



Local Government Brief: 09/2013

Empowering municipal planning, governance, oversight & benchmarking through easily accessible and reliable Local Level Data”

Local Government Briefs are monthly electronic updates for municipalities on critical areas of law, policy, facts and data affecting the sector.

1. Municipal Barometer

The need for local level data in South Africa has increased tremendously in the 19 years since the advent of a democracy in South Africa. Drivers for the increase in demand include: (1) the need to better understand and address the imbalances inherited from the pre-democracy era; (2) the need to properly evaluate the effectiveness of different government policies and programs in addressing these imbalances at the local level; and (3) the need to track general life circumstances for the population of South Africa.

However, more often than not, there have been growing concerns among key agencies regarding a lack of accessibility of readily available, and up-to-date local level data. Planners at regional and local levels (e.g. local municipalities) have complained that there is lack of adequate data to support effective program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A study conducted by SALGA and the Wits University’s African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS)¹ pointed out that municipalities are unable to draw nuanced and dynamic understanding of their constituencies due to poor or limited availability of local level data. COGTA (2009) mentioned that ‘the information intelligence base of what is happening in municipalities is uneven and actually absent in many respects’. Consequently, planning is not sufficiently aligned; implementation is fragmented and there is weak oversight by councillors as well as provincial and national authorities.

¹ A study on migration patterns, urbanisation and municipal governance conducted by SALGA and ACMS, 2010

In 2008, Statistics South Africa raised concerns about general supply of statistical data for government planning and decision making, a challenge that has been addressed at least in part through the packaging and dissemination of census 2011 data.

The National Development Plan 2030 of the National Planning Commission (August 2012) identifies 'a long-term approach to building capacity' to be one of the key critical areas in the improvement of local government performance.

While different government departments and private research organizations collect some of the required data, there has been no concerted effort to bring them together in one portal where they are made readily available and easily accessible. This has resulted in fragmented, often ad hoc data collection processes, which undermines the otherwise positive efforts by some key data agencies.

Local Data Programme

SALGA as a representative voice of municipalities responded to these challenges by establishing a Local Data Programme. This initiative brings together key data agencies such as Stats-SA, MDB, DBSA, SACN and CMRA to make local level data easily accessible to municipalities. Consequently, the Municipal Barometer was established as a web-based tool that will be used to manage and disseminate local level data to municipalities and stakeholders at manageable costs.

Primary objectives of the Municipal Barometer

The primary objectives of the Municipal Barometer are: (1) to provide municipalities and their stakeholders easy access to wide ranging local level data on areas that that municipalities are required to plan and / or report on; (2) to build the capacity of municipalities to locate, access, interpret and utilize data for planning, budgeting and governance processes; (3) to improve municipal governance and performance by equipping municipal officers with the necessary information they need for planning, implementing and monitoring projects; and (4) to provide time series data for selected municipal indicators.

Outcomes indicators

These indicators are grouped into 9 broad areas covering: (1) demographics; (2) economic growth and development; (3) access to basic services; (4) access to social services; (5) environmental issues; (6) municipal finance; (7) governance and accountability; (8) municipal planning; and (9) municipal capacity. Altogether, these indicators provide the necessary tools for holistic evidence-based policy development, planning and program implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The Launch

The Municipal Barometer was launched at the SALGA National Members Assembly held in Cape Town on 20 of November 2013. Delegates who visited the exhibition stand for further demonstration and memorabilia applauded the initiatives. Municipalities are now able to access ward level data, however, on some indicators. The process of refining and updating the data is on-going.

3. Implications for municipalities

Municipalities are advised to make use of the portal and provide feedback to SALGA. Feedback may include, but not limited to, the tool itself, the content, and suggestions on how to collect administrative data from municipalities. Collecting and collating administrative data will ensure that the data is regularly updated.

In addition, SALGA will be conducting provincial roadshows, in which municipalities will be informed about the portal and how to use it thereof. It is advisable that municipalities participate in these processes and provide feedback.