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Editorial Note

This is a brief introduction to a timely and intellectually relevant conversation in this AYIKA publication. It centres on ten articles that cover unique aspects of development challenges in Africa, with particular attention to South Africa and Nigeria. These contributions, taken together, not only identify persistent challenges in environmental protection and economic growth but also advance policy recommendations in response to Africa's changing circumstances across various fronts. To be clear, the needs of Africa are multifaceted and interconnected in several ways; the challenges are similar across the board, although the manifestations may differ geographically. These articles address the connections in the needs and choices of Africa while projecting a better future. Motswaledi's article illuminates this in this volume, concluding that equitable and inclusive energy provision should be prioritised as a fundamental social justice intervention to redress historical inequalities, promote human dignity, and advance socio-economic transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. Such insight applies to all of Africa.

Collectively, these contributions demonstrate that Africa's development challenges cannot be understood in isolated compartments. Governance affects environmental management; energy affects social justice; infrastructure affects economic growth, etc. The major strength of this collection is therefore its interdisciplinary character. It brings together governance, economics, environmental studies, development studies, public policy, agriculture and social justice. More importantly, the articles consistently return to a central question: how can African societies build institutions and development pathways that improve human welfare without undermining the environmental and social foundations of the future? This collection does not claim to offer simple answers. Instead, it provides evidence, cases and critical perspectives that can help scholars, policymakers and practitioners ask better questions. New and better research questions are a right way in the right direction.

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ENTRENCHING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL SIXTEEN WITHIN A DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

An exploratory analysis was undertaken to assess how a developmental local government in South Africa can entrench the Sustainable Development Goal on peace, justice, and strong institutions through participatory public engagement with local communities. A major task of a developmental local government in South Africa, mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996, is to be a coalface of service delivery that contributes to developing socio-economic development strategies for local communities to mitigate against poverty, inequality, and unemployment. A desktop analysis using secondary document analysis is pursued as a research strategy to derive relevant themes related to sustainable development goals and developmental local government. The exploratory analysis is framed by public value theory to influence how developmental local government can entrench Sustainable Development Goal 16 and align it with its service delivery mandates and approaches. Generated themes from secondary documents were current challenges in the local government system in South Africa, conceptualization of a developmental local government in South Africa, and integration of sustainable development goals with a developmental local government. Strategies such as data usage for monitoring local government performance, fiscal injection at the local government level, reassessing the institutional context of local government provision, and multi-stakeholder engagement for capacity building informed the findings, which make propositions on how the Sustainable Development Goal on peace, justice and building strong institutions can be entrenched with a developmental local government in South Africa.

Keywords: *Accountability, developmental local government, good governance, socio-economic development, sustainable development goals*

Introduction

The South African Constitution (No. 108 of 1996), through section 152, sub-section 1, mandates local government to improve socio-economic conditions, encourage public participation, and deliver services effectively and sustainably to align with sustainable development goals (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Additionally, the National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030 envisions a local government that is developmental and transformative, to build a capable, effective, and efficient state that designs and implements local economic development strategies through public participation by local communities (National Planning Commission, 2012). Therefore, the intention of the Constitution and the NDP is to strengthen local government to be effective and sustainable in tackling the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, in an effort to embed a democratization process for South Africa (National Planning Commission, 2012).

In 2015, the United Nations member states adopted Agenda 2030, which seeks to transform the world through global governance mechanisms, resulting in the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs are envisioned as a shared blueprint for the future prosperity of all countries worldwide, with peace, justice, fairness, and sustainable

development, even at the local community level. The United Nations Agenda 2030 sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets and 232 approved indicators, including Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions (Fernandez, 2020; United Nations, 2015). Therefore, the core focus of this article is on how Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG16) can be entrenched within a developmental local government in South Africa to improve service delivery performance and contribute to peace and stability in the country (Fernandez, 2020; United Nations, 2015). The article adopts an exploratory analysis, drawing on secondary sources, to critique how sustainable development goals, particularly SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions, should be embedded within developmental local government in South Africa.

