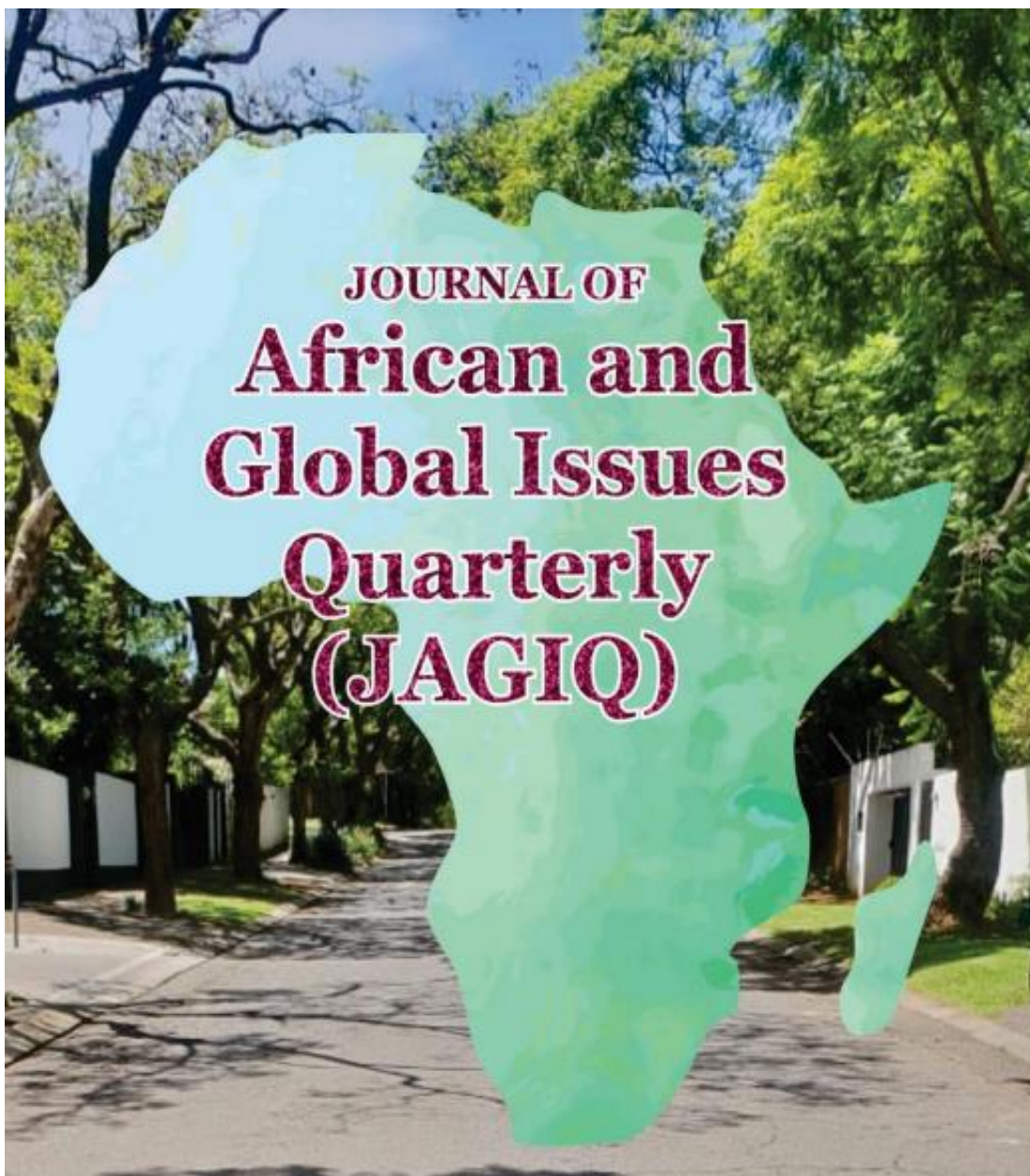




ISSN: 2709-8478 (PRINT)
2710-0073 (ONLINE)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69778/2710-0073/2026/7.3/EN>

Editorial Note

Indigenous Knowledge, Institutional Capacity, And Africa's Quest For Self-Determination

Welcome to the October 2026 issue of the African and Global Issues Quarterly. The collection of articles assembled here reflects the journal's enduring commitment to interrogating the multifaceted challenges and opportunities confronting the African continent and its place in the global order. The contributions in this volume share a common thread: a determination to look inward for solutions while engaging critically with external frameworks and legacies.

Several articles in this issue foreground the imperative of harnessing indigenous knowledge and frameworks as vehicles for progress. Nkemakolam and Amaechi propose "Igbozealotism" as an indigenous framework for socio-political and economic advancement, challenging scholars and policymakers to centre African philosophical traditions in contemporary governance discourse. Similarly, Mthethwa, Kolanisi, and Singh explore the repositioning of indigenous knowledge in fostering "studentpreneurship," while Mahlala and colleagues examine indigenous governance systems through a public administration lens. Kilonzo and her co-authors contribute a profile of indigenous banana cultivars, reminding us that agricultural biodiversity and traditional knowledge are integral to food security and rural livelihoods. These contributions collectively affirm that sustainable development in Africa must be rooted in, rather than detached from, local epistemologies and practices.

The issue also engages critically with questions of institutional effectiveness and the delivery of public goods. Lamidi and Hofisi examine the implementation gap in South African public service delivery, highlighting the centrality of bureaucratic capacity. Malope's study of community health worker programmes illuminates the intersection of recruitment, governance, and the democratisation of public administration. These articles underscore that institutional strengthening is not merely a technical exercise but a deeply political one, requiring accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness to community needs.

