



# Responding to Human Mobility: Is Local Government Set up for Failure?

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Municipal authorities remain wary of population movements and few acknowledge human mobility as a fundamental driver of and response to development. Yet human mobility in South Africa—including the crossing of domestic and international boundaries—has significant dramatic effects with direct implications for local governance, service delivery, and economic development. While international migration gains much attention, movements into and within municipalities are far more significant in demographic and policy terms. Municipalities’ inability to effectively respond to migration ultimately reduces the possibility of promoting poverty alleviation and social cohesion.

Municipalities need to take human mobility seriously if they are to fulfil their mandate as developmental local governments. An increase in the number of persons moving into a municipality alters the needs of the community as a whole. It increases the claims to public and other services which essentially affect the participatory planning and

budgeting processes. Human mobility affects development in different ways and at all levels of government. In particular, local government experiences the real effects of mobility and must be actively involved in managing mobility.

Municipalities’ role in managing migration is enshrined within their development mandate in the Constitution of South Africa Act 108<sup>i</sup> and the White Paper on Local Government<sup>ii</sup>. They are empowered to lead the forces for development by “structuring and managing administration, budgeting and planning process to give priority to the basic needs of their communities and to promote social and economic development.”<sup>iii</sup>

Why then has local government fallen short of addressing real development challenges brought about by the population dynamics of human mobility?

The African Centre for Migration & Society in partnership with the South African Local Government Association conducted an eight-month study across

South African Municipalities<sup>iv</sup>. A research team interviewed municipal officials and other key local players in understanding how municipalities comprehend and respond to human mobility, and identified the challenges they encounter. Municipal officials pointed to the following:

1. Lack of specific and dynamic understanding of their indigent communities;
2. Perceptions impeding on local governments proactive management of human mobility;
3. Lack of financial and human capacity to plan for population dynamics;
4. Non-inclusive Planning and Budgetary Processes;
5. Ineffective Intergovernmental Coordination on Planning and Service Delivery.

### Lack of Specific and Dynamic Understanding of Indigent Communities

Municipalities lack a nuanced understanding of population dynamics of the communities living within their jurisdictions. Data absences are particularly acute regarding indigent populations. Populations are typically framed within the context of race and inequality which in effect overlooks other vulnerabilities like ethnicity and nationality. In addition, data used for planning is scarce, incomplete, inaccurate, outdated, de-contextualized and difficult for decision makers to understand.

Where datum is available, municipalities often lack the skills internally to make sense of it. Lack of specific information has resulted in the systematic neglect of specific cleavages amongst the poor. It has also altered the quality of services provided for the community as whole. Most fundamentally, planning and budgeting usually does not adequately reflect the needs of indigent members of the community.

There is great confusion over the responsibility for data collection and management among municipal departments. Information for planning is thus derived from multiple and sometimes contradictory sources like Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) and independent demographic studies commissioned through consultants, local researchers and the private sector.

The reliability and robustness of using multiple sources of data for planning and budgeting are questionable.

### Recommendations

- Municipalities must be encouraged and financially enabled to conduct detailed research and analysis that could offer municipal planners information for planning for better delivery of services.
- Statistics South Africa must work with municipalities to better disaggregate data at the local level, while maintaining a degree of standardization at a national level for comparability. It should be more proactive in reaching out to municipalities and drawing

their attention to ongoing trends where they lack the capacity to analyse data appropriately.

- Mainstream responses to human mobility more systematically into Integrated Development Plans.

### Perceptions hindering Proactive Management of Migration

The unverified and misleading perceptions that migrants are a drain on public resources, and are associated with criminality, diseases and unemployment continues to persist. While these perceptions are proved to have fuelled tensions within communities, officials continue to downplay the significance of these discriminatory attitudes and deny their responsibility in preventing these from transforming into violent popular mobilisation. There is a general lack of understanding of the roots and impacts of xenophobia which hinders the municipalities from taking proactive measures. In numerous instances, municipal officials themselves would convey xenophobic statements.