The identified knowledge gap that necessitated this particular discourse, is that despite South Africa framing its legislation and strategies such as the Constitution, White Paper on Local Government of 1998, National Development Plan: Vision 2030 and being signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals that set Agenda 2030 by United Nations of institutionalizing governance mechanisms to be developmental and transformative; local municipalities are not empowered to implement sustainable development programmes and projects through engagement with

communities. As a result, there is a dissonance between legislative and policy frameworks and institutional strategies and practices at local government level that fail to ensure that sustainable development practices and activities are implemented through community participation to strengthen peace, justice and security. This assertion is demonstrated by the current violent community protests across South Africa against migrant people from other African countries.

Johnston (2020) and Osborne, Nasi and Powell (2021) assert that there are overlaps and interconnections among the seventeen SDGs, arguing that SDG16 on peace, justice and building strong institutions is central to coordination and delivery, and that none of the other sixteen goals can be achieved without it. Its emphasis on justice, good governance, and the building of strong institutions is fundamental to public administration at all levels of government, which require appropriately skilled and trained public servants who are morally and ethically upright to manage government resources effectively (Johnston, 2020). A good governance approach within local government is tied to its specific constitutional mandate of socio-economic development and improved service delivery to realize sustainable development goals for all citizens.

Based on this reflection, this article's significance lies in its effort to provide an exploratory analysis of how SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong

institutions can be entrenched within developmental local government in South Africa. A major task for a developmental local government in South Africa, being at the coalface of service delivery for communities, is to contribute to developing strategies that mitigate the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment (Development Bank of Southern Africa, 2000). Failure of local government to deliver expected services that can contribute to employment creation to address the triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment results in constant service-delivery protests that become violent and undermine peace and stability in the country (Ramodula & Govender, 2020).

A developmental local government should assume a leadership posture to craft sustainable developmental programmes and activities in pursuit of its constitutional mandate to undertake socio-economic development through public participation in decision-making processes. This article is grounded in public value theory to conceptualize the service delivery mandate of a developmental local government in South Africa. By reviewing secondary documents, numerous themes are derived for detailed analysis, namely: challenges inherent in South African local government; aligning developmental local government with the sustainable development agenda; and strategies for integrating sustainable development goals within

a developmental local government in South Africa. The following section outlines the methodology guiding the inquiry.

Methodological Approach

A qualitative research inquiry is adopted as the methodological approach due to its flexibility, openness, and contextual responsiveness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Plaatjie, 2013). A qualitative exploratory design is used as a blueprint to guide the article in reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting data from secondary documentary sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Secondary documents reviewed and analyzed include South African legislative policies and strategic plans for the country and the local government system, scholarly articles on the local government system, good governance, the National Development Plan, and the Sustainable Development Goals (Plaatjies, 2013).

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to determine the relevancy of the articles that were to be included or excluded during the systematic review and analysis. Different databases such as Sabinet, Science Direct, JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar were consulted to search for relevant documents that focus on local government and developmental local government in South Africa, sustainable development goals, and peace, justice and strong institutions, governance and good

governance. Out of 93 documents that were subjected to review process through reading abstracts, 50 that included scholarly articles, legislations, policies and strategic documents were deemed to contain relevant themes that were relevant for the study (Kaywood, 2021). Another inclusion criteria were that articles with identified topics containing relevant topics were to be from 2010 to 2025. An exception was made for legislation and policies due to the fact that governments' policies and legislation do not easily change. An exclusion criterion was for articles mainly from developed countries as the focus was to generate lessons from developing countries that share similar context with South Africa that can inform local government. Another exclusion criterion was scholarly articles that are from developed countries in Africa but are published before 2010. The reason was to derive recent information that is not outdated due to contextual changes.

