EQUITY AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

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…we are living in an age of hope and a government that cares. And there is a massive effort by all spheres of government to address the basic, social needs of our people. In particular we are pushing to achieve a number of sanitation targets-which will see us eradicating buckets in established areas by the end of this year…[1]
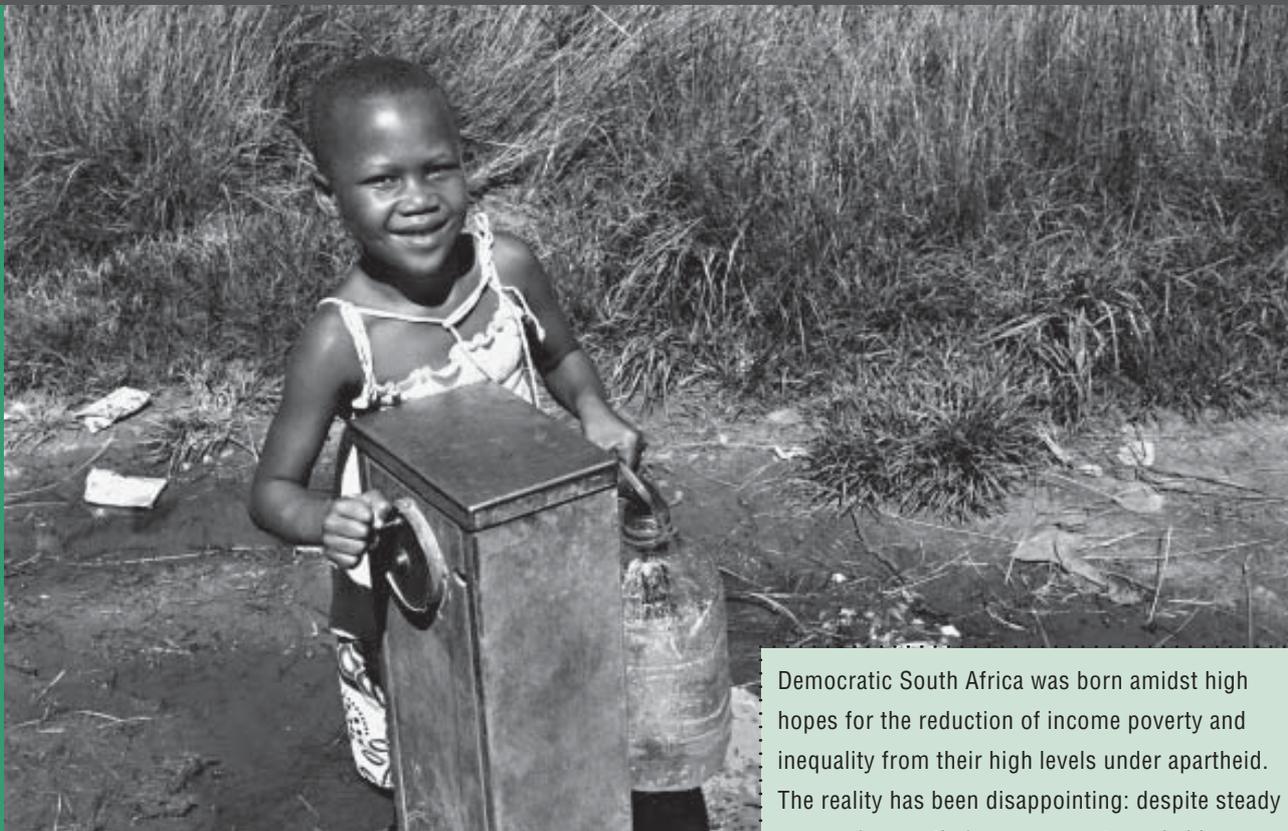

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MUCH OF THE frustration that emanates from organised civil society, social movements and neighbourhood activist groups stems from the fact that South African local government and related organs of state continue to hold up visions of equality and prosperity, while, for ordinary citizens economic life is precarious indeed.

Democratic South Africa was born amidst high hopes for the reduction of income poverty and inequality from their high levels under apartheid. The reality has been disappointing: despite steady economic growth, income poverty probably rose in the late 1990s before a muted decline in the early 2000s, income inequality has probably grown, and life expectancy has declined. The proximate causes are clear: persistent unemployment and low demand for unskilled labour, strong demand for skilled labour, an unequal education system, and a social safety net that is unusually widespread but nonetheless has large holes (Seekings 2007: Abstract).