Attitudinal issues impact negatively on municipalities' capacity to improve their service delivery standards. Denying the damage done by xenophobia and refusing to take responsibility for managing social cohesion within communities, hampers the development of innovative rethinking of migration's impact among municipal decision-makers

and officials. Among other things, it precludes more fruitful discussion in terms of skills, entrepreneurial activities and growth in local consumption markets that usually come with migrants. .

### Recommendations

Information and training of officials at all levels is vital in changing attitudes. The following steps could be taken:

- Introduction of modules on migration and population dynamics in municipal officials' training insisting on the developmental dimension of migration and its connections with poverty reduction;
- Nationwide sensitization campaign enhancing the need for a change in attitudes among officials, empowering them to take responsibility in disseminating a culture of tolerance and social cohesion at the local community level;
- Support for social cohesion programmes to monitor communities within municipalities.

### Lack of Capacity to Manage Migration

Many municipalities lack the human and financial capacity to effectively respond to movements into, within and out of their communities. They have been unable to develop appropriate frameworks due to the frequent staffing transitions and lack of coordination in responding to migration. In some municipalities, leadership and staff turnovers have resulted in redeploying staff into positions

where they lack capacity to respond to population dynamics and human mobility.

Rapid turnover within some municipalities has also resulted in the loss of institutional knowledge that could provide important insights into municipal population dynamics.

#### Recommendations

- Institutionalise local government responses to migration in improving coordination for responding to human mobility.
- Build dedicated and relevant capacity within municipalities to deal with planning for human mobility.
- Develop institutional frameworks that entrench collaboration between municipalities and specialized research institutions to ensure regular and swift dissemination of information.

#### Non-Inclusive Planning and Budgetary Processes

There is a de facto exclusion of the most marginalised sections of indigent populations from public planning processes. As planning processes largely represent the pre-defined (prior) needs of sections of the current poor population who can access consultation forums, they miss out on newly urbanised and more vulnerable other groups. Negative attitudes towards migrants further make it unlikely for officials to insist that resources be

dedicated to these unwanted 'future' residents, especially because they are equipped with only limited knowledge of migration dynamics.

In some municipalities, newcomers (whether foreigners or South Africans) were generally not invited to participate in Community Policing Forums, Stakeholders' Forums, Residents' Associations, or meetings held by local ward councillors. Migrants are conspicuously absent from stakeholders consultations.

The City of Johannesburg has launched a number of initiatives to foster and encourage migrants' participation in dialogue platforms and other activities at the ward level. These include the Migrant Help Desk, created in April 2007, and the Johannesburg Migrants' Advisory Committee (JMAC), created in 2010.

Participatory planning processes which constitute the basis of the preparation of the five-year Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) structurally exclude migrant participation and actively work against planning for mobility. Although municipal officials consider population information useful for targeting poverty pockets, they are unable to use it to gain the financial support needed for investing in them through planning. Planning is more oriented towards the permanent residents even if new needs are expressed by newcomers.

One of the key problems seems to come from the fact that National Treasury fails to factor in mobility in the allocation of national resources.



Failure to consider population and migration trends perpetuates the shortfalls of planning by disregarding the demand of resources required by municipalities to meet their development goals.

The current system of resource allocation to local government through the Local Government Equitable Share (LGES) does not reflect population fluctuations at the local level. Even where significant efforts are made by municipal officials to plan for mobile populations, they are largely not supported by resource allocation to local government which reflects the population figures from the 2001 Census data used to calculate the equitable share.

Municipalities are left unable to cater for the increasing numbers of indigent people, a majority who come from rural areas. The result in an increased need for and consumption of services that is not met by municipalities owing to the inadequate funds received through budgetary allocation.

#### Recommendations

- Establish initiatives to guide municipalities on how to proceed in developing and implementing policies and strategies that reflect all indigent populations and demographic trends like migration.
- Review the budgeting processes including the Local Government Equitable Share allocation to respond to the population dynamics of

human mobility. The budgeting process must be cognizant of where people, their needs and in what municipalities they live in.