The adoption of a qualitative exploratory design as the study's methodological approach aligns with Park and Blenkinsopp (2011), who affirm that it enables the researcher to make informed decisions. Thematic analysis of the reviewed literature is conducted by following the process detailed by Braun and Clarke (2012). Thematic analysis entailed five steps which are familiarization with data, generate initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and identifying and naming themes (Braun

& Clarke, 2012:14). In the practical sense, the authors achieved thematic analysis through reading repetitively articles and noting ideas and impressions that are related to the topics outlined during the search, systematically assigning descriptive and interpretative labels to information emerging from reviewed articles, grouping the codes, ideas and interpretative labels together to form broader themes, merging ideas and labels that are aligning with the topics, and finally writing a detailed analysis in order to write a draft report. The credibility of the inquiry was ensured whereby the two authors conducted the thematic analysis separately and meet for the debriefing session (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, the identified themes and material were subjected to peers at the university to review and assess the quality of the themes relating to how they were generated and make suggestions.

Public Value as a theoretical framework for the inquiry

The analytical review on strengthening a developmental local government in South Africa to effectively meet its constitutional mandate of providing basic services and stimulating socio-economic development through engagement in public participatory processes with the community is informed by the Public Value theoretical perspective. Mark (2013) notes that Public Value Theory was coined by Moore around the year

2000 to explain how public managers can adopt professional qualities, work approaches, and processes from private-sector institutions when creating value for shareholders. Depending on the context, a similar approach can be adopted by public sector leaders and officials to influence performance standards in public sector institutions such as the local government system.

Public Value is viewed through a prism in which public sector institutions design and implement governance approaches, management strategies, and operational processes to add value to public services and to bring about sustainable development activities for communities (Kaywood, 2021). Such governance, leadership, and performance culture resonate with the “Batho Pele” (People First) principles of public service ethos (i.e., customer service, selflessness, openness, ethical conduct), which are essential for South Africa’s developmental local government system to contribute to maximizing value to the public when rendering services to the public efficiently and effectively. Lawrence (2014) asserts that public managers should learn from their counterparts in private-sector institutions to manage institutional and operational affairs in ways that enable them to meet their performance objectives and targets. They create private value in the products and services they sell to customers, thereby increasing companies’ revenue and enabling

them to earn profits above production costs.

Despite public and private sector institutions operating from different paradigms and values, institutional mandates, strategic and operational perspectives, and processes, Public Value Theory has gained traction amongst policymakers, scholars, and practitioners (Kaywood, 2021). The intention is to understand how some of its principles can be applied within government policy, strategies, programmes, and activities to improve service delivery approaches, mechanisms, and processes. Strategic thinking and planning derived from Public Value Theory align with the vision and outcomes of the National Development Plan of South Africa, envisioning a developmental way of planning that can be responsive to the goals of building and strengthening the local government system to undertake its constitutional mandate (Lawrence, 2014; National Planning Commission, 2012; O'Flynn, 2007). Anderson et al in Kaywood (2021: 8) outline public value to entail the manner in which government crafts "its principles and values, citizens' entitlement and non-entitlement of rights, benefits, and prerogatives, and citizens' obligations to society, state, and amongst themselves". O'Flynn (2007) analyses Public Value as a multi-dimensional construct that expresses citizens' preferences through processes and outcomes that can foster trust and fairness in service delivery, thereby requiring political

astuteness. This further implies that trust and fairness should be hallmarks of service delivery, driven by effective developmental local government institutional mechanisms that align with the Sustainable Development Goals on peace, justice, fairness, and the building of strong institutions.

Current challenges inherent in South Africa's local government system

The current local government system in South Africa is grappling with serious shortcomings of governance and leadership failure, lack of delivery of basic services such as water, electricity and waste management, and serious corruption due to weak institutional mechanisms that demonstrate lack of performance efficiency and effectiveness (Auditor-General of South Africa, 2023; Mnguni & Subban, 2022). This is despite South Africa having a world-acclaimed Constitution that envisions a developmental local government that should deliver basic services by ensuring inclusiveness through genuine public participation and anchors human and governance sustainability (Munzhedi & Phago, 2020). Inclusivity and public participation, as constitutional imperatives, demand that local communities be able to share ideas about socio-economic development challenges and propose solutions to be encompassed in the Integrated Development Plans as strategies for local municipalities (Republic of