In 2009 the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) was forced to concede in its national municipal assessment report, that more than three million households out of about 13 million were receiving below a basic level of service and '…600 452 households need to be served with sanitation facilities per year until 2014 to eradicate the existing backlog' (Cogta 2009:44).

As Bhorat and Khanbur note, the aggregate driver of inflation for poor urban households between 1998 and 2002 was the cost of water, electricity, sanitation and transport – the provision of better municipal services, whilst a first step out of poverty, also presented problems of deepening household debt (2006:8). The problem seems to lie not so much with the affordability of services but the management of the national fiscus in the longer term to ensure the services are sustained. Local economies and municipal financial management are increasingly de-linked from these responsibilities:

> At 22.4% of total operating revenue in 2007/08, government grants are the second largest source of revenue for municipalities. The increasing reliance of municipalities on local government transfers is largely due to the rapid growth in the local government Equitable Share and in national conditional grants to local government, as well as the abolition of the RSC levies (Cogta, 2009:58).

Why do governments 'set themselves up for failure' in this manner? Much has to do with the powerful notion of equality and the understanding that the state can and must extend its influence in society by taking up this complex social cause. The obvious reason why states concern themselves with equality, beyond the ambit of public services and administration and into the difficult arena of economic rights, is

stability. Growing inequality, as Fakir (2009:7) points out, signals the instability of the state and, when accompanied by deepening poverty, a crisis of governance is imminent.

This paper tries to show why government undertakings to advance equality need to be understood in terms of the state's obligation to rule and ensure homogeneity and stability. Further it examines the feasibility of reducing equity considerations down to a set of procedures and indicators that can be applied within local governance. The use of the term in the context of local public administration also requires a re-examination of the origins of the concept of equality and its meaning beyond the confines of bureaucracy. This paper tries to use the term equity or equality in a cautious manner that recognises both its meaning in broad political discourse and its usage in very specific governance settings (public management approaches currently in use in South African local government.) It looks at the possibility that notions of equality have been distorted through the efforts of the state to 'measure equity' in public management and administration systems operated by local government.

RECENT POLICY INTERPRETATIONS OF EQUALITY

Analysts and consultants are invariably anxious to recognise that principles of equality are strongly entrenched in the South African constitution and the resulting framework of legislation and policy.

> The particular values that inform the meaning of 'equity' in South Africa are provided for within the Constitution and speak to the attainment of human dignity, equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms. The strongest provisions for equality relate to the principles of non-racialism and non-sexism. Within the Constitution, the Bill of Rights obliges the state to recognise and protect human rights and to interpret equality in such a way that all are equal before the law and that the state >>

>> does not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth. (Mbumba Development Services 2009:9)

These acknowledgements are invariably a precursor to a conclusion that despite this strong policy framework, inequality persists in South African society. The dominant argument to explain this gap between policy and economic reality has been the critique that neoliberal forces have subverted what are generally sound policy principles. 'Successive administrations since 1994, for example, have been criticised by the labour movement and other elements of civil society of pursuing a neoliberal agenda where citizens needs are overruled by conservative public spending policy that focuses primarily on limiting public spending and keeping inflation indicators in check' (ibid).

A different emphasis is found in the explanation that government simply lacks the institutional capacity, operational efficiency, resources and appropriately designed programmes to deliver on its equality pledge. Van Donk (2007:2) encapsulated this view:

There are many factors that may have contributed to this, including ongoing institutional reform, capacity and financial challenges, the overwhelming scale of service needs, and weak social mobilisation on these issues. In addition, the progressive ideals of the White Paper have not (yet) been sufficiently translated into clear programmes and assigned responsibilities that can be implemented by municipalities of varying sizes, with clear indicators for monitoring progress and enforcement.

The measures of equality suggested by Van Donk have gone further than others in resolving definitional issues. Generally, however Van Donk, Mbumba and other researchers[2] assisting government programmes, and the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG)[3] Equity Programme in particular, have had to restrict their focus to conceptual parameters already defined in South African policy frameworks and the government originated terms of reference. Essentially this looks at issues of equality in terms of groups defined by gender, HIV/Aids status, age and disability and relative vulnerability and marginalisation. The question of whether local government, as an organ of state, is best placed to address problems of inequity was not deeply explored – instead much of the research simply linked the imperative for greater equity to local government's service delivery and development mandate.