- Reform the standard of calculation of the Local Government Equitable Share to allow municipalities to plan for rapid or highly localised population changes.

#### Intergovernmental Coordination on Planning and Service Delivery

Intergovernmental relations have not been effective in coordinating planning and strengthening accountability towards achieving critical and targeted development outcomes across the three spheres of government. There is a general lack of clarity on the roles of the different levels of government, especially regarding responsibility towards addressing migration issues. Municipalities have confirmed that they often feel that failures in national and provincial government policies and processes undermine their credibility and effectiveness.

Conflict and competition exist over powers and functions between provinces and their local governments. Local government officials confirm that 'national targets for service delivery that apply uniformly irrespective of the economic and institutional differences between municipalities simply set municipalities up to fail.'

Municipalities thus consider themselves excluded from planning and budgeting processes and are largely frustrated from the shifting priorities and



goalposts in service provision for the poor in particular. For example changes in policies and practices regarding immigrants and asylum seekers (including relocating offices, lifting work prohibitions, and formally enabling access to services) are adopted without consulting or forewarning local authorities.

#### Recommendations

- Intergovernmental co-ordination on planning must be improved across the national, provincial and local levels towards more effective management of migration.
- The spheres of government together with the relevant stakeholders like the private sector, organised labour, research agencies and academic institutions should facilitate institutionalizing local government response to migration in improving coordination and communication between municipalities and migrant communities.
- Local government must be enabled and included in all decisions that impact on realizing development targets vis-à-vis the movement of persons.
- The Immigration policy which should be reformed with wide consultations, including members of SALGA.
- SALGA and COGTA should work with municipalities to review their sectoral policies to better account for human mobility.
- Municipalities should be enabled to formulate

and articulate their interests with regard to immigration policy and practice.

#### Conclusion

Local government is a critical actor and should be far more strategic in realizing development for the poor within rapidly changing communities. Municipalities must be enabled to collect localized information that defines the social and economic cleavages that may render certain groups more vulnerable than others, whether South African or foreign, whether former residents or new comers. Planning and budgeting processes should be reshaped in order to ensure the effective allocation of resources to all sections of local communities.

Inclusive platforms for engagement with all sections of the population, including the highly mobile and most indigent ones, should be set up in order to ensure the planning processes are representative. Inclusive governance also entails frequent consultation amongst all spheres of government to clarify the roles of different levels of government and their coordinated responsibility towards responding to migration for development.

Planning and budgeting should be 'forward looking' projecting the demographic changes in localities and catering for resultant needs that flow from it. In the face of increased urbanization, local governments, being the interface between the government and communities must be capacitated to respond to migration.



The failure of municipalities to respond to migration has highlighted the knowledge gap within governing institutions on the relationship between migration and development. Continuous research is necessary to identify how best development can be achieved in the face of rising urbanization and movements of persons.

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<sup>i</sup> The Constitution of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996.

<sup>ii</sup> Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) 'The White Paper on Local Government' 1998 Available at <http://www.treasury.gov.za/legislation/mfma/guidelines/whitepaper.pdf> (6 December 2010)

<sup>iii</sup> The Constitution of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 S 153(a).

<sup>iv</sup> Landau, L.B., Wa Kabwe Segatti, A. and Misago, J.P., 'Governing Migration & Urbanization in South African Municipalities: Developing Approaches to Counter Poverty and Social Fragmentation' (African Centre for Migration and Society, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2011)



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### Web Resources

This policy brief has been derived from the report on “Governing Migration & Urbanisation in South African Municipalities: Developing Approaches to Counter Poverty and Social Fragmentation.”

This report can be accessed online at:  
African Centre for Migration & Society  
[www.migration.org.za](http://www.migration.org.za)  
South African Local Government Association  
[www.salga.net](http://www.salga.net)

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