



WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM?

The purpose of this section is to provide a broad overview of the history of local government in South Africa and to reflect on the core ideals and principles that inform and define the current system of local government.¹ It provides a framework for understanding local government’s successes and challenges, and for questioning whether the assumptions underlying the current system are still relevant and appropriate.

TIMELINE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT 1980–2021

THE EARLY DAYS (1980s–2000s)

1980

- **Black Local Authorities** (in rural and township areas) that have limited powers with a virtually non-existent rates base
- **White Local Authorities** (in municipalities) that have adequate powers and functions, and receive rates income for services rendered
- **Local Advisory Committees** that oversee the management of Indian and Coloured areas in what is then the province of Natal

1985 The **Regional Service Councils (RSCs)** and the **Joint Services Boards (JSBs)** are established to support “development related projects within the politically turbulent black areas”.² The RSCs are intended to deliver bulk services across regions that are less clearly consolidated than more established municipal areas. They are not accepted by black communities but achieve some success in improving services and redistributing funds to poorer areas. They are later incorporated into the notion of district municipalities (part of the current local government model).

The civic movement, which emerges before the start of the official negotiations, is extremely powerful and active, and plays a critical role in the final phase of apartheid and its eventual downfall. This has relevance for current challenges related to community engagement and the implementation of the all-of-society approach.

1990

EARLY 1990s

- **Increased protests**, following release of political prisoners and unbanning of political parties
- **Formation of local negotiating forums**, which focus on enhancing service provision and improving the living conditions in township areas, and demand a transition to a single tax base – giving rise to the well-known slogan, ‘One city; One tax base’
- **Transitional arrangements** put in place

1992 The **African National Congress (ANC’s) Regional Policy** is prepared for the constitutional negotiations. It contains the origins of South Africa’s current constitutional structure of decentralisation and three spheres of government. The process includes a debate among the political parties about what to call the second level of government (‘regions’ or ‘states’) – ultimately, they agree on ‘provinces’, as a compromise.

The Regional Policy prefigures the current local government legislative framework:

- Adoption of a 10-region model (ultimately 9 provinces).
- Strong focus on metropolitan government.
- Fiscal decentralisation that emphasises “the need to strengthen local control over the use of public resources”; acknowledges the link between paying taxes and receiving public services; and stresses the need to address inequality through redistributing resources at national level, which places some limits on the extent of decentralisation.

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¹ See Section 2, Chapter 1 ‘Governance in South African Cities’ for details of the legislative and policy framework covering local government in South Africa, especially in relation to cooperative governance and an all-of-society approach.

² <https://www.salga.org.za/Documents/Knowledge%20Hub/Local%20Government%20Briefs/15-YEARS-OF-DEVELOPMENTAL-AND-DEMOCRATIC-LOCAL-GOVERNMENT.pdf>

1990s

1993 (March): The **Local Government Negotiating Forum** (LGNF) is established, comprising existing local, provincial and national governments, and non-statutory groups led by the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), including the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) and extra-parliamentary parties (ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania or PAC).

1993 The **Local Government Transition Act** (LGTA) No. 209 of 1993 paves the way for the transformation of the local government system and the inclusion of local government as a third sphere of government in the new Constitution. The LGTA lists the functions of local government that will subsequently inform the provisions for local government in the Constitution; establishes representative provincial committees appointed by the **Transitional Executive Council** (TEC) to provide checks and balances on provincial power; establishes the national **Demarcation Board**; makes provision for organised local government; and introduces the concept of 'cooperative government'.

Agreements made through the LGNF:

- Provision of equitable services, based on the concept of 'one municipality, one tax base' and the notion of payment for services.
- Local government provisions to be included in the Interim Constitution, specifically recognising local government as a "deliberative legislative assembly with legislative and executive powers".
- A broad concept of the role, powers and functions of municipalities.

The concept of cooperative government, as outlined in the LGTA, was entrenched as a guiding principle in the Constitution, and ultimately defined a way forward for intergovernmental relations in South Africa.

1995/6–2000
INTERIM PHASE

Transitional metropolitan councils are established following the municipal elections.

1996 The **Constitution** establishes local government as an independent sphere of government.

1998 The **White Paper** defines the policy of developmental local government.

1998 The **Municipal Structures Act** No. 117 lays out categories of municipalities.

1999 The **Municipal Demarcation Board** (MDB) is established to oversee the redrawing of municipal boundaries.

A wall-to-wall system of local government is adopted, to tackle the apartheid legacies of spatial distortion, by disintegrating the boundaries between the previous white cities and the black 'homelands'.

1994–1995
PRE-INTERIM PHASE

Negotiating forums become statutory structures, and '**local governments of unity**' are established.

Temporary councils are established in areas where councils already exist, with predominantly white areas being enlarged to include black areas.

Nine **provincial advisory demarcation boards** are introduced to create boundaries for the 1995/6 elections.

The municipal elections take place in 1262 municipalities.

2000
LAUNCH OF DEMOCRATIC LOCAL GOVERNMENT

2000 Local authorities are consolidated into **metros, districts and local municipalities** (284 in total).

2000 The **Municipal Systems Act** No. 32 affirms municipal autonomy, introduces **integrated development plans** (IDPs) and regulates public participation.