Much of the research work on equity and equality conducted between 2006 and 2008 for the Department of Provincial and Local Government was advocacy orientated. It was suggested that equity measures relating to gender, HIV/Aids, disability, youth, children etc, were best understood as 'cross-cutting issues', in that they occurred within different government functions i.e. poverty reduction, staff development, planning etc (Van Donk, M. 2007: 3) A further strategic tool was the idea of mainstreaming, defined by Van Donk '…as a process towards the achievement of transformation and development goals, more specifically equity, empowerment and representivity' (ibid). Van Donk developed a comprehensive analysis of policy and legislation relevant to equity considerations in local government while government produced a set of framework documents using the same equity categories. These resource manuals provided guidelines to municipalities on how to implement policies, plans, programmes and

actions that protect and promote the rights of persons within the respective equity categories. Examples include:

- Office on the Status of Disabled Person's 2006 Guide for Municipalities in the Implementation of Policies, Plans, Programmes and Actions that Protect and Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Framework for an Integrated Local Government Response to HIV and Aids (DPLG 2007)
- The Framework for Youth Development at Local Government (DPLG 2008)
- The Gender Policy Framework for Local Government (DPLG 2007)

In its attempt to translate 'equity' into a practical set of criteria against which the performance of local government can be assessed, the DPLG established a chief directorate for equity and development. This unit began commissioning research into relevant indicators and systems for measuring equity in local government. The department also commissioned a handbook entitled *Guidebook for Mainstreaming Equity Considerations in Local Government (2008)*[4]. The guidebook, was never finalised however it framed some of the core principles that seem to underpin the sector-specific framework documents already described.

Definitions of 'equality' and 'equity' in the literature related to the work of the equity and development unit are never fully clarified, perhaps understandably, given the complexity of these terms and their use in different contexts. The incomplete Guidebook already referred to cannot be regarded as an 'official instrument of policy' but it does offer a rare glimpse of the conceptual foundations of other policies related to equity:

The term '**equality**' means different people (e.g. women, men, able-bodied people, people with disability, younger and older people and people living with HIV and Aids) have equal conditions for realising their full human rights and potential, and are able to contribute equally to development efforts and benefit equally from the results. It entails that the underlying causes of discrimination are systematically identified and removed in order to ensure equal opportunities and a society based on non-discrimination. Working towards equality does not necessarily imply treating the various designated groups in exactly the same way. This is where 'equity' comes in.[5]

'**Equity**' refers to the process of being fair to the various designated groups and looks beyond equality of opportunity as it requires 'transformative change'. Equity recognises that different measures might be needed for the various designated groups where they reflect different needs and priorities or where their existing situation means that some groups need special or additional supportive measures to ensure that all are on a 'level playing field'. This could mean that specific actions are necessary to enable equality of opportunity between people (e.g. women, men, able bodied people, people with disability, younger and older people and people living with HIV and AIDS). As the theoretical literature notes, ensuring real equality of opportunity often means treating certain groups differently.[6]

The use of the term 'equity' poses particular problems of definition since it has very distinct meanings in relation to economics, accounting and finance, law, behavioural science etc. A widely accepted

A well-established convention, for example is that in societies that sub-scribe to equality, all have equal access to advantages and opportunities

usage relates to the imperative to ensure that welfare or other state benefits are fairly distributed.[7]

One useful distinction suggests that equity refers to the institutions that promote equality and how these institutions are viewed – whereas equality can be measured by comparing households or individuals in quantitative terms (relative wealth, Gini coefficients etc), equity is more about how institutional fairness is perceived. This begins to make sense in a context where equity is used as an alternative to fairness in relation to a specific institutional practise.[8]

In October 2007 the Department of Provincial and Local Government reported to Parliament's Joint Monitoring Committee on the Status of Women that equity and development programmes categorised as Youth, HIV and Aids, Gender and Disability were being 'mainstreamed' within local government with a focus on information management and special projects. Mainstreaming, it was explained, would ensure recognition of all groups, and ideally pro-grammes should be incorporated into Integrated Development Plans of municipalities.[9]

