

Setting service delivery targets

During the past two months, the newly elected government has emphasised the important role that local government must play in meeting the challenges of economic development and poverty alleviation.

President Thabo Mbeki set specific delivery targets in his State of the Nation Address of 21 May. A month later the Minister of Provincial and Local Government, Sidney Mufamadi, announced some practical measures in his budget vote speech that his department will take to meet these targets.

The President's State of the Nation Address

The President set clear service delivery targets for the next five years. To achieve visible advances in improving the quality of life, the government committed itself to the following:

- all households having easy access to clean running water within five years;
- clean and potable water being provided by the end of 2004 to the tenth million South African to have received it since 1994;
- more than 300 000 households being provided with basic sanitation in 2004; and
- each household having access to electricity within eight years.

Achieving these targets will require the collective effort of local, national and provincial governments. The following measures will be taken:

- the Intergovernmental Framework Bill providing for structures and procedures to enhance cooperation will be enacted before

key points

- Local government should become the provider of choice with regard to the delivery of basic services.
- The Municipal Infrastructure Grant is to be increased to R5.1 billion in 2005/6 and R5.9 billion in 2006/7.

the end of 2004;

- a process to ensure the harmonisation of municipal IDPs with the development plans of the provincial and national governments will be completed, increasing the capacity of local government to meet its responsibilities relating to economic growth and development;
- the national government will transfer nearly R16.5 billion of the R38 billion that local government will invest in infrastructure development in the next three years;
- to ensure that municipalities with a poor revenue base are adequately resourced, there will be a major review of local government's equitable share allocation and the formula will be completed within six months; and
- the national government will also assist local government to ensure that the system of ward committees functions as intended in the Structures Act.

Minister Mufamadi's budget vote speech

In realising the targets set by the President, Minister Mufamadi said in his budget vote speech that local government should become the provider of choice with regard to the delivery of basic services. However, obstacles to action include the limited capacity and resources of some municipalities. With a limited skills base, some fail to implement new strategies of delivery and cost recovery. The Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) will take the following concrete measures to improve governance:

- A high caliber team will be deployed to work with municipalities experiencing a short-term need for intense, hands-on support. As it is a

short-term measure, the provinces will immediately replicate this support measure.

- Guidelines will be developed within three months to help municipalities implement the Property Rates Act, which came into effect on 1 July 2004.
- The Municipal Infrastructure Grant, to be launched within the next two months, will allocate R4.4 billion to municipalities in the 2004/5 financial year, increasing to R5.1 billion in 2005/6 and R5.9 billion in 2006/7. It will target the provision of water, sanitation, roads, solid waste, community lighting and other community facilities.
- Before the end of 2004, the DPLG, working closely with the Department of Water and Forestry, will ensure that the framework for the rollout of free basic sanitation is finalised.
- To deal effectively with natural disasters, the DPLG will establish a national early warning system. It will ensure that, with the support of the provinces, disaster management plans are an integral part of all municipalities' IDPs.
- A training programme for councillors and senior officials will be established by February 2005. The DPLG will launch the Local Government Leadership Academy in partnership with academic institutions. By March 2006 more than 5 000 local government practitioners will have been trained.

Comment

The government is to be commended for setting clear targets for the provision of basic services, for ensuring local government is the provider of choice and for recognising that municipalities must be suitably skilled and equipped with the necessary human and financial resources. The DPLG plays an important role in assisting municipalities with both guidelines and financial support. The responsibility to ensure a better life for all ultimately lies with the municipalities and their residents. They must make developmental local government a reality.

Nico Steytler
Local Government Project
Community Law Centre