On the continental and global stage, Odaudu's analysis of post-Françafrique dynamics in the Sahel offers a penetrating account of shifting dependencies and external realignments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, a region of immense strategic significance. Taleat, Lukamba, and Diedericks examine the localisation of the

Sustainable Development Goals, arguing that global agendas must be adapted to local realities if they are to deliver meaningful prosperity. Maeresera's study of strategic communication and nation branding during Zimbabwe's COMESA chairmanship illustrates the role of media in projecting regional leadership.

Finally, the issue addresses pressing social and demographic concerns. Omopo and Pillay investigate the psychological distress associated with food insecurity and housing conditions among school-going children and adolescents, while Ifanayajo, Palamuleni, and Adebowale provide a decomposition analysis of fertility rates among women of reproductive age in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Taken together, these thirteen articles offer a rich and diverse body of scholarship. They challenge us to think deeply about the relationship between indigenous agency and institutional effectiveness, between local realities and global agendas. We trust that this issue will stimulate further research and debate and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge on African and global affairs.

We thank our authors, reviewers, and readers for their continued support.

Editor

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69778/2710-0073/2026/7.3/a7>

BRIDGING THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP: BUREAUCRATIC CAPACITY AND PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

South Africa continues to face persistent challenges in translating progressive policies into effective public service delivery outcomes. While the country has established an extensive legislative and institutional framework since the democratic transition, significant disparities remain between policy intent and implementation on the ground. This study underscores the importance of bureaucratic capacity as a critical determinant in bridging this implementation gap, particularly in contexts marked by inequality, resource constraints, and administrative fragmentation. It examines the relationship between bureaucratic capacity and public service delivery performance, with a focus on identifying key constraints and enabling factors within selected government institutions. The study also aims to contribute context-specific insights that can inform institutional reforms and capacity-building strategies. Using qualitative case studies drawn from selected municipalities and provincial departments, the findings reveal that weak administrative capacity significantly undermines effective service delivery. Conversely, institutions that demonstrate stronger leadership, professionalization, and coherent administrative systems tend to perform better, even within resource-constrained environments. The study concludes that strengthening bureaucratic capacity is essential for improving public service delivery outcomes in South Africa. It highlights the need for targeted investments in skills development, institutional stability, and governance reforms that prioritize meritocracy and accountability.

Keywords: *Bureaucracy, State Capacity, Accountability, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Good Governance, Public Service Delivery,*

1. Introduction

South Africa has been a country of significant reform in the democratic dispensation since 1994, with the goal of redressing past inequalities and creating a developmental state that will be inclusive. The government has a number of progressive policies in place and a well-developed legal and institutional framework to strengthen public services like health, education, housing, and social welfare. The Constitution and subsequent public administration reforms have placed great importance on equitability, accountability and responsiveness to citizens' needs through key policy instruments. However, there are still significant gaps in translating policy intent into real results as many communities continue to suffer from poor access to basic services (World Bank 2018; National Planning Commission 2012).

One of the major challenges faced by the South African state is the failure to adequately execute policies. Policies may have good intentions and theory but are not always implemented effectively due to administrative failures, and/or inefficiencies. The “implementation gap” has been extensively documented in government reports and in the academic literature, pointing to some challenges, including limited expertise, weak institutional oversight and poor coordination (Auditor-General of

South Africa, 2021; OECD, 2020). Consequently, protest in the service delivery sector and citizens' discontent over the state's service delivery has become a familiar occurrence in the socio-political landscape, and a growing expression of disappointment with the state's performance.

This paper suggests that one important reason for these areas of difference between policy and practice is the issue of bureaucratic capacity. Bureaucratic capacity is the capacity of the public institutions to design, implement and manage policies with skilled staff and efficient systems and stable organizational structure. In the context of inequality and limited resources, as well as administrative fragmentation, like in some parts of South Africa, the role of competent and professional public administration becomes even more important (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Fukuyama, 2013). A lack of institutional capacity can impede service delivery, even when there is an adequate supply of resources and good policies, and a strong capacity can allow institutions to operate relatively well under constraints.

The main aim of this study is to investigate the link between bureaucratic capacity and Public service delivery performance in South Africa. In particular, it aims at uncovering the main hindering

factors and facilitating factors affecting the effectiveness of administration in the country as well as the factors that affect the performance of the institutions. The study seeks to provide some insights that are specific to the selected municipalities and provincial departments, in order to understand how the variations in capacities affect the service delivery outcomes. The general research questions for this inquiry are: (1) what are the key dimensions of bureaucratic capacity that impact service delivery in South Africa? (2) what are the institutional factors that limit or facilitate effective implementation? and (3) how do disparities in the capacity of the institutions influence disparities in the performance of services?

This paper is important because it helps to advance academic and policy discourses on the question of state capacity and governance in the developing world. South Africa has given considerable attention to policy design, but not as much to the institutional capacities needed to implement the policy effectively. This research focuses on the capacity of the bureaucracy, and thus underscores the need to invest in state's internal functioning, such as skills development, professionalization, and organizational coherence. The results are meant to be feeding into the continued work of strengthening public institutions and enhancing service delivery but, as well, provide specific recommendations to policy and administration makers trying to get between the intent of a policy and the developmental results.

2. Literature Review

Conceptualizing Bureaucratic Capacity

Bureaucratic capacity is widely understood as the ability of public institutions to effectively design, implement, and manage policies in pursuit of collective goals. It encompasses multiple dimensions, including administrative competence, technical expertise, and organizational coherence. According to Francis Fukuyama (2013), state capacity refers not only to the scope of government activity but also to the strength and effectiveness with which institutions carry out their functions. Similarly, Peter Evans and James Rauch (1999) emphasize the importance of “Weberian” bureaucratic characteristics—such as meritocratic recruitment, career stability, and professional norms—in enhancing state performance. These features contribute to what is often described as “embedded autonomy,” where bureaucracies maintain independence from political interference while remaining responsive to societal needs.

