

## REPORT ON THE GGLN LEARNING EVENT ON GOOD GOVERNANCE SURVEYS

CO-HOSTED BY AFESIS-CORPLAN AND THE PROJECT FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT (PCRD) IN EAST LONDON ON 29<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2007

### 1. Background

Over the past few years, Afesis-corplan, in partnership with PCRD and independent researchers, has been undertaking surveys of good governance in various municipalities across South Africa. Initial studies focused on local municipalities as both the entry points as well as the units of analysis. In 2006, some changes were introduced in the survey methodology. These changes were necessitated partly by the need to effect a more productive follow-up process that would lead to purposeful interventions in areas where gaps had been identified. A decision was therefore made to the effect that, henceforth, district municipalities (DMs) would be the entry points to the local municipalities (LMs) under their jurisdiction. This meant that the DMs would in turn be viewed as core partners, stakeholders to the process and the commissioning agents for the GGS and would also share the responsibility of following through the recommendations to ensure that they were implemented in consultation with their LM counterparts.

The two compelling reasons for viewing DMs as the appropriate level for monitoring governance practices and building capacity at the local level are that 1) they are a key source of support and can offer advice and guidance that may pre-empt crisis at the local level and; 2) they occupy a unique position to make an objective and comparative assessment of different local governance practices and communicate or network these across the entire district. Other anticipated potential benefits of working through the DM include:



- a. Creating institutional responsibility for the survey outcome at municipal level, including setting in place measures to address the problems identified;
- b. Encouraging the use of the tool as a measure of good governance coordinated by district municipalities. In this regard, the DM monitors and provides support rather than acts as a policing structure or regulatory body;
- c. Providing an 'umbrella' structure which is slightly removed from the survey findings and able to process the results in an objective manner and promote comparative assessments of local municipal practice;

- d. The potential for DM officials to be trained and mentored to incorporate the survey methods into their own monitoring and evaluation functions.

## 2. Objectives of the event

The key objective of the seminar was to share with GGLN members the findings that had been gathered by Afesis-corporplan, PCRD and independent researchers in the Nkangala and Cacadu DM Good Governance Surveys (GGS). Besides being an opportunity to exchange information and share the lessons learnt, the convenors of the seminar anticipated that the discussions would generate useful insights that would in turn inform and enrich future good governance surveys.

Moreover, the convenors felt that a GGLN-sponsored seminar would be the right forum through which the lessons learnt from the GGS could be best shared and most importantly, channelled through to the national Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG). Hopefully, the findings will positively influence policies at the DPLG level.

## 3. Highlights of the learning event

The event took the form of a seminar with presentations of the two consolidated reports from Nkangala and Cacadu DMs being the highlights. These two reports were presented by Afesis-corporplan and PCRD, respectively. However, before the substantive discussions of the research findings, participants from the University of Fort Hare and Rhodes University led the participants in a theoretical review of the concept of good governance and how it applies in the local sphere of government.



It was observed that good governance is a multi-faceted concept encompassing a wide range of features or indicators. Governance was variously described as the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are or are not implemented. It could also be described as the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised i.e. the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced. The concept also has connotations of the capacity of government

to effectively formulate and implement sound policies as well respect citizens and state institutions that govern economic and social interactions.

From a theoretical point of view, there is a consensus that good governance relies on a proactive, non-bureaucratic civil service, sound human resource management, law reform, improved service delivery as well as enhanced public management. Good governance entails meaningful participation by both members of the public as well as organized civil society. It requires a fair legal framework whose provisions are impartially enforced by an independent judiciary and protection of human rights (particularly those of minorities). Additionally, good governance requires that there be prompt responsiveness by state institutions to people's grievances, inclusiveness and accountability.

Regarding the findings of the Nkangala GGS, it was reported that a total of 356 individuals had been interviewed from among councillors, officials, members of civil society organizations as well as members of the public. Regarding the latter, these had been drawn from different social-economic groups, wards and genders to ensure that the sample was representative. Focus group interviews had also been conducted in an effort to verify findings and also clarify some of the issues that were contentious. The GGS focused on key indicators such as decision-making, transparency, public participation and consultation, transparency, disclosure, corruption, service delivery and issues around systems and structures in use in the local municipalities that were under review.

The local municipalities generally fared well in terms of transparency as the majority of the respondents reported that their respective LMs kept them informed about on-going projects. Attendance at council meetings by members of the public was reported to be fair in Emalahleni and Steve Tshwete local municipalities, while it was poor in Thembisile and Delmas. Poor publicity for these meetings was blamed for the dismal attendance.



On a positive note, participants were informed that 61% of the respondents had reported that they were aware of the existence of ward committees as forums for public participation in their municipalities. However, there are concerns over their capacity to deliver on their mandates. It was suggested that their capacity could be enhanced through induction workshops and training around Ward level Key Performance Indicators (WKPIs).

