims to improve efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery (Tompkins, 2023). This enhancement focuses on optimising outputs concerning inputs, not just reducing costs. According to Lapuente and Van de Walle (2020), incorporating private sector management techniques, a key aspect of NPM improves the quality of public services. Privatisation, a key aspect of NPM, transfers public sector services to the private sector to benefit from their efficiencies and innovation. Improved service delivery can result from this, but it may also raise concerns about equity and access. Outsourcing under NPM enables public agencies to prioritise core functions and utilise the specialised skills of private entities.

Tompkins (2023), emphasises that performance management in NPM now emphasises outcome-based evaluations. Transitioning from process-centric to results-centric evaluation improves efficiency and effectiveness. Deconcentration and decentralisation, under NPM, distribute administrative responsibilities for more responsive and tailored local services. Lapuente and Van de Walle (2020), emphasise the significance of public participation in NPM for aligning services with community needs. Transparency and accountability are crucial in democratic governance. NPM prioritises cost-effective and high-quality services, emphasising efficiency and effectiveness. Autonomy in NPM allows government units to make decisions independently, promoting innovation and responsiveness. Autonomy and accountability mechanisms ensure that public services are responsive to citizen needs.

Reiter and Klenk (2019), provide a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted nature of NPM, highlighting its focus on performance measurement and results-oriented manage-

ment. Torfing and Bentzen (2020), provide additional support for aligning public services with citizens' needs and expectations, a fundamental principle of New Public Management (NPM). Torfing and Bentzen (2020), argues that traditional performance management, which emphasises control, is subject to criticism. In response, they propose stewardship theory as an alternative approach that aligns with the ethos of NPM. This alternative approach empowers public managers and prioritises outcomes.

The concept of market-oriented management strategies prioritising service quality and cost-effectiveness applies to private entities and public institutions, according to NPM. Implementing NPM in local municipalities, including UPhongolo, emphasises the importance of resource management and utilisation in achieving effective service delivery. This literature review examines the challenges encountered in implementing the SDBIP from the perspectives of managerial efficiency, organisational agility, and responsiveness to public needs. This literature review examines the implementation of the SDBIP in UPhongolo Local Municipality under the NPM framework. The evaluation of this implementation focuses on outcome metrics, service quality, and stakeholder satisfaction. It highlights the transition from traditional bureaucratic processes to a more dynamic and results-oriented approach in public service.

### **Research methodology**

This study adopted an exploratory research design to investigate the challenges in implementing SDBIP within the uPhongolo local municipality in South Africa. Exploratory research aims to clarify uncertainties and generate hypotheses for future studies by exploring unexplored areas (Pandey and Pandey, 2021). The focus was on comprehending the overall aspects of a topic rather than reaching definitive conclusions. Flexibility is crucial for a thorough and unrestricted exploration of the complexities related to SDBIP implementation. The preliminary nature of this approach may limit generalizability and conclusive findings and could lead to extensive data collection that challenges effective analysis (Pandey and Pandey, 2021). This method was suitable for gain-

ing initial insights into SDBIP implementation dynamics and laying the groundwork for future research.

The relevant data for this study was collected through conducting in-depth interviews, which facilitated a thorough examination of individual experiences and perspectives. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis steps were utilised in this qualitative approach and helped to facilitate the identification of recurring themes and patterns on the challenges that impact the implementation of SDBIP. The researcher included participants from diverse backgrounds to ensure the research findings were robust, inclusive, and accurately represented the wide range of individuals within the municipality's workforce.

### **Literature review**

This section will in greater detail present a literature review on challenges surrounding the efficacious implementation of the SDBIP in South Africa.