Scholars further distinguish between different types of capacity, including administrative capacity (the ability to manage resources and processes), technical capacity (specialized knowledge and skills), and political capacity (the ability to navigate political environments and sustain support for policies) (Gomide & Pires, 2014). In developing contexts, weaknesses in any of these dimensions can significantly

constrain policy implementation. Thus, bureaucratic capacity is not merely a function of resources, but also of institutional design, leadership quality, and organizational culture.

Policy Implementation and Service Delivery

The study of policy implementation provides important insights into why well-formulated policies often fail to achieve desired outcomes. Early implementation theories, particularly top-down approaches, conceptualized implementation as a linear process in which centrally defined goals are executed by lower-level actors. Scholars such as Paul Sabatier (1986) argued that clear objectives, adequate resources, and strong control mechanisms are essential for successful implementation. However, this perspective has been critiqued for overlooking the complexities of real-world governance.

Bottom-up approaches, advanced by scholars like Michael Lipsky (1980), shift attention to “street-level bureaucrats” who exercise discretion in implementing policies. Lipsky argues that frontline officials play a decisive role in shaping outcomes, often adapting policies in response to local constraints and pressures. This perspective highlights the importance of capacity at multiple levels of the bureaucracy, as well as the need for flexibility and context-sensitive implementation strategies.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly adopts a hybrid perspective, recognizing that both structural conditions and actor-level dynamics influence implementation

outcomes. Factors such as intergovernmental coordination, institutional clarity, accountability mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement are all critical in determining service delivery performance (Hill & Hupe, 2009). In this regard, bureaucratic capacity emerges as a central variable that shapes how effectively policies are translated into practice.

Public Service Delivery in South Africa

South Africa’s public service delivery system operates within a robust constitutional and legislative framework that prioritizes equity, human dignity, and social justice. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa establishes the foundational principles of democratic governance and mandates the state to provide basic services to all citizens. Complementary policies, such as the National Development Plan, outline long-term strategies for improving service delivery and reducing inequality.

Despite this progressive framework, the country continues to face significant challenges in achieving consistent and equitable service delivery outcomes. Persistent socio-economic inequalities, spatial disparities, and resource constraints complicate implementation efforts, particularly at the local government level. Reports by institutions such as the Auditor-General have repeatedly highlighted issues including financial mismanagement, weak internal controls, and limited administrative capacity within municipalities (Auditor-General of South Africa,

2021). These challenges are further exacerbated by political instability and high turnover in key administrative positions, which undermine institutional continuity and effectiveness.

Linking Bureaucratic Capacity to Performance

A growing body of empirical literature demonstrates a strong relationship between bureaucratic capacity and public sector performance. Cross-national studies have shown that countries with more professionalized and merit-based bureaucracies tend to achieve better development outcomes, including higher levels of economic growth and improved service delivery (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Fukuyama, 2013). These findings suggest that institutional quality, rather than merely policy content, plays a role in shaping outcomes.

In the South African context, research indicates that variations in bureaucratic capacity across provinces and municipalities contribute to uneven service delivery performance. Institutions with stronger leadership, clearer administrative systems, and higher levels of professionalization are generally more effective in implementing policies and delivering services. Conversely, weak capacity is associated with delays, inefficiencies, and poor accountability (National Planning Commission, 2012; World Bank, 2018).

However, despite these insights, gaps remain in the literature. Much of the existing research focuses on macro-level indicators of state capacity, with less attention to the micro-level dynamics within specific institutions. There is also a need for more context-specific studies that examine how different dimensions of bureaucratic capacity interact in practice. This study seeks to address these gaps by providing an in-depth analysis of selected government institutions, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the capacity-performance relationship in South Africa.

3. Theoretical Framework

The research is based on the theory of state capacity that focuses on the capacity of public institutions to design and implement policies effectively as a crucial factor in the outcome of development. Capacity of the state does not just mean the presence of formal institutions, but also the quality of governance, administrative capacity and the capacity to enforce rules and provide services. The power of the state is conveyed not just by what it wants to do, but by its ability to do it, as Fukuyama (2013) stated. In this sense, bureaucratic capacity turns into a pivotal element of state capacity, especially in low-income countries where poor quality institutions can severely restrict the capacity of policy to have an impact. The framework also relies on Weberian ideas of bureaucracy, where merit-based selection, professionalization and stability are viewed as key

characteristics of effective public institutions (Evans & Rauch, 1999).

The study also draws on theories and concepts from governance and public administration, specifically addressing the relationship between political leadership, administrative systems and service delivery results. In the context of governance theory, accountability, transparency and coordination are of importance at various government levels. Given the South African context, where intergovernmental relations and power are shared between national, provincial and local authorities, intergovernmental relations are essential for ensuring the implementation of policies. The analytical lens also draws from implementation theory, which acknowledges that outcomes are not only a function of the policy design, but of the capacities and behaviors of the actors involved in executing the policy, such as the people who implement policies at the front-line and the institutional leaders. This holistically integrated approach enables a deeper understanding of the effect of bureaucratic capacity on service delivery performance.

For the purpose of putting this framework into practice, the study takes a comparative case study approach which involves selected municipalities and provincial departments that vary in administrative capacity and service delivery performance. The study is at the municipal level covering City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality and

Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality. Cases are chosen to represent a range of institutional environments. As one of the largest and most resourceful municipalities in South Africa, the City of Johannesburg is an example of a complex urban administration that has a relatively higher capacity but still has many issues with coordination.

eThekweni Municipality provides insights into a metropolitan government that has also experienced some moments of innovative government and challenges to governance. Conversely, Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality is a context of limited resources and capacity, and where service delivery failures and administrative instability have been reported. These are diverse cases which allow for a comparison to be made across the different levels of bureaucratic capacity, and the consequences of those levels.

