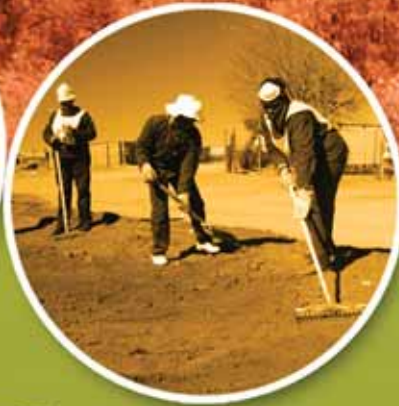


Making Local Government Work Better



Knowledge Week 09

Knowledge creation and sharing are intensified at the annual Knowledge Week gatherings at the DBSA, as development practitioners interact and debate current development issues that impact on the aspirations of South Africa and the region.

The Knowledge Week is designed to advance the DBSA's knowledge management objectives and highlight new developments for practitioners in Southern Africa. For the DBSA, it is a platform for sharing and transferring knowledge and an opportunity to learn from its partners and clients.

This year's Knowledge Week gave the DBSA the opportunity to facilitate policy discussions on local government.

The 2009 theme 'Making Local Government Work – Taking the Local Government Turnaround Strategy Forward' was even more pertinent given the growing impatience of communities, government and the private sector to see a difference in local government.

The 2009 theme is also linked with the DBSA's Local Government Programme to assist the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CGTA) in developing and taking forward the local government turnaround strategy. The Knowledge week took place timeously, immediately after the

CGTA's release of the 2009 report on the state of local government and the introduction of the proposal to develop a local government turnaround strategy.

This Knowledge Week's programme comprised six sessions, with papers and addresses by politicians, local government and general development practitioners. Each session was followed by a panel discussion, which included inputs from the audience. Speakers included members of the DBSA's management and Siyenza Manje deployees, CGTA officials, independent experts and consultants who are well known in the local government arena. The key speakers included the Deputy Minister of CGTA, Mr Yunus Carrim (Deputy Minister of CGTA), Mr Lechesa Tsenoli (Chair of the Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance), Mr Ongama Mahlawe and Mr Mohammed Bhabha (advisors in the CGTA Ministry) and other key local government experts.

Outcomes

How the local government turnaround strategy can be made a success

The discussions during knowledge week concentrated on how and what should be done to ensure that the CGTA local government turnaround strategy becomes a success. The general sentiment was that issues raised in the CGTA report on the state of local

government were not necessarily new and unknown challenges but that they were now raised more boldly. The participants and presenters agreed that to make the proposed strategy different from previous interventions, such as Project Consolidate, the **how** question would be important. Key sentiments included the necessity for:

- partnership with local government in developing these strategies. This should not be a national intervention imposed on local government;
- monitoring of the intervention's quality – local government should not be left to monitor itself; and
- reasonable reporting requirements; municipalities should not be burdened to such an extent that they are unable to fulfil their basic functions.

The session prioritised the following ten points as required interventions:

- 1. Strengthening community involvement and participation.** This is the most important matter that the local government turnaround strategy should deal with. Innovative community engagement mechanisms that would attract civil society engagement should be supported to supplement the ward committee system.
- 2. Getting the skills and technical capacity in place.** The challenge of having skilled officials at the local government level is paramount. Many appointments are based on political grounds rather than on skills. There should be a proclamation that municipal managers, in particular, should not hold any political party positions. Skills attraction should be pursued for technical maintenance in municipalities, through an intensive artisan programme.
- 3. Improved political governance.** Institutional capacity enhancement and improved accountability by local politicians must be prioritised. It was proposed that party deployment systems and criteria be revisited to ensure that qualified and capable people are deployed to lead local government. The possibility of rotating politicians among the spheres of government should also be explored.
- 4. Strengthening performance monitoring and reporting.** Indicators for performance of local government should be clearly defined and developed with local government so that they are understood by all. Reports required from municipalities should be rationalised to one or two covering all the sector requirements.
- 5. Matching municipal roles to capabilities.** The principle of differentiation or segmentation of powers and functions of different municipalities should be promoted. Differentiation, however, should not be introduced to induce poor performance.

Differentiation should not only be based on current capacities but also on the potential to improve performance.

- 6. Standardising and simplifying processes and systems.** Complicated and closed procurement systems are an example of bad systems in municipal administration. Multiple order books, for example, pose a challenge in respect of monitoring real-time municipal expenditure and may result in the municipality consistently over-spending.
- 7. Improving the fiscal relations system.** The processes and timelines followed in the intergovernmental fiscal relations system need to be refined. The system should rationalise compliance requirements to allow for proper accountability to communities.
- 8. Strengthening the IGR planning system.** Spatial planning and data management are some of the key elements that can make the turnaround strategy a success. Proper definitions and differentiation of IDP requirements for municipalities are essential.
- 9. Strengthening national and provincial capacity to facilitate the local government turn-around.** Local government challenges and poor performance are symptomatic of the failures of the entire governance system. It is a 'whole of government' problem. With regard to supporting and monitoring local government performance, capacity is a key challenge in the provincial and national departments responsible for local government. The proliferation of reporting and other compliance requirements from different sector departments also compounds problems.
- 10. Defining accountability and consequences at key decision points.** Clarity is essential on the indicators of governance for local government. Also imperative are involving other spheres of government in the appointment of senior local government officials to ensure quality, and monitoring of performance by the auditor-general through the right indicators.

The 2009 Knowledge Week again presented the DBSA and its stakeholders with the opportunity to discuss issues of national importance. The outcomes of this event will undoubtedly provide guidance to the Local Government Turnaround Strategy. The DBSA is looking forward to partnering with government and all other stakeholders in this process.

For more information on the Knowledge Week please contact Ms Nelly Rampete at 011 313 3357, Fax 011 206 3357 or nellyr@dbsa.org.

The presentations at the Knowledge Week are available on the DBSA website, www.dbsa.org.