#### ***Challenges affecting the effective implementation of SDBIP in South Africa***

The Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP) is an important tool for South African municipalities (Zweni, 2020). Its purpose is to ensure transparency in monetary allotments and make providing services to local communities easier. Despite its significance, several obstacles prevent it from being effectively implemented. Capacity constraints are among the most important of these factors; many municipalities do not possess the qualified professionals to effectively draught and oversee the SDBIP (Auditor-General South Africa, 2017). Political interference, which can sometimes lead to administrative decisions inconsistent with the goals outlined in the SDBIP (Mngomezulu, 2020), further complicates the landscape. The realisation of the plan's goals is frequently hampered by financial difficulties (National Treasury, 2018), which can be traced back to either insufficient levels of revenue or administrative mismanagement. In addition, the lack of stringent accountability structures in some municipalities creates an environment where deviations from the SDBIP can occur without being investigated (Auditor-General

South Africa, 2019). In the same vein, a lack of robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms makes it difficult to keep accurate track of SDBIP initiatives and make necessary adjustments (Municipal IQ, 2019). Additionally, although community engagement is still the cornerstone of the SDBIP's ethos, it is sometimes overlooked, leading to a misalignment between community goals and municipal strategies (Ngamlana and Coopoo, 2018). The following challenges highlight how important it is to conduct an exhaustive review and to put reforms into place if one wishes to improve the performance of the SDBIP in terms of local governance.

#### ***Budgetary Constraints and Mismanagement***

Poor SDBIP implementation causes budget constraints and mismanagement, greatly affecting service delivery in local governments. Financial year-end performance reviews in municipalities often uncover budgetary constraints and mismanagement (De Klerk et al., 2020). Insufficient budgeting can lead to underfunded and poorly executed projects, impacting the quality and accessibility of public services. Financial mismanagement worsens these problems, causing resource waste and inefficiencies. Insufficient infrastructure and essential services hinder development and strain local government finances, requiring a strategic approach to budget allocation and financial oversight.

#### ***Lack of Transparency and Accountability***

Lack of transparency and accountability in SDBIP implementation is a critical challenge that harms public trust and hinders local governance effectiveness. Sebake and Mukonza (2020), highlight inadequate monitoring and evaluation in local governance for transparency and accountability. Lack of transparency in the process can make citizens unaware of fund usage, leading to suspicions of corruption or misallocation. The absence of these elements in SDBIP implementation reduces public trust and hampers service delivery (Brown, 2022). Additionally, municipal officials need more incentive to optimize service delivery or adhere to the stipulated plans with accountability. The

lack of transparency and accountability hampers community engagement and leads to inadequate public services.

### ***Inadequate Training and Development***

The success of SDBIP implementation relies on the expertise of municipal staff. Municipalities in South Africa face challenges due to insufficient training and development, resulting in employees lacking the expertise to effectively implement and manage plans (Sbusisiwe and Abiso, 2021). This causes errors, delays, and poor service execution. Continuous professional development and training are necessary for staff in public administration to stay updated with the latest skills and knowledge. This ensures their ability to manage and execute SDBIPs effectively. Training is important for improving the performance of municipal staff.

### ***Poor Planning and Lack of Alignment with IDP***

Successful SDBIP implementation necessitates thorough planning and alignment with the IDP. There needs to be better planning in municipalities to ensure effective service delivery (Sebake and Mukonza, 2020). Thus, projects fail to align with community goals, leading to a mismatch between allocated resources and citizen requirements (Sebake and Mukonza, 2020). Coherent and effective public service delivery requires well-planned SDBIPs harmonising with the IDP.

### ***Ineffective Monitoring and Evaluation***

Insufficient monitoring and evaluation of SDBIP implementation has hindered oversight, making it challenging to track progress and assess service effectiveness. De Vries and Ile (2021), emphasise the significance of participatory monitoring for improving governance monitoring and evaluation of SDBIP implementation, which hinders progress tracking and effective resolution of service delivery issues. Lack of monitoring and evaluation has made it difficult to identify areas for improvement or hold responsible parties accountable for underperformance in different municipalities across South Africa. Monitoring and evaluation are crucial for ensuring services meet

community expectations and are delivered as intended.

### ***Presentation of Qualitative Results***

The study established that there are recurrent challenges in Implementing SDBIP within local government contexts, like uPhongolo Municipality. The findings revealed that various issues such as resource allocation, communication barriers, and resource constraints affecting projects emerged as some of the recurrent challenges identified by the participants to be hindering the successful implementation of SDBIP. The findings explore the intricacies and practical aspects of public administration, specifically emphasising the disparities between planning and implementation, challenges related to resource allocation, financial limitations, and the ever-changing nature of municipal requirements. Through a comprehensive analysis of these challenges, the objective is to unveil the fundamental patterns and suggest strategic approaches that can enhance the implementation of SDBIPs more efficiently and flexibly.