The study is at province level and involves the Gauteng Department of Health, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance, and North West Department of Education. The departments were chosen because they play a crucial role in providing the basic services and because they perform differently. The Gauteng Department of Health is a case, in that it is situated in a relatively well-resourced province, but has still suffered from problems of management and system coordination. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs plays a key role in monitoring and supporting municipalities' performance, and in gaining a deeper

understanding of intergovernmental dynamics and capacities building. Located in a province where there are often problems with administration, the North West Department of Education provides a glimpse into the impact of capacity constraints on the provision of frontline services in key areas.

The cities and provinces were chosen as diverse as possible in geographic location, resources available, and administrative effectiveness. This variation enables the study to determine both general trends and the unique determinants of bureaucratic capabilities and service provisioning. The framework allows for an in-depth discussion of the processes and factors that influence results in relation to institution performance; it allows for comparisons between high- and low-performing institutions across various levels of government. In conclusion, this approach contributes to the overall goal of this study which is to provide practical findings of how institutional reform and capacity-building strategies can be adapted to enhance public service delivery in South Africa.

4. Research Methodology

This study is of a qualitative nature that seeks to examine the relationship between the bureaucracy's capacity and the delivery of public services in selected South African institutions. The qualitative method is especially apt in this study because it seeks to analyze why things are the way they are and circumstances that are not adequately captured by quantitative data. The research focuses on depth rather than breadth, thus allowing for more detailed understanding of the

operation of bureaucratic capacity in practice and its impact on service delivery outcomes in different governance settings. The research is done by using the comparative case study approach and a purposive selection of municipalities and provincial departments that are listed in Section 3. The cases at the municipal level cover the City of Johannesburg, the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality and the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality. These municipalities were chosen to represent different levels of administrative capacity, resource endowment and service delivery performance. The inclusion of large metropolitan municipalities and a resource constrained district municipality enables a comparison between the impact of scale, institutional complexity and capacity limitations on implementation outcomes. Province level study of Gauteng Department of Health, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and the North West Department of Education. They were chosen because they are key departments that provide vital services and contribute to governance in various sectors and because administrative performance in these departments varies. As a whole, these case studies offer a powerful foundation to explore the issue of bureaucratic capacity in institutional and geographic settings.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants with direct knowledge and experience relevant to the study objectives. Participants were drawn from the selected institutions based on

predefined inclusion criteria, including their roles, responsibilities, and involvement in the processes under investigation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including administrators, managers, faculty members, healthcare professionals, or policymakers. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection continued until no new themes, concepts, or insights emerged from subsequent interviews. Saturation was achieved with additional interviews conducted to confirm the consistency and completeness of the findings. This approach ensured that the data collected were sufficiently rich and comprehensive to address the research questions. Data collection involves a number of qualitative approaches in order to achieve triangulation of data and strengthen the credibility of findings. Semi-structured interviews with key informants, such as senior officials, middle managers and frontline administrators in the selected institutions are first conducted. These interviews will seek to gain in-depth views on institutional capacity, leadership, administrative processes and implementation challenges. Second, the document analysis is conducted to check on relevant policy documents, strategic plans, annual reports, audit results and internal evaluations. This enables the study to evaluate the formal institutional structures and to compare them with practices. Where possible, minimal observations (e.g., attendance at public meetings or service delivery forums) can be included to allow real-time admin interaction and decision-

making processes to be captured. Data analysis is done in a thematic pathway, where qualitative data from the interviews and documents are systematically coded and categorized on the basis of the themes identified in the theoretical framework. These themes include administrative capacity, leadership, professionalization, coordination and accountability. The findings from the selected municipalities and provincial departments are then analysed cross-case and patterns, similarities and differences are identified. This comparative approach allows for the study to link the different levels of bureaucratic capacity with the observed levels of service delivery, and thereby enhance the analytical depth of the study. Ethical aspects are considered well throughout the research. Interviews are a voluntary process and informed consent is given by all respondents. Individual responses and sensitive institutional information is anonymised where necessary to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. The study also guarantees the security of the data and the use of the data exclusively in the context of the study. The ethical protections are necessary to ensure the integrity of the research and the trustworthiness of the research with participants, especially when there may be political sensitivity to discussions about institutional performance and capacity. The overall methodology selected is appropriate for the study's goals. The research employs a mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches and a comparative case study design, which allows for context-specific insights into the role of bureaucratic capacity in public

service delivery. The intentional use of multiple municipal and provincial departments provides analytically sound results and applicability to the process of targeted institutional reforms and capacity-building strategies in South Africa.

5. Findings and Analysis

The results of the selected case studies show that the capacity of the bureaucracy has a significant impact on the results of public service delivery at both the municipal and provincial levels. The trend that is apparent across the municipalities – City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality and Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality – and the provincial departments – Gauteng Department of Health, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, and North West Department of Education – is that institutions with well-established administrative systems, stable leadership, and professionalised personnel perform better in service delivery, even when they have limited resources. Weakness, on the other hand, is associated with inefficiencies, delays and inconsistencies in the implementation of policies.

One of the limitations of several of the cases covered is the lack of critical skills and limited professionalisation in the public service. Respondents often mentioned a lack of technical knowledge, especially in financial management, infrastructure planning and project implementation in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and the North West

Department of Education. Such shortcomings tend to lead to the under-spending of budgeted resources, inadequate infrastructure maintenance, and missed service delivery commitments. The City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality and the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality have higher access to skilled personnel, however they are faced with several issues of uneven distribution and high turnover of key employees in key departments. Capacity challenges are not only a problem in resource-limited environments but also in other institutional environments in different ways.

The lack of coordination between the different levels of administration and the low effectiveness of coordination systems also contribute to poor implementation. In municipalities with complex governance structures, like the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, there is a risk of duplication of functions and slow decision making processes because the responsibilities are split among the different departments. Likewise, in the Gauteng Department of Health problems were identified around co-ordination of administrative units and health care facilities, impacting on efficient service delivery in procurement and resource allocation processes. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, which is mandated to assist municipalities, also suffers from limited powers in terms of coordination of capacity-building programmes, given overlapping mandates and weak enforcement powers. The results

suggest that coherent administrative systems and clear lines of authority are crucial in enhancing administrative capacity.