This programmatic approach to the advance-ment of equity and equality may have seemed sound at the time but it was constrained by important conceptual limitations and logistical constraints. For one, it paid little heed to the broader political traditions that have shaped the meaning of equality. A well-established convention, for example is that in societies that subscribe to equality, all have equal access to advantages and opportunities. However as legal scholar Jewel Amoah (2004:8) notes, 'This does not mean that everyone will arrive at the same place – for that is completely counter-intuitive to the notion of diversity that equality seeks to protect. But rather, it means that people will not be arbitrarily or unfairly denied access to opportunity.' But equality of outcome is very much a component of the equity discourse in government – the most significant equity measures look not just at opportunity but who finally got the tender, was appointed to the job or received the promotion. This complexity is explored further in the theoretical section of this paper.

Secondly, the rationale of 'designated groups' is taken for granted and the complexity created by intersecting identities is noted but not resolved.

…the contextual realities and intersection of various forms of inequality require an analysis of the various designated groups i.e., women, children, the youth, the elderly, people with disability and people living with HIV and AIDS, not as isolated but as overlapping and intersect-ing. The challenges of HIV and AIDS, gender inequality, unemployment and underdevelopment impact in multiple forms on individuals who exist on a continuum of forms of exclusion and inequality.[10]

This is the main focus of Amoah's (2004:10) concern with the difficulty of regarding equality as something that be understood in terms of group rights, 'Individu-als are grouped together on the basis of race, religion, age, gender, economic status, etc. And so at any given time, individuals are members of several groups – depending on the nature of the comparison and social context at play.' For local government, a notion of equality based on group rights, is difficult to action in terms of its service and facilities mandate since its services and core functions relate mostly to house-holds and individual service consumers. It may be more realisable in relation to development programmes and projects that focus on groups of beneficiaries.

The idea that broad social equality can be advanced through the affairs of local government is also questionable, especially when the broader political economy is given only cursory attention. As Amoah notes, equality is a fluid and changeable concept whose, '…meaning and content also necessarily change with time and circumstance' (2004:9). Bound by particular circumstances, time and the nature of the public service in question, equality safeguards seem to have more practical value in relation to a specific line function or service – rather than the idea of a complex bundle of mixed social, human and economic rights. If the current political economy in South Africa and indeed the global capitalist economy, explicitly entrenches inequality, strategies to combat this through organs of state should reflect a realistic assessment for the scope of impact. Municipal government, particularly at its current level of performance, has little prospect of meaningful impacting on broader inequity within society. At best it can restructure service patterns and other practises that reinforce inequality and make modest provision for counter-acting the worst inequities of the market. Many role-players in municipal government would argue that this is exactly what the South African local government system has set out to do.

Tackling inequality issues via local government functions is therefore at risk on two fronts; firstly a tendency to overestimate what can be achieved within the specific parameters of municipal functions and secondly adopting a limited under-standing of equality. As Mbumba noted in its *Mainstreaming of Equity Issues within Local Government: Report on Pilot Survey* (2009: 9), '…successive theorists have struggled to apply a very rich intellectual discourse around equity and equality to the practicalities of government and governance.'

BASIC THEORIES OF EQUALITY

The idea that democracy is at the very least condu-cive to more equality is inherent in the South African constitution and many of the laws and policies that shape our political system. The notion however of a causal link between democracy and reduced inequal-ity needs to be approached with caution. Classic political thinking, Plato and Aristotle in particular, suggests that democratic justice is achieved when numeric equality ensures that a majority of citizens approve of the mechanisms and substance of their rule – justice and what is right, is therefore deter-mined not by a complex examination of principles and values but simply by the endorsement of the majority (Ebenstein, W. 1969:102). Ancient Greek notions of democracy did not preclude differences of wealth or stature between citizens and equality was more of a hypothetical notion of the administration of justice than one that applied directly to persons and their social and economic circumstances.

Faced with an intractable reality that successive government reforms all replicated some degree of inequality, many societies have reconciled to the view that the ultimate source of sovereignty or legitimacy derives from the will of the majority, expressed through an elected people's assembly (ibid, 267). Modern political reforms, however, inevitably driven by new elites, were confronted by the reality that the largely poor and uneducated masses would hold sway under true democracies. Equality was therefore held in check by reservations about who was fit to govern (ibid). Lummis notes that in the medieval times 'the common people', particularly during rebellious periods, were forced to invoke a religious rationale in their opposition to a class-based society (1992: 40).

