

# Communities providing services

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The Constitution mandates local government to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner and to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.

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## Community participation

In line with the constitutional mandate, the 1998 *White Paper on Local Government* (the White Paper) establishes the basis for a new developmental local government system, which is committed to working with citizens, groups and communities in meeting the social, economic and material needs of communities in a holistic way. Against this backdrop, the White Paper embodies a new approach to municipal service delivery and recommends that municipalities look at innovative ways of providing and accelerating the delivery of municipal services.

## CBOs and service delivery

To that end, engaging community-based organisations (CBOs) in the delivery of municipal services is one option for municipalities when making the choice of how municipal services can best be delivered. Already there are a number of instances where municipalities have engaged CBOs to provide basic municipal services, such as environmental management and refuse removal. To date, however, outsourcing of municipal services to CBOs has been very limited, which raises a number of questions: Is it a viable and worthwhile service delivery vehicle to help address the municipal service backlog in South Africa? What are the benefits? What are the limitations and risks? Can CBOs be effective service providers?

## CBOs and Municipal Community Partnerships

CBOs have the following characteristics:

- they promote the interests of, and/or provide a service to, a particular community;
- they work with a community mandate, or represent the overall interests within a community; and
- they are generally staffed by people who live in the community and were elected or appointed by that community.

Municipal Community Partnerships (MCPs) are arrangements between municipalities and CBOs to provide municipal services to meet the basic needs of communities. These arrangements are usually formal for service provision, but informal for basic needs and poverty alleviation projects. Typically, an MCP involves a CBO and an NGO which have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and aim to achieve common goals usually centred on the provision of basic municipal services. MCPs are intended to assist municipalities to work with communities to provide quality facilities and services in an equitable, efficient and effective manner for the benefit of local residents.

## Benefits of MCPs

The White Paper emphasises that support to CBOs in the form of finances, technical skills or training can enhance the ability of the poor to take control of their own needs and development. It encourages municipalities to work with communities to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of life in those areas. It therefore encourages the creation and building of partnerships between municipalities, business and communities. The White Paper cites the

main benefits of partnerships with CBOs as the chance of gaining access to external experience and expertise, as well as stimulating local economic development. CBOs can also act as effective intermediaries between the municipality and community because of their strong community base.

## Partnerships

According to the *White Paper on Municipal Service Partnerships* of 2000, the service contract arrangement is a starting point for involving CBOs in service provision, with the other (longer-term) contractual arrangements being considered as capacity and experience are developed over time. A service contract is an MSP arrangement wherein the service provider receives a fee from the council to manage a particular aspect of a municipal service and is usually short-term in duration (one to three years). Examples include refuse removal and waste collection functions.

The Constitution and policy papers clearly envisage a more interactive role for communities and their organisations in the provision of basic services. Although the legal framework does not expand on this option in great depth, it encourages the involvement of communities and their organisations in addressing their service delivery needs. It also allows municipalities greater flexibility in structuring cost-effective service delivery arrangements that meet the needs of their communities. The policy documents therefore recognise that CBOs can be a particularly effective vehicle for development based on close relationships forged with communities. They also show a perceptive understanding of community development needs and the ability to respond to those needs. In sum, they recognise that it is vital for CBOs to become active participants in the provision of basic municipal services at the local level.

## Comment

While the involvement of CBOs in municipal service provision is not without many difficulties

# key points

- MCPs are arrangements between municipalities and CBOs to provide municipal services to meet the basic needs of communities.
- MCPs are intended to assist municipalities to work with communities to provide quality facilities and services in an equitable and efficient manner for the benefit of local residents.
- It is vital for CBOs to become active participants in the provision of basic municipal services at the local level.

and challenges (which will be explored in the next issue of the *Local Government Bulletin*), municipalities should seriously consider the merits of CBOs as a service delivery option in the appropriate circumstances, particularly in poorer rural communities. Moreover, this gives effect to the constitutional mandate of working with communities in meeting the social, economic and material needs of communities in a holistic way, as well as meaningfully involving communities and their organisations in the affairs of local government.

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This article is the first in a series on the communalisation of municipal services, and is part of an ICCO-funded research project on the outsourcing of municipal services.