Political interference and institutional instability become other restrictions for some of the cases selected. Rapid leadership and senior management changes create discontinuity and loss of institutional memory in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and the North West Department of Education. Political factors sometimes affected appointments and decision making, and this had an adverse impact on meritocracy and efficiency, several respondents noted. In relatively good performing institutions like eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, periods of political contestations have been linked to administrative disruption. The dynamics here highlight the interactions that may occur between the political and administrative domains and their impact on the performance of the bureaucracy.

However, the study also finds a number of factors that enhance the effectiveness of service delivery. Good leadership and management are always linked to good institutional performance. Good leadership in various departments in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality and the Gauteng Department of Health has helped to establish a clearer strategic direction, boost staff morale and better utilised resources. In the same vein, government initiatives to speed up the professionalization and merit-based recruitment process, especially in technical positions, have had positive effects on improving administrative

capacity. Investing in training and skills development puts institutions in a better position to deal with complex demands for service delivery.

Systemic administrative structures and strong accountability systems are also important for the realization of performance. The eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, for instance, has relatively well established planning and monitoring systems, which have helped to ensure more reliable service delivery results, notwithstanding the broader governance challenges. While some of these support programmes are effective under some circumstances, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs has shown how effective structured support programmes can be in building municipal capacity. The results indicate that institutional design and management can reduce some of the resource limitations.

A comparative analysis of the cases provides important insights into the differences between how BCP translates into service delivery performance. The City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (CJM) has a higher level of resources but faces challenges due to the complexity of coordinating and governing complex parts, creating variations between the different departments. The eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality shows a more nuanced picture, with some institutional assets counterbalancing governance problems. The Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality on the other hand, has more systemic capacity constraints, resulting in

continual service delivery failures. The same trends are seen at provincial level, but the Gauteng department of health fails to show up as particularly doing well compared to the North West department of education, although there are challenges.

The comparative analysis of the six case studies demonstrates that bureaucratic capacity is a critical determinant of public service delivery outcomes across municipal and provincial government institutions in South Africa. Institutions characterized by stable leadership, professionalized personnel, effective administrative systems, and strong accountability mechanisms consistently achieved better service delivery results than those facing institutional weaknesses. Although resource availability influenced performance, the findings suggest that administrative capacity often played a more significant role than resource levels in shaping implementation outcomes. Common challenges across several institutions included shortages of critical technical skills, weak professionalisation, fragmented coordination mechanisms, and political interference. The Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and the North West Department of Education experienced the most severe capacity constraints, particularly in financial management, infrastructure planning, and project implementation, resulting in budget under-expenditure, deteriorating infrastructure, and recurring service delivery failures. Similarly, weak coordination arrangements in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, the Gauteng

Department of Health, and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs contributed to inefficiencies, duplication of functions, and delays in decision-making. Political interference, frequent leadership changes, and instability further undermined bureaucratic effectiveness by weakening institutional memory, meritocracy, and administrative continuity.

At the same time, the findings identified several factors that enhanced service delivery performance. Strong leadership and effective management in institutions such as the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality and the Gauteng Department of Health contributed to clearer strategic direction, improved staff morale, and more efficient use of resources. Professionalisation initiatives, merit-based recruitment, training, and skills development programmes also strengthened institutional capacity and improved responsiveness to complex service delivery demands. Furthermore, robust accountability systems and well-structured administrative processes proved essential in supporting implementation effectiveness. For example, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality benefited from effective planning, monitoring, and evaluation systems, while the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs demonstrated the value of structured municipal support programmes. Comparatively, eThekweni and the Gauteng Department of Health displayed relatively stronger

administrative capacity and service delivery performance, whereas the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and the North West Department of Education recorded weaker outcomes due to persistent structural and operational deficiencies. Remarkably, the findings confirm that bureaucratic capacity remains central to public service delivery, highlighting the need for context-specific reforms that strengthen skills, coordination, leadership, accountability, and institutional stability within South Africa's public sector.

Overall, these findings support the main conclusion of the study, which is that the capacity of the bureaucracy is a key determinant in explaining the outcomes of the public service. The differences found between the municipalities and provincial departments selected, highlight the need to implement contextually relevant interventions that tackle issues of structural and operational capacities. The analysis gives a basis for formulating strategies to improve institutional performance based on constraints and enablers identified, and helps address the disconnect between policy intent and implementation in South Africa.

6. Discussion and Implications of Findings for Public Service Delivery in South Africa

The analysis of the selected South African municipalities (City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality and Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality) and the province

departments (Gauteng Department of Health, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, and North West Department of Education) has a strong connection with the existing literature on public administration in Africa. Evidence shows a consistent across-continent link between the quality of bureaucratic institutions and service delivery outcome. Research in Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana, and Kenya among others underscores the need for competent, well-trained and professionalised bureaucracies to make policy commitments come to fruition (Evans & Rauch, 1999; World Bank, 2017). In this regard, the difference between institutions is not of any policy differences but of the capacity of the bureaucracy to implement them which, as argued above, is a crucial determinant of the effectiveness of implementation in governance.

One of the key implications from this study is the need for technical skills and professionalisation in the public service. The challenges found in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and in the North West Department of Education – specifically limited financial resources, infrastructure planning and project implementation – are similar to those identified in other contexts in Africa. In Nigeria, for example, studies indicate that poor bureaucratic capacity in particular sectors, notably technical sectors, has a significant impact on development outcomes and the effectiveness of service delivery (Adebayo, 2019). Likewise, research in Ghana shows poor professionalization and inadequate training systems are responsible for

inefficiencies and ineffective implementation of public policies (Ohemeng 2011). The results indicate that targeted recruitment, ongoing training and professional development can be a critical component to enhancing institutional performance throughout South Africa.