### ***Resource Allocation***

The findings of the study revealed that lack of proper resource allocation is one of the critical challenges affecting the effective implementation of SDBIP. The disparity in resource allocation aligns with a prevalent issue encountered in the field of public administration. The existing body of scholarly work in the field of public management frequently emphasises the discrepancy that exists between the process of planning and its subsequent execution. This discrepancy is primarily attributed to limitations in available resources (Smith, 2019). The discrepancy can arise due to financial constraints, discrepancies in the prioritisation of resources, or unanticipated costs, which are common occurrences in municipal endeavours (Johnson, 2020). The employees highlighted their concerns and explained the following: "As someone involved in the SDBIP process, I've noticed that resource allocation doesn't always match the actual needs on the ground. We need a more flexible approach to adapt to unforeseen challenges and ensure effective service delivery" (Participant 9).

Another participant shared similar sentiments: *"Balancing the available resources with the municipality's growing demands is one of our biggest challenges"* (Participant 1).

Poor resource allocation is one of the critical challenges to the effective implementation of SDBIP identified by uPhongolo municipality employees. The multifaceted nature of resource allocation challenges in the implementation of the SDBIP at uPhongolo Local Municipality can be better understood by examining it through the perspectives of NPM and GGT. The NPM emphasises the value of efficiency and market-oriented approaches in local governance, highlighting the importance of optimising resource utilisation (Tompkins, 2023; Lapuente and Van de Walle, 2020). In contrast, the concept of GGT places a strong emphasis on ethical and equitable governance (Kovač et al., 2016; Keping, 2018). GGT underscores the significance of transparent and accountable resource distribution. Collectively, insights from these theories offer a comprehensive framework for efficiency, effectiveness, market-oriented methods, ethical governance, transparency, and accountability, ensuring equitable and just allocation of resources to promote optimal use of resources. Scholars on South African local governance issues agree that well-structured budget practices are crucial in improving municipal performance and can advance a more transparent, accountable, and efficient service delivery (Govender and Reddy, 2019; Zweni, 2022). These insights help to analyse and resolve the persistent challenges associated with resource allocation in SDBIP processes.

### ***Communication Barrier***

The study found that communication barriers are one of the critical challenges affecting the effective implementation of SDBIP in local municipalities. Efficient communication is considered essential and effective in achieving local government project objectives, thus in the event of miscommunication negative consequences are imminent (Brown and Osborne, 2018). Participants attested to these sentiments by reflecting on their experiences in the uPhongolo municipality: *"Communication barriers between departments often lead to misunder-*

*standings and delays in project execution"* (Participant 5).

Another participant said: *"In our team, we often struggle with receiving timely updates. Delays in communication lead to gaps in understanding the latest changes in SDBIP policies, which directly impact our work efficiency"* (Participant 1).

Another participant explained: *"Differing communication styles across departments create a barrier. What one team perceives as a priority may not be clearly communicated to another, leading to misalignment in executing the SDBIP effectively"* (Participant 8).

Communication challenges are frequently intensified in multi-departmental contexts characterised by divergent interpretations and approaches to the SDBIP (Mabuza, 2016). Communication barriers have detrimental effects which lead to the rise of misunderstandings and inefficiencies, particularly in dynamic municipal settings where time is of the essence (Muneer et al., 2022). The frequency of challenges is consistent with the cyclical pattern observed in budget and project reporting within municipal environments. The frequent manifestation of these difficulties can be ascribed to the systematic schedules that municipal administrations adhere to, frequently resulting in a hurried pace during designated periods of data submission (Lekhhera, Schutte and Dlamini, 2023). The haste involved in this process has the potential to undermine the integrity of the reporting and the ultimate results of the project. The insights from the findings highlight the importance of implementing effective communication strategies that are clear and consistent to ensure the successful execution of the SDBIP in municipalities such as uPhongolo.