States that espouse equality are cognisant not just of social justice but that equality is a key element of stable rule. Thomas Hobbes drew from the classic

Greek discourse which postulated that humankind has a natural propensity for 'dominion' i.e. to seek power over others. Without accepting equality, humankind was likely to exist in a constant state of conflict. Hobbes thus framed a notion of equality that included a homogenising element – people as uniform elements and `constituent parts of the great machine of the state…' (ibid). Drawing from Alexis de Tocqueville, Lummis describes how the concept of democracy became synonymous not simply with a particular system of government but a way of life (in this case early America) dominated by the drive for material gain and thus requiring the legitimating principle of equality of opportunity – `a system which generates homogeneity and economic inequality, and pronounces the consequence just' (ibid).

Tocqueville however also warned of the advent of a notion of equality and popular government that would ostracise competition and dissent and give rise to nations that were little more than 'a flock of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd' (Ebenstein 1969:536). Such concerns heightened with economic modernity and John Stuart Mill's views on the risks of conformity under industrialisation (ibid: 544).

The idea that equality mainly relates to 'equality of opportunity' remains pervasive in liberal democracies (Lummis 1992:43). This does not require that all citizens be on an equal footing but simply that everyone be subject to the same 'rules of the game'. As Lummis notes, this pre-supposes an outcome where there are winners and losers i.e. inequality. The system assumes competition but also generates some degree of homogeneity – the economic inequality that it produces is regarded as just

'economic development mythology of "catching up", pretends to offer to all, a form of affluence that presupposes the relative poverty of some.'

because every citizen has the same opportunity to succeed or fail (ibid). Seymour Martin Lipset, building on the work of Tocqueville, showed that America, after adopting these principles, remained a deeply unequal society despite its commitment to constitutional equality and equal opportunity. (Lipset 1991: 4) Lipset shows that successive administrations in the United States attempted to implement equality of opportunity however conservative groups within civil society, including labour and business, conspired to defeat the policy (ibid). Furthermore, US citizens tend to support compensatory measures to ensure that people enter a competitive society on an equal footing e.g. targeted training, financial aid and relaxing job entry criteria for certain groups. They do not support efforts to pre-determine the outcome of such competition (ibid). This cannot be entirely dismissed as evidence of conservatism or prejudice. Lipset draws on Shelby Steele in outlining the contention that some affirmative policies are seen as attempts to by-pass the obligation to develop formerly oppressed people to a point where they secure their own rights and representation – a surprising degree of resistance has therefore emanated from the intended beneficiaries of such policy (Lipset, 1991: 5).

Development strategies in South Africa whether driven by national or sub-national government have been positioned to be ambitiously transformative. More consideration could have been given to Lummis' warning that 'It is a fraud to hold up the image of the world's rich as a condition available to all. Yet this is what the economic development mythology of "catching up" does. It pretends to offer to all, a form of affluence that presupposes the relative poverty of some.' (1992:47) Lipset further notes that even social democratic governments in Sweden and Australia have generally limited wage growth, increased privatisation, reduced income tax and cut-back on welfare measures (1999:11).

EQUALITY AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE

If inequality is an inherent aspect of the political economy in liberal democracies, to what extent can the machinery of government and the public service ameliorate this? There is a vast body of literature devoted to the manner in which public management systems have attempted to tackle inequality. This paper can trace only a few broad trends.

PLANNING

Norman Krumholz, a former director of planning in Cleveland USA, examined urban redevelopment and local economic development strategies for the regeneration of down town areas. He found that this often occurred at the expense of the poor in nearby residential neighbourhoods and in some instances worsened their plight or resulted in their relocation (2003: 224) In a series of case studies, Krumholz found that these strategies were supported by public subsidies but were often unplanned, and were led by private developers or real estate entrepreneurs whose objectives were private. Some of Krumholz's findings suggest that equity issues are best defined in relation to very specific local neighbourhoods and very particular urban development issues and that a case study approach rather than broad surveying may be the best manner of identifying the marginalised and incorporating their concerns into projects and urban design options (ibid).