2000 The **first non-racial, inclusive local government elections** are held.

TWO DECADES OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT (2001–2021)

2000s

2001–2006

2003 The **Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG)** is approved, with the aim of ensuring all South Africans receive basic services and in response to the growing number of service and infrastructure blockages and breakdowns.

The **Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) No. 56** establishes standards and requirements for the sustainable management of municipal finances.

2004 'Project Consolidate' is launched by the then Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) to deal with the 136 municipalities identified as being in distress. The aim is to improve municipal performance, accountability, service delivery and governance, with a particular emphasis on weak cooperation among government spheres, declining participatory democracy and a lack of support from provincial and national government.

2005 The **Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act No. 13** lays out the interdependent and interrelated relationships between the three government spheres, as well as intergovernmental forums and mechanisms.

2006 The **second local government elections** are held. The ANC retains its majority with two-thirds of the vote.

Cities enjoy a period of robust growth and economic progress, with increased consumer spending and a resultant growth in GDP, but also face service delivery and infrastructure pressures, as a result of rapid urbanisation.

Despite challenges around inequality and service delivery, the South African economy is growing.

2007–2009

2007 For the first time since 1994, the government budgets for a **surplus**.

2008 The world is hit by a **global financial and economic crisis**.

2009 The **Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA)** replaces the DPLG as custodian of cooperative governance, with an additional emphasis on partnering with institutions of traditional leadership.

The State of Local Government Report lays the basis for the development of the **Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS)** published in November.

South Africa is hit hard: job losses, an outbreak of xenophobic attacks, demonstrations around service delivery, and a recession from 2008 to 2009.

2010

South African hosts the **FIFA Soccer World Cup**, but urban disadvantaged groups do not benefit.

There is a shift in housing policy from eradicating to **upgrading informal settlements** and from building new houses to **creating sustainable communities**. However, instead of shifting the apartheid spatial legacy, this approach continues to locate poorer populations in peripheral areas and perpetuates neighbourhoods separated by race and class. In addition, it affects productivity, resulting in long and expensive commutes for poor urban residents.

Prior to the FIFA Soccer World Cup, there is massive spending on infrastructure: new stadiums and transport initiatives (Gautrain, bus rapid transit systems, airport expansion).

2010's

2011

The **third local government elections** are held. The ANC wins just under 62% of the vote.

Buffalo City and **Mangaung** are upgraded to metros, bringing the total to 8.

2013

The **Spatial Planning and Land-Use Management Act (SPLUMA)** No. 16 provides for the devolution of a range of functions to municipalities, overseen by national government, and a cooperative approach to strategic spatial planning and land-use management.

There is an increased focus on the centrality of cities in supporting economic development and planning.

2014–2015

The SACN works closely with COGTA to develop South Africa's urban policy framework.

2019

President Ramaphosa introduces the **District Development Model (DDM)**, as a platform to improve cooperation between the various spheres and entities of government in delivering services and to support the developmental outcomes of local government. The DDM concept is about identifying the competitive advantages within each district and then linking local economies with district and national economies to improve economic growth.

2018

The United Nations (UN) adopts the **New Urban Agenda (NUA)**, to provide guidance on managing sustainable urbanisation.

South Africa aligns the priorities of the IUDF with those of the NUA.

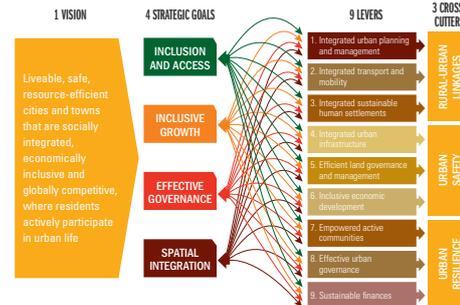
The NUA and IUDF both emphasise the importance of all-of-society and whole-of-government approaches.

2016

Cabinet approves the **Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF)**, South Africa's urban policy framework aimed at managing urbanisation and achieving economic development, job creation and improved living conditions for its people.

The **fourth local government elections** are held. Support for the ANC falls to its lowest level since 1994. With the ANC's diminished dominance, coalition and minority governments became more widespread.

IUDF vision and goals



2020–2021

2020 A new **Municipal Demarcation Bill** is drafted to replace the Municipal Demarcation Act of 1998 and sets out new factors to be considered when determining municipal boundaries. It stipulates that the Demarcation Board may make boundary decisions to move a whole municipal ward only once every 10 years.

2021 The **fifth local government elections** are held. The ANC loses its outright majority in all metros (Cape Town: DA leadership; Gauteng City-Region metros: DA-led coalitions; Buffalo City, Mangaung and Nelson Mandela Bay: ANC leadership, despite a decline in support; eThekweni: ANC-led coalition).

The COVID-19 pandemic hits South Africa, halting many processes, as everyone focuses on crisis management and emergency governance issues. The pandemic highlights and exacerbates the broader economic, developmental and governance issues that local government has faced over the previous decade.