Management practices and organizational effectiveness add to this vision. Empirical evidence on the Nigerian civil service shows that the better the management practices, e.g. through monitoring of performance, accountability systems and strategic planning, the higher the project completion rate and the better the delivery of services (Rasul & Rogger, 2018). This is especially true of the Gauteng Department of Health and City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, where administrative complexity and coordination problems have a negative effect on the performance of the department, despite relatively high resource levels. The idea is that improving the capacity of the bureaucracy needs more resources, but it also needs to make better management systems and institutional procedures.

This study identified administrative fragmentation and poor coordination as constraints to better governance, and these are also common in African governance systems. In Kenya, for instance, decentralization reforms have created situations where there is overlap in mandates and coordination issues between the national and local governments, which has caused inefficiencies in the provision of services (Cheeseman, Lynch, & Willis, 2016). Similar challenges

have been reported in Zimbabwe, where institutional integration and coordination is weak and policy implementation is limited (Mukonza, 2014). The patterns are similar to those seen in the Gauteng Department of Health and City of Johannesburg, where a lack of coordination and coordination failures exacerbate delays in decision making and duplication of resources. Enhancement of coordination mechanisms and better definition of institutional roles is thus essential to increasing administrative efficiency.

Political interference and institutional instability are also important factors that influence the performance of the bureaucracy. The results of the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and the North West Department of Education, both of which see political factors play a role in appointments and continuity, are consistent with trends across Africa. In Nigeria and Uganda, the politicization of the civil service has been cited as a major constraint on institutional performance given its negative impact on meritocratic principles and lessens the capacity of institutions (Fukuyama, 2013; Grindle, 2012). Often changing leaders and patronage appointments lead to a loss of institutional memory and an inefficiency in the public administration system. The results of this study underscore the need to ensure that bureaucratic institutions are insulated from undue political interference and remain accountable to the democratic process.

Meanwhile, comparative lessons from around Africa illustrate a number of facilitating conditions that

can be used to build up the capacity of African bureaucracies and to enhance the quality of service delivery. Good leadership and management is found consistently in some departments such as in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality and the Gauteng Department of Health and is always linked to good organisational performance. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2015) has found that good leadership improves strategic direction, staff motivation and institutional coherence. Likewise, investigations conducted in Rwanda show that leadership efforts have led to marked improvements in public sector performance through the creation of accountability and results-based management (Chemouni 2014). The above examples indicate that leadership development must be one of the key pillars of South Africa's capacity building efforts.

Institutional design and administrative systems are also important to facilitating effective service delivery. The relatively high performance of the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality could be due to more coherent planning and monitoring systems, thereby highlighting the value of structured planning and monitoring systems. New Public Management has led to the implementation of performance-based systems and monitoring in public service delivery in Ghana, which have enhanced efficiency and accountability (Ohemeng & Ayee, 2016). Likewise, there are practical examples of structured support programs in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs to

show how such programs can contribute to the improvement of municipal capacity, though such programs' effectiveness is dependent on context. The results of this research suggest that administrative systems that are well designed can alleviate some of the limitations imposed by limited resources.

Another crucial element of bureaucratic capacity in the African context is digital transformation. Empirical evidence in Nigeria and Kenya demonstrates that use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) can improve efficiency, transparency and coordination of the public sector (Bwalya, 2009; Heeks, 2002). But in many cases, technical capacity and institutional preparedness place restrictions on these advantages. The current lack of uniformity in the use of digital systems by municipalities and provincial departments in South Africa is an opportunity for change e.g. in procurement, data management, tracking services etc. The use of digital tools together with institutional reforms will have a major impact on improving the performance of the bureaucracy.

A third important lesson from comparative African literature is that institutional culture and motivation influence outcomes of public service delivery. Other research carried out in Nigeria has shown that low morale and productivity in the Civil Service are partly due to poor working conditions, lack of promotion and poor incentive systems (Adebayo, 2019). This is applicable to the South African context where high staff turnover, combined with inadequate

skills distribution, indicates that there are issues with the retention of skilled staff. Institutional culture can be strengthened by merit-based recruitment, professional recognition, and improving working conditions, which may contribute to increasing the capacity of the bureaucracy and improving the performance of providing services.

These findings are in line with the general trend of public sector reform in Africa. Structural adjustment programmes and global governance trends have put pressure on reform in many countries, including Ghana and Nigeria (Ohemeng, 2011). These reforms have sought to bring about new changes, but many are implemented poorly or fall short due to institutional resistance. South Africa also provides examples of a large number of policy reform initiatives to enhance service delivery that have had varying levels of success because of the capacity constraints that remain in the system. This underscores the importance of commitment and effective mechanisms to implement reforms and thus deliver on their desired effects.

Comparative analysis also highlights the need for context-specific strategies to capacity building. The reality is that although there are common challenges in all African countries, their expression is different in each country because of the local context. For instance, in rural municipalities like Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality, the capacity of the basics of administration and technical might be the main challenge, while in urban

municipalities like the City of Johannesburg, there might be more complex coordination and governance challenges. Likewise, the demands of provincial departments like the Gauteng Department of Health and the North West Department of Education are different and demand interventions that are specific to the sectors. This reinforces the need to tailor approaches to capacity building to the needs and context of individual institutions (World Bank, 2017). Lastly, the results provide a broader context on the developmental aspects of the bureaucratic capacity in South Africa and across Africa. Good public service delivery is a technical problem, but also one of the factors in the legitimacy of the state and citizens' trust in it. A lack of service delivery can lead to erosion of public confidence in government institutions and can have an impact on social cohesion. On the other hand, strengthening the capacity of the bureaucracy can help to improve governance outcomes, increase democratic accountability, and foster inclusive development. Improving governance and institutional capacity is at the heart of sustainable development outcomes (World Bank, 2017). Finally, the extended discussion highlights the extent to which the problems and opportunities South Africa has identified are part of wider African governance issues. Comparative analysis of other countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda supports the need to professionalize, manage, and make government agencies politically neutral and innovative to build their capacity. It is important to note that any effort to better the delivery of

public services in South Africa needs to be a holistic and context-specific solution that tackles the structural and operational aspects of capacity. Such an investment in human capital, a strengthening of administrative systems, a culture of meritocracy and a culture of accountability will help the state do a better job of fulfilling its developmental mandate and meeting its citizens' needs.

