

**“PLEASE DO NOT FORGET US”, EXAMINING THE
CHALLENGES TO PRACTICABLE SOLUTIONS AND
INNOVATIVE SERVICE DELIVERY PRACTICES IN SOUTH
AFRICA’S RURAL COMMUNITIES**

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ABSTRACT

One positive outcome of South Africa’s post-1994 era is that local communities are increasingly looking inwards (at themselves) for resolving issues that they previously expected the government to resolve. This is not to deny that people still largely expect the government to do much of the work in terms of service, but they are at least slowly beginning to realise the need for self-reliance and innovative action on the delivery of services. Thus, the key question is “What can local communities, especially in rural areas, do to ensure that they are not left behind by service delivery and development innovations?” This paper will, first, give a brief description of innovative measures of service delivery that rural communities in South Africa have experienced and benefit from. Second, it will examine the challenges that they often face whenever they attempt to “catch up” with the rapid pace of developments throughout the country. Third, the paper will examine the practical application of the term “innovative service delivery” in the context of the rural areas, especially given the often-uneasy relationships between traditional authorities and “formal” local government structures in parts of the country.

Issues to be covered include:

- Innovative service delivery for *who* and *what*?
- How best to deal with service delivery challenges in an era of change.
- What roles are civil servants and other authorities playing in this process?
- The need to take sustainable measures towards the redress of apartheid-era backlogs and urban-rural disparities.
- Learning from the people: Examining home-based strategies for effective and practical service delivery.

The paper will conclude with an overview of the dynamics of channelling economic and other resources to rural areas, given the challenges of providing them to urban areas. Presently, there are so many projects and programmes that purportedly help to enhance service delivery, thereby alleviating rural poverty, but these will be meaningless eventually if the intended beneficiaries continue to suffer. Certainly, it will be a mockery of South Africa’s new democracy if the poorest of the poor—for

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whom most of the rural development projects are intended—continue to suffer the injustices of unequal development that they experienced before 1994.

Abstract

This paper examines the challenges to practicable solutions and considers innovative service delivery practices in South Africa's rural communities.

1. Intro
2. What are the key issues?
3. Innovative service delivery in the context of rural communities in SA
4. The challenges and constraints
5. Innovative service delivery: Lessons from other countries
6. "Please do not forget us"
7. Conclusion

Theme: "Practices of Innovative Service Delivery"

A third approach is aimed at *linking payments to municipal service delivery*. This would involve the innovative use of front-line staff (meter readers, payments clerks) to undertake regular opinion surveys about problems experienced in the community, so that municipal service delivery can be targeted appropriately for maximum benefit. The re-training of front-line staff as "customer service agents" offers major potential benefits. By more effective and more regular PR contact with residents (e.g. distribution of pamphlets, opinion surveys, etc), and by targeting municipal service delivery improvements to meet popular demand, municipal credibility can be restored, and gradually payments levels will improve.