Paul Davidoff focuses on the different interests to be represented through planning and urges that, 'Planning must be so structured and so practised as to account for this unavoidable bifurcation of the public interest.' Davidoff argues for pluralism in planning and more space for independent and critically minded planners to make their input into the process on behalf of minority or marginalised groups. Planners should be capable of developing

advocate-type relationships with particular clients (who could be designated marginalised groups) and helping clients to think through and shape their views before bringing these to an inclusive planning process characterised by debate and consideration of competing proposals (2003: 212).

Richard E Foglesong perceives a dilemma for urban planning in what he refers to as the 'capitalist-democracy contradiction'. Foglesong's Marxist critique suggests that capital faces the problem of retaining control over urban spaces and infrastructure that are necessary to reproduce labour and maintain capitalism, whilst appearing to democratise the control of urban land. In Foglesong's view, planners are caught between the democratic imperative to reduce inequality and respond to the needs of the vulnerable and capital's need to retain control of land and the built environment as important commodities in the means of production (Foglesong 2003: 103).

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

H G Frederickson an American theorist on public administration provides a useful outline of the origins of equity as a concept within public administration literature. Equity, explains Frederickson, was initially treated purely as a matter of fair or equitable treatment of public administration employees i.e. a concern of business organisation. (undated: 1) Frederickson argues that the notion that public administrators act simply as the neutral implementers of law and policy is not only outdated but inherently flawed. Grappling with matters of fairness, justice and equality, administrators are forced to confront the notion of social equity. (ibid: 2) The concept was further explored by Shafrtiz, and Russell who offer the following definition of social equity:

> …fairness in the delivery of public services; it is egalitarianism in action - the principle that each citizen, regardless of economic resources or personal traits, deserves and has a right to be given equal treatment by the political system (2005: 434).

Frederickson and others make a case for social equity being achieved by professional bureaucrats exercising broader discretion in decision-making than would normally be accepted within the conventional versions of the political–administrative model.[11] The need for checks and balances between professional staff and elected political leadership has recently come back into the South African discourse on local government.[12]

Of direct relevance to the South African programme of equity indicator development for local government, is Frederickson's blunt assessment of such technicist interventions, 'I respect those who are working on social equity indicators, social equity benchmarks and other forms of statistics, but the prospects of such labours for success seem to me to be limited. Furthermore, statistics and data lack passion and smother indignation' (undated:11).

By contrast, in his essay *Social Equity and Social Service* Stephen R Chitwood argues that social equity is not misplaced as an element of productivity measurement in government and therefore should be integrated into such systems (1974: 172). Whilst productivity measures look at quantity and quality of government services, social equity looks at the distribution of these services and their effect. Chitwood shows that issues of local government service distribution can be measured according to proportionality as determined by client needs and other determinants that go beyond the rule of 'willingness and ability to pay.' In the case of

the latter, it could be argued that many of Chitwood's principles are already reflected in the policy of free basic services.

TESTING EQUITY INDICATORS

As discussed the new public administration paradigm links the idea of 'social equity' to systems for service efficiency. The result is that equity is regarded as a value that must now also be capable of being measured and benchmarked. However reducing complex notions of equity to a set of public management indicators is no easy task. Furthermore the idea that this may be undertaken in order to allow a national government department to monitor the equity performance of another sphere of government, makes the task even more challenging.

The DPLG's Equity and Development Unit set out in 2008 to test an instrument for measuring equity within municipal functions for improved monitoring and reporting by local government. The point of departure for framing the indicators for measuring equity were the six designated groups, namely, gender, HIV and Aids, youth, children, disability, and the aged. Using the groups as the template for analysis, Mbumba Development Services, the service provider, commissioned by the GTZ-Strengthening Local Governance Programme, (GTZ-SLGP) on behalf of the department, was required to examine the institutional capacity of municipalities to address equity issues both within its ranks and in terms of the local community. Equity evaluation would cover patterns in internal employment policy and practise, council and managerial leadership, programme design, IDP, planning, budgets, law-making, service partnerships with civil society and performance management.