7. Integrated Framework to Bridge the Implementation Gap between Bureaucratic Capacity and Public Service Delivery in South Africa

The current situation of a significant disconnect between the capacity of municipalities and provincial departments in the public service and the service outcomes experienced by users in the field, demands a systemic and holistic reform response. It is observed in organisations such as the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality and the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality as well as the provincial departments of the Gauteng Department of Health, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, and the North West Department of Education. The literature on public administration in developing countries consistently reveals that problems in delivering services are not solely the result of the policy process, but of implementation gaps related to limitations in the capacity of public officials (Brynard, 2005; World Bank, 2017). This study suggests an Integrated Bureaucratic Capacity-Service Delivery Alignment Framework (IBCSDAF),

which consists of five interrelated pillars on this premise to help address the gap in implementation.

The first pillar is to build the capacity of the professional bureaucracy, especially in the wake of the skills gap that was observed in Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and the North West Department of Education. Persistent issues in financial management, infrastructure planning, and project implementation are issues these institutions face, and have direct impacts on service delivery performance. Systemic weaknesses in technical skills and financial controls in public institutions are documented in South African oversight reports, and similar patterns are observed in the reports (Auditor-General of South Africa, 2023). The evidence from other African countries is similar, with Nigeria showing that lack of professionalisation translates to poor development outcomes, due to inadequacy of bureaucratic expertise (Adebayo, 2019), and Ghana demonstrating that inadequate training systems result in weak policy implementation (Ohemeng, 2011). It is in this context that the framework suggests a system of professionalisation based on a competency, which is built on the foundation of merit-based selection, lifelong learning and sectoral certification. This is in keeping with the South African government's public service reform programme which places professionalisation as a critical focus in enhancing the state's capacity (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2022). The Rwanda experience also shows that devoting resources to the

development of bureaucracy over time will lead to better service delivery results and will enhance the efficiency of service delivery (Chemouni, 2014).

The second pillar relates to the issue of administrative fragmentation and poor coordination, especially in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality and the Gauteng Department of Health. Overlapping mandates and silo-oriented departmental structures in these institutions lead to duplication, delays and inefficiencies in providing services. Decentralised governance institutions have been noted to experience coordination problems in unclear or poorly coordinated institutions (Cheeseman, Lynch, & Willis, 2016). The framework calls for the creation of Integrated Service Delivery Coordination Units (ISDCUs) at the municipal and provincial levels in response. These units would streamline planning functions, standardise budgeting systems and provide a framework for interdepartmental collaboration. The experience of Ghana shows that decentralisation resulted in significant improvements in the ability of the local and central government institutions to coordinate effectively, which in turn boosted service delivery effectiveness (Ohemeng & Ayee, 2016).

The third pillar is to enhance the systems for performance measurement and consequences. In the set of selected South African institutions, there is still a lack of accountability mechanisms and a low level of enforcement of performance standards as significant constraints on

quality service delivery. This is evident in the reports from the Public Service Commission that its recommendations for oversight have not been effectively implemented and disciplinary action for underperformance has not been taken (Public Service Commission, 2021). The framework thus suggests a Results Based Performance Management System (RB-PMS) to tie institutional performance with the budgeting processes and with individual accountability. This involves disciplining for poor performance in a structured way, as well as having performance contracts that can be enforced. Evidence from Nigeria confirms that these systems work: The more effective the performance enforcement, the more efficient the bureaucracy, and the less the implementation is faulty (Rasul & Rogger, 2018). Strong accountability systems are also vital to the implementation gap in developing countries, as highlighted by the World Bank (2017).

The fourth pillar is about the depoliticised administration and the need for political neutrality. Political considerations often play a part in appointments and continuity of administration, in institutions like the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and the North West Department of Education. The evidence from comparative African studies indicates that the politicisation of the bureaucracy has a negative impact on performance and on the stability of institutions. Patronage-based appointment systems have been discussed as significant impediments to administrative efficiency and

professionalism in Uganda and Nigeria (Fukuyama, 2013; Grindle, 2012). To meet this challenge, the framework suggests the implementation of a Public Administration Integrity and Separation Protocol (PAISP), to further define the difference between political leadership and administration execution. This encompasses merit-based recruitment of senior appointments, independence of appointments and safeguarding of administrative tenure from political cycles. The South African Public Service Commission (2021) also calls for the adoption of the principles of meritocracy and a decrease in political involvement in administrative processes.

The fifth pillar is digital government and adaptive implementation systems to enhance efficiency, transparency and coordination. In health departments like Gauteng Department of health and City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, inefficiencies in procurement and tracking of services are attributed to some extent to the fragmented and outdated administrative systems. Focusing on African studies, one can see that digital governance, if implemented well, can have a tremendous impact on the efficiency of public sector services. Looking at African studies, one can see that digital governance, when done properly, can have a tremendous impact on the efficiency of public sector services. E-government in Kenya has increased transparency and decreased administrative delays (Bwalya, 2009) and the use of ICTs in Nigeria has improved coordination and

eliminated bureaucratic delays (Heeks, 2002). The framework thus includes the creation of a Unified Public Service Digital Platform (UPSDP) for bringing together the procurement, HRM, budgeting and monitoring of service delivery platforms system across government departments. On the other hand, Heeks (2002) warns that digital reform can be ill-fated if institutional capacity is inadequate, creating what is known as a design–reality gap. This highlights the need to tie technology changes to capacity and readiness of staff.