Participants also discussed councillors – council officials' relations. It was noted that in some cases, relations between officials and councillors had soured so much that concerns were starting to be raised over the impact of this on service delivery. Delmas local municipality was mentioned in this regard.

Participants raised concerns over the reported allegations of corruption in numerous places across the district municipality. Suggestions were made to the effect that the DM could assist the LMs by offering guidance on how the existing mechanisms for fighting against corruption can be strengthened. Additionally, communities need to be well informed about procedures and measures employed to combat corruption.

Regarding ways in which attendance at council meetings could be improved, it was suggested that the DM could supplement LM efforts by helping disseminate information on meeting dates and venues i.e. through radio announcements, ward committees, newspapers and municipal accounts. LMs should also be encouraged to translate certain elements of their proceedings into a local language.

Performance around service delivery was reported to be dismal across the DM. While it was felt that the DM needed to attend to this problem in all the LMs, it was specifically suggested that the DM enquires into the housing delivery delays in Emakhazeni and assist the LM to overcome whatever challenges there could be.

Regarding structures and systems in the LMs, the system for confidential reporting was found to be particularly wanting. Though noted as being in existence, the system appeared to lack sufficient safeguards for people wanting to report cases of impropriety. It was suggested that the DM could offer institutional support to make the systems more credible.

Some of the key findings from the Cacadu GGS as reported during the seminar included the following:

- There appears to be inadequate communication between the municipalities and residents on municipal plans, projects and processes;
- Residents are aware of issues that directly affect their lives and will participate in initiatives, such as the indigent policy and ward meetings on service delivery issues, if these lead directly to improvements in their living conditions;
- There are no deliberate attempts by municipalities to obstruct residents' participation – rather a lack of awareness or interest in municipal matters by residents;
- Levels of corruption are perceived to be a major problem (in particular nepotism and irregular awarding of tenders) and respondents are afraid to report corruption for fear of reprisal;
- There is a limited awareness regarding the frequency of council meetings and the level of attendance of councillors at these meetings;
- Council meetings are viewed as highly formal and intimidating and respondents felt that ward meetings enabled them to raise issues and voice their concerns more effectively;
- There is little consistency in the provision of free basic services across the LMs.



Some of the recommendations arising from the Cacadu GGS are to:

- Develop comprehensive communication strategies in each LM to guide and facilitate interaction with their residents;
- Encourage ward committee members to attend council meetings;
- Publish attendance registers from council meetings in, for example, local newspapers;
- Simplify and make more user-friendly the Auditor-General's annual reports on each municipality;
- Establish an independent audit committee;
- Provide a user-friendly summary of each municipality's IDP and budget and publish them on municipal notice boards or send with municipal accounts;
- Develop and widely publicise municipal whistle-blowing policies.

#### 4. Way forward

Participants offered numerous ideas for how the GGS methodology could be further refined and improved. For example:

- Ensure that the presentation of the survey findings is user-friendly and accessible to the targeted audiences (e.g. include a concise executive summary with each report);
- The focus of the GGS reports should be on practical recommendations for addressing each of the issues identified in the survey;
- Prioritise recommendations regarding the most important issues in each LM;
- Establish a clear set of benchmarks of good governance practices appropriate for each type of municipality;
- Possibly use district 'average scores' as a way of comparing the performance of local municipalities within the district. LMs' performance can then be ranked comparatively according to their divergence to the district average performance;
- Consider conducting the surveys in each District every 2-3 years (rather than annually which might be less feasible) and focus follow-up surveys on the issues identified in previous surveys as the most urgent;
- Develop a user-friendly manual for conducting GGSs to enable other municipalities and civil society organisations to implement surveys of their own;
- DM's should be targeted for capacity building to enable them to play their envisaged role in the new approach to the GGS (towards this end, the DPLG should also examine ways, including legislative provisions, of entrenching and enhancing the oversight and support role of DM's in terms of good governance practices in LMs).
- Consolidate best practices/recommendations from the two recent GGSs into a document that could be made widely available.

The need for the GGS findings to be channelled to the DPLG through the GGLN was expressed. Afesis-corplan reported that the GTZ was already in the process of sharing the findings with the DPLG as well but it would be equally useful to have the GGLN also partake in the endeavour. In terms of the potential role of the GGLN in expanding the roll-out of the GGS methodology, a suggestion was made to encourage at least one GGLN member organisation in each of the four provinces in which the network has members (i.e. Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape and Eastern Cape) to conduct GGSs in DMs, and to capacitate other NGOs to become involved in carrying out the surveys.

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## ATTENDANCE REGISTER

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