Indicators were developed for all the designated groups and formed the basis of a pilot survey in order to test the instrument and reflect generally on

municipal capacity for any form of equity reporting. A set of 10 to 16 indicators was refined for each of the designated groups. The indicators were structured according to the local government functions, described above. The structuring of the indicators was similar but not uniform for each designated group, for example. only the disability sub-set included 'buildings, equipment and facilities.' The following is an example of an indicator related to disability: % of sports, recreational and cultural facilities operated by the municipality that accommodate disabled usage or operate programmes that target disabled people

The sample for the pilot survey was 32 municipalities (roughly 11%) spread evenly over provinces and stratified by category (metropolitan, district and local) and further stratified within these categories according to capacity as assessed by the Municipal Demarcation Board (low, medium and high.) The rate of return of questionnaires was poor at 14 out of 32 (approximately 44%) and none of the district and metro municipalities responded.[13] The survey was supplemented by focus groups with equity oversight structures at provincial level.

FINDINGS

Given that this was a very limited pilot survey, the findings related more to the feasibility of using the respective indicators and basic assessments of municipal reporting capability and understanding the theoretical framework for equity measurements. Any comments on actual equity practices are tentative and illustrative only in the broad sense.

- Across the designated groups (i.e. youth, gender, disability etc.), many of the questions were found to be impractical for future studies of a similar nature due to the unreliability of the returned data. Many of the questions are only feasible if supplemented by a process for verification.

- The majority of respondent municipalities for example claim that up to 50% of their goods and services are procured from youth owned enterprises – the opportunity to verify this theoretically exists in supply chain management records.

- There is limited capacity within local government to effectively engage with equity issues involving its interactions and transactions with civil society. Reporting on issues of internal equity e.g. the percentage of senior managers who are women, appears to be more feasible as it is underpinned by legislated employment equity reporting requirements.

- Information management capability is weak and the ability to disaggregate existing data bases such as indigent registers by gender, age, HIV and Aids status etc is rare.

  - Claims in respect of the percentage of women headed households receiving basic services fell in the ranges of 26% to 50% and 76% to 100% but there was little clear evidence that municipalities had reliable data for such claims.

  - Most also claim that HIV and AIDS related targets are part of their IDP but none can provide examples.

- A significant degree of equity regulation already occurs through policy and legislation e.g. the Employment Equity Act and associated statutory reporting frameworks – duplication of this through additional reporting obligations should be avoided

- In the majority of respondent municipalities, women were reported to constitute 25% or less of the senior management.

- Equity intent is strong - all municipalities except one claimed to have a policy dealing specifically with youth and all except two claimed to have

some form of capacity building intervention to enhance youth participation in governance and civic affairs

- Most respondent municipalities were confident that some budgetary provision is made for facilities specifically for children and that organisations representing children's interests participate in IDP forums.
- The ability to direct basic services on a preferential basis or determine what percentage of any of the designated vulnerable groups access such services does not seem to exist.
- Nearly 75% of respondent municipalities claimed that the needs of the disabled were factored into skills development plans – such claims could, in theory, be verified through employment equity reports and the workplace skills plans.
- Equity considerations tend to be taken up once they are formalised in policy and legislation e.g. few municipalities claimed to have policies dealing with older persons and even those that did, noted that the policies were still being developed. This is because the group 'older persons' was a relatively recent addition to the ranks of those designated vulnerable.

The evidence revealed by the pilot survey does not allow for any sweeping conclusions on the manner in which equity is understood and applied in local governance. Tick-box surveys, standardised reporting formats and performance reporting generally conceal the critical inter-linkages and multiple forms of vulnerability that exist across the designated groups in relation to local government services.

Although municipalities seem to be generally sensitised to equity concepts and can readily engage in the discourse, there is less indication that they are able to apply this to their service and development obligations as a set of well formulated strategies or performance measures.

Many of the indicators framed in the test exercise were clearly too broad ranging in terms of trying to measure, for example, actual economic impact for vulnerable groups. More feasible were the indicators that looked at opportunity and access. Reporting on technical indicator sets that purport to measure equity across designated groups is unlikely to advance equality in relation to services and development opportunity. Alternative approaches which could be considered include:

- Case studies on particular scenarios where vulnerable groups have had to input into service or facility design, planning, budgeting or other municipal functions;
- The development of basic guiding templates for equity reporting in annual reports and engagement with vulnerable groups prior to such reporting – partnerships in doing equity audits could also be considered;
- Technical reporting i.e. equity in institutional patterns, budget allocation can frequently be derived from existing reports to National Treasury, Cogta and the Auditor General;
- Some level of monitoring is feasible from the statutory frameworks within which local government operates such as the Employment Equity Act and associated reporting; and
- Vulnerability profiling can be applied to customer satisfaction or quality of life surveys which may allow better understanding of individual experiences of vulnerability in different settings.