In all 5 pillars, leadership and institutional culture become key enablers of reform cross-cuttingly. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2015) provides evidence that the quality of leadership plays a big role in the effectiveness of public sector reforms in the developing world. The lack of leadership and accountability culture are cited as major challenges for effective public administration in South Africa (Naidoo, 2005). In contrast, Rwanda is a country that has experienced substantial improvements in state capacity and service delivery results due to the commitment of its leaders (Chemouni, 2014). The framework thus provides for a Leadership Development and Accountability Compact, including mandatory leadership training, performance assessment, and ethical governance certification of senior officials. This is especially true of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, where the capacity of leadership is

crucial in coordinating the support functions of the municipalities.

The framework implementation is suggested in phases to assure sustainability and institutional absorption. During the near term (0-2 years) attention should be directed to enhancing consequence management systems, tackling key skill gaps and enhancing performance monitoring systems (Public Service Commission, 2021). For the medium term (2-5 years), government's focus should be on coordinating units and deploying digital governance platforms (World Bank, 2017). It should be to establish the complete professionalization of the public service and the unification of depoliticized administrative systems in the long term (5 years and beyond). This is a gradual approach which aligns with the international public sector reform literature that stresses gradual reform and context sensitivity in developing countries (World Bank 2017).

Finally, it can be stated that the Integrated Bureaucratic Capacity–Service Delivery Alignment Framework offers a holistic and contextually relevant solution to the ever-present implementation problem in the South African public sector. It directly tackles issues highlighted by the Auditor-General of South Africa (2023) and the study by Brynard (2005), namely skills shortages, weak governance, fragmented governance, weak accountability, political interference and limited digital integration, which are prevalent in municipalities and provincial departments. The framework combines professionalisation, coordination reform, performance

enforcement, depoliticisation and digital transformation, providing a unified approach to enhance the performance of the bureaucracy. The key to develop institutional reforms to strengthen service delivery is ongoing institutional reform work that ensures that capacity and effectiveness of the service delivery system is aligned, which needs to involve the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality and the Gauteng Department of Health (World Bank, 2017; UNDP, 2015).

8. Concluding Remarks

This study aims to explore the relationship between the bureaucratic capacity and the outcomes of public service delivery, between selected municipalities such as the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality and Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and the departments of government in the province, with specific reference to the Gauteng Department of Health, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and the North West Department of Education. The main argument put forward is that the capacity of the bureaucracy is a key factor in determining the quality of services and that institutional and administrative problems are responsible for a significant proportion of implementation failures, while lack of good policy design is largely a secondary issue (Brynard, 2005; World Bank, 2017).

The results show that institutions with relatively good administrative

systems, stable leadership and more professionalised staff, like some parts of the City of Johannesburg and the Gauteng department of health, perform better on measures of service delivery despite resource constraints. In contrast, structural capacity gaps are higher in institutions like Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and the North West Department of Education, such as skills shortages, inadequate financial management and inconsistent leadership structures. These challenges are invariably associated with sub-optimal performance in infrastructure maintenance, budget utilisation and service delivery targets.

One important finding from the study is that the notion of bureaucratic capacity is multidimensional, and consists of inter-connected institutional characteristics such as human capital, administrative systems, coordination mechanisms and governance stability. Failure to do well in any of these dimensions can have a serious negative impact on the overall performance of the institution. This result supports the existing literature on African governance that focuses on the role of the quality of the bureaucratic institutions and their capacity to enforce policy regularly and efficiently (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Fukuyama, 2013).

Also, the study underscores the need to pay proper attention to the role of political-administrative relations in influencing the performance of bureaucrats. Political interference and frequent changes in leadership were identified as factors which affected administrative continuity and

impinged on institutional memory in some of the selected institutions, especially in the North West province. This research is aligned with comparative studies conducted in other African countries that conclude that politicisation of the administrative system affects efficiency, the meritocracy framework and long-term planning (Grindle, 2012; Cheeseman, Lynch, & Willis, 2016). It is suggested that administrative reform is not enough to give a good service, the political and the bureaucratic roles need to be demarcated.

Concurrently, the research determines key enabling conditions to enhance service delivery results. There is a persistent and consistent focus on the need for strong leadership, professionalised staffing, coherent planning systems and effective accountability mechanisms in driving institutional performance. Within the limitations of an institution's resources, such as eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, structured monitoring systems show that good governance practices can help reduce the impact of resource constraints. This further validates the importance of institutional design and management practices in the effectiveness of the public sector, as much as resource availability, (UNDP, 2015).

The comparative dimension of the analysis further highlights that South Africa's service delivery problems are by no means unique but are part of a global phenomenon that can be discerned in many developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Other countries, including

Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, exhibit similar patterns of weak and poorly coordinated government, and implementation problems. The South African case is unique however, in that there are relatively advanced institutional structures that still experience implementation problems, a situation characterized by “capable institutions with uneven performance.”

To overcome these challenges, the study recommended an Integrated Bureaucratic Capacity–Service Delivery Alignment Framework with five key pillars: 1) professionalisation of the public service; 2) coordinated governance systems; 3) enhanced performance management and accountability; 4) depoliticised governance structures; and 5) digitalisation of service delivery systems. The framework is designed as a flexible and usable guide to improve the capacity and capability of states in a range of institutional settings.

In conclusion, the paper comes to the conclusion that enhancing public service delivery in South Africa requires a long-term, multifaceted reform initiative that goes beyond temporary fixes. Long-term investments in human resources, institutional reform, improved accountability mechanisms, and political support for administrative professionalism are all necessary. The gap between policy purpose and execution is likely to continue in the absence of such changes, hurting developmental objectives and weakening public confidence in state institutions. This research adds to the current discussions on state capacity and governance efficacy in emerging nations by placing the South African experience within a larger African comparative framework. It supports the idea that bureaucratic institutions are crucial to development outcomes and that ensuring fair, effective, and sustainable public service delivery requires improving them.

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