South Africa, 1996). However, challenges of corruption and institutionalized poor performance in service delivery result in local municipalities failing to engage with and account to citizens, which in turn leads local citizens not be able to participate in localizing sustainable development goals and denied an opportunity to shape their prospects. Furthermore, progressive and transformational legislation like the Municipal Structures Act, No. 117 of 1998, the Local Government Municipal Systems Act, No. 32 of 2000, and the Municipal Finance Management Act, No. 56 of 2003 were enacted to provide categories of local government that are democratized and engage communities through public participation in service delivery programmes. Therefore, a developmental local government that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring peace, justice and strong institutions should craft principles, mechanisms and processes to support and monitor local government efforts to improve socio-economic development (Republic of South Africa, 1998; United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, incorporating targeted indicators of SDG16, such as promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, into local government planning mechanisms will ensure sound financial management, whereby services are provided cost-effectively without maleficence or corruption

(Republic of South Africa, 2000; 2003; United Nations, 2015).

Regardless of this legislation, poor performance still undermines local, district, and metropolitan municipalities across South Africa (Auditor General of South Africa, 2023). Local government in South Africa is synonymous with a lack of service delivery, thereby preventing the development of socio-economic programmes that can encourage genuine public participation by communities in deliberating on Integrated Development Plans (National Planning Commission, 2015). Services are not provided sustainably; design strategies are poor and fail to ensure safety and a healthy environment; and there is no accountability as per the constitutional mandate outlined in Section 152 (Kaywood, 2021). All these negative performance indicators threaten South Africa's ability to realize the strategic priorities and goals of the National Development Plan, namely eliminating poverty and reducing inequality (National Planning Commission, 2012; Republic of South Africa, 1996). At the current juncture, the local government in South Africa is deviating from its constitutional and strategic mandates to be developmental and sustainable, aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens, by virtue of being the coalface of service delivery. This means that the local government system in South Africa should be revitalized to embed Sustainable

Development Goal 16, foster peace and justice, and build strong institutions that are responsive to improving the socio-economic conditions of local citizens.

Conceptualizing a developmental local government in South Africa

The idea of a developmental local government should be tied to a people-centered developmental approach that fosters public participation and inclusivity in crafting institutional strategies and mechanisms that lead to effective service delivery, thereby encouraging a sustainable development pathway (Van der Waldt, 2018). Transformational elements such as the maximization of socio-economic development, improved coordination and integration, leading and learning, and democratic development are considered essential for developmental local government in South Africa's 1998 White Paper on Local Government (Landsberg & Graham, 2017). Koma (2012) concurs with the assertion of developmental local government that facilitates local economic development, fostering national economic growth and job creation, thereby creating a pathway for sustainable development in South Africa. As a consequence, the White Paper on Local Government of 1998 sought to entrench a developmental local government approach by introducing an Integrated Development Plan as a legislative and institutional mechanism that mandates local government authorities to

engage in honest public participation with local communities to influence their programmes and activities related to service delivery.

Therefore, a developmental local government should be closely tied to a sustainable development agenda that prioritizes a human development approach, ensuring that local communities are at the centre and direct beneficiaries of the government's development initiatives (Maserumule, 2011; Munzhedzi & Phago, 2020). Despite development being a moving target, its effective and progressive implementation through a developmental local government can strengthen resilience and sustainability, thereby improving local communities' quality of life over time (Munzhedzi, 2020). Therefore, the thrust of a developmental local government in fostering sustainable development is to design and institutionalize effective strategies and programmes that can maximize local economic development, enabling local communities to participate in generating economic and entrepreneurial activities to mitigate poverty and hunger that threaten peace and stability.