Rather than reducing equity down to yet another function of new public management methods, there is scope for a more realistic approach for tracking equity in basic institutional considerations of front-line service, gender balance in staffing and leadership, access to municipal amenities and facilities. More recognition also needs to be given to the equity

benefits of existing policy frameworks such as free basic services and employment equity provisions.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is not to suggest that the South African government's initiatives to advance equality in society and equity in the functioning of state organs are entirely disingenuous. These endeavours however are best viewed against the historical lessons that democratic systems do not necessarily advance equality even when they adopt the mantle of social democracy. Furthermore, while public administration systems can be geared towards increasing equity in the manner in which citizens use and experience government services and facilities, they have very limited impact on the fundamental economic and social inequality generated by the market. Any state initiative that ignores this and purports to advance significant changes in equality and equity through managerial tools like indicator sets and mandatory reporting formats needs to be viewed with great caution.

As Fakir and others have noted, persistent inequality gives rise to disquiet in society and lack of confidence in the state – for reasons of administrative and political stability therefore, government must be seen to redress inequality. Government programmes however tend to hold out a vision of equality based on non-realisable or unsustainable benchmarks – to paraphrase Lummis, the promise of affluence for all is premised on the disadvantage of some. Even with huge improvements in administrative efficiency and vastly improved integrity in resource deployment (which seem increasingly unlikely), government cannot deliver on such

promises. More importantly for the general thesis of this publication, citizens may begin to make unfavourable comparisons between what is promised and what is delivered. Coupled with a growing sense that the real imperative for such programmes are political imagery rather than material change, citizens disquiet and sense of being 'short-changed' is understandable even though the state has been a significant source of social benefits and services over the last decade and a half.

In many respects therefore, the dilemma of the South African state in confronting mounting dissatisfaction amongst citizens is unsurprising and unremarkable. Having committed to a political economy

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that guarantees inequality as an outcome, the state is forced to use the public service and local government to ameliorate the social consequences of gross economic inequality. Despite significant increases in social spending and fine-tuning the social safety net, the state is losing the battle and inequality, generated by the market, is rapidly widening the gap on government's compensatory measures. Manipulated measures of equality, largely technicist and designed to fulfil public management objectives, may help to obscure the reality of this dilemma but can never address the root causes. Corruption, incompetence, wastage and negligence in local government place these ameliorative strategies under further stress and hasten the prospect of increased social discord.

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ENDNOTES

[i] Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry Mrs LB Hendricks at a sanitation project handover speech at Elundini (Mount Fletcher Eastern Cape) in March 2007

[2] See for example Mbumba Development Services 2009: *Mainstreaming of Equity Issues within Local Government: Report on Pilot Survey,* commissioned by GTZ-SLGP / Cogta,

[3] It should be noted that this department has undergone a series of name changes: in 2008 it was the Department of Provincial and Local Government. After the elections in 2009 it became CoGTA, and in mid 2010 it became the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG). The Ministry however is still referred to as CoGTA,

[4] DPLG 2008: *Guidebook for Mainstreaming Equity Considerations in Local Government (2008)* prepared by Dynamic Development

[5] Ibid, p9-10

[6] Ibid

[7] See for example Walster, E. Walster, William G. and Berscheid, E. (1978). *Equity: Theory and Research* Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

[8] http://www.thefreedictionary.com/equality

[9] Minutes of the Joint Monitoring Committee on Improvement Of Status Of Women 19 October 2007
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[10] Mbumba Development Services 2009: *Mainstreaming of Equity Issues within Local Government: Report on Pilot Survey,* commissioned by GTZ-SLGP / Cogta, (Working Draft) p 5

[11] See for example See for example Rosenbloom, David H. and James D. Carroll. 1990. *Toward Constitutional Competence: A Casebook for Public Administrators* and Svara, J.H.and Brunet, J.R 2005. *Social Equity is a Pillar of Public Administration*, North Carolina State University

[12] See for example GGLN 2009 *Local Democracy in Action: A Civil Society Perspective on Local Governance in South Africa* p 39

[13] This despite extensive telephonic follow-up and facilitation of the exercise via preparatory focus groups.