### ***Resource Constraints Affecting Projects***

The challenges of resource constraints affecting projects that were identified by the participants are not exclusive to the uPhongolo Local Municipality but rather represent systemic issues encountered by numerous local governments. For instance, the existing body of literature provides evidence that resource allocation problems and communication barriers are prominent challenges affecting public sector project management (Smith, 2019). Infrastructure projects in local governance are notably susceptible to experiencing delays as a con-



sequence of financial constraints. The occurrence of such delays has a dual impact, not only on the designated timeline of the project but also on the perception of the municipality's effectiveness by the general public (O'Leary, 2021). The participants said: *"Resource constraints affect not just our project timelines but also the quality of services we deliver"* (Participant 8).

Another one said: *"Financial limitations are a constant challenge. We have to frequently adjust our plans due to budget cuts"* (Participant 3).

In addition, another participant also said: *"Adapting to the changing needs of our municipality is tough, especially with rigid planning structures and limited resources"* (Participant 7).

These perspectives provide insights into how resource constraints affect projects in the local government of uPhongolo municipality. To mitigate these issues, it is recommended to adopt a flexible budgeting approach and proactive planning (Fisher, 2020). Additionally, regular meetings and integrated project management systems should be implemented (Harris, 2021). Khan, Kaviani, Galli and Ishtiaq (2019), supports continuous improvement and using past experiences for future planning. To optimize SDBIP effectiveness and improve service delivery, a comprehensive strategy is needed. This strategy should include strategic resource management, effective communication, and a commitment to continuous enhancement. Theoretical perspectives emphasise strategic resource management, efficient communication, and a culture of continuous improvement for addressing resource constraints in public projects. For instance, the lens of NPM suggests optimising resource use and implementing flexible budgeting practices to address such constraints (Tompkins, 2023). GGT focused on the importance of fairness and accountability in resource management, emphasising the need for equitable and transparent resource allocation (Kovač, Tomažević, Leben, and Aristovnik, 2016; Keping, 2018).

### **Discussion of research findings**

The implementation of SDBIP presents several key challenges, primarily revolving around resource allocation and communication barriers. The issue of resource allocation, specifically the financial constraints (Smith, 2019; Johnson, 2020), have been identified as a signifi-

cant factor contributing to delays and inefficiencies. In the realm of municipal planning, the implementation of plans can often be hindered by internal communication challenges (Brown and Osborne, 2018). Those obstacles play a significant role in creating discrepancies and inconsistencies within the process. The challenges mentioned have a significant impact on both service delivery and public perception. In their study, O'Leary (2021) examines into the impact of delays on public trust in the efficiency of municipal operations. Meanwhile, Yang and Holzer (2021) highlight the significance of service provision inefficiencies in generating community dissatisfaction, which is a crucial factor in assessing the performance of local government.

To effectively tackle these challenges, scholarly literature proposes two key approaches which include digital transformation (Gil-Garcia et al., 2016) and participatory governance (Fung, 2015). The integration of digital tools has the potential to significantly improve transparency and efficiency in municipal operations. Additionally, actively engaging the community in decision-making can enhance service outcomes and foster a stronger relationship between the municipality and its citizens. These literature insights aligned with the study objectives providing a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by the uPhongolo Local Municipality in implementing the SDBIP. It offers a nuanced understanding of these challenges and proposes strategic recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the SDBIP. The study found that implementing the SDBIP at uPhongolo Local Municipality was challenging. Participants in the study talked about the lack of resources, particularly financial constraints, which severely affected project timelines and quality. They also mentioned that communication barriers existed within and between departments, leading to misaligned objectives and operational inefficiencies. These challenges highlight the need for improved resource management and communication strategies to enhance the effectiveness of SDBIP implementation.

### **Conclusion**

The profound impact of these implementation challenges on the delivery of municipal

services cannot be overstated. The research discovered that the delays in executing projects not only hindered the efficiency of the municipality but also harmed public perception and trust. The study established a correlation between these delays and a decrease in community satisfaction, highlighting the crucial significance of timely and effective service delivery in maintaining public trust in municipal governance. After gathering insights from the participants, several key recommendations were made. Firstly, it was suggested that improving transparency in decision-making processes and adopting digital tools for project management would enhance operational efficiency. Secondly, the importance of community engagement in municipal planning was emphasized, with participants advocating for inclusive decision-making processes that consider public input. These recommendations aim to address the identified challenges and promote a more responsive, efficient, and community-aligned municipal governance system.

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