For a developmental local government to be sustainable, it should incorporate robust institutional mechanisms that are responsive to service delivery improvements to meet the needs of local communities. Sustainable development programmes that can lead to the realization of sustainable development goals should be

informed by the needs of local citizens so that they can have buy-in and be responsive to practical challenges at the coalface of service delivery, rather than just policy prescripts. This further implies that local government should be professionalized and appointments should be based on meritocracy rather than cadre development, which contributes to corruption and poor performance in many of South Africa's local municipalities (Makole, 2022).

Integrating sustainable development goals with a developmental local government in South Africa

The achievement of sustainable development goals is closely intertwined with developmental local government in South Africa, as it is on the front lines of service delivery, where government services and local citizens coalesce and interact. However, when the SDGs were adopted in 2015, it was noted that many African countries, including South Africa, are performing poorly across all dimensions of the SDGs, undermining their core theme of 'leave no one behind' (Annan-Aggrey, Bandauko & Arku, 2021). The United Cities and Local Government (2019) acknowledges the important role that local government plays in realizing sustainable development goals, which should be reflected in its legislative and institutional mechanisms, such as the Integrated Development Plan, a cornerstone of developmental local

government in South Africa. An emphasis is on ensuring that "local government implements policies and day-to-day actions that are integrated with sustainable development goals performance targets to have direct impact on the population's access to infrastructure, enjoy peace and stability, and are provided with services and life opportunities" (United Cities and Local Government, 2019: 13).

Lucci (2015) avers that sustainable development goals should be inculcated and localized at the local government level by recognizing sub-national contexts across countries, thereby driving the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. This implies that a developmental local government should embed performance mechanisms in its institutional toolbox that clarify service delivery targets. These performance indicators and targets should be efficiently rolled out and effectively monitored by citizens and communities at the local level during implementation, ensuring they are linked to each SDG. The main goal of the SDGs is to address challenges of inequality that are the main causes of poverty and destabilization in many African countries and thus aligns neatly with African Agenda 2063, which is a roadmap for radical transformation of the African continent (Annan-Aggrey et al, 2021). Thus, the intention of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals and the African Agenda 2063 for transformation through socio-

economic development programmes and actions finds expression in the South African context at the local government sphere. The nature of a developmental local government is to build strong institutional mechanisms that enable it to efficiently and effectively undertake its mandate of socio-economic development and inclusive participation by local communities, who take control of their well-being by actively engaging in integrated development planning in their communities (Mashapa & Makole, 2025).

Strategies for entrenching sustainable development goals within a developmental local government in South Africa

For sustainable development goals to be systematically integrated within a developmental local government in an effort to improve service delivery, numerous strategies are essential to close gaps between South African local government's policy imperatives and their practical application at the coalface of service delivery. This then provides an opportunities for the South African local government system to learn best practices from its African counterparts such as Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda who have adopted different legislative and strategic institutional mechanisms to integrate and implement sustainable development goals within their local government approaches, practices and programmes (African Union Commission, 2015; Beegle,

Christiaensen, Dabalen, & Gaddis, 2016; Brookings, 2019; Reddy, 2016). The reason for the choice of the aforementioned countries is that their populations experience similar socio-economic conditions and challenges of high unemployment, poverty, lack of infrastructure, and higher levels of social volatility such as violence that undermine peace, justice, and social coexistence, which have characterized sub-Saharan African countries and are also experienced in South Africa (African Union Commission, 2015). However, despite challenges that undermine good governance and sustainable development goals of enriching citizens' lives and promoting peace, security, and stability, these countries are signatories of the African Agenda 2063 that seeks to transform their countries to adopt a developmental approach that aligns with sustainable development goals as touted by the United Nations' 2030 Agenda (African Union Commission, 2015; United Nations, 2015). Taking a cue from lessons learnt from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), local government in some African countries was central to defining and communicating a global developmental agenda for citizens and to building partnerships between government and its citizens (United Cities and Local Governments, 2019). As such, a developmental local government in South Africa, which is viewed as the coalface of service delivery aimed at enhancing citizens' quality of life, is well-placed to anchor

strategies to make sustainable development goals achievable in practical terms. Developmental local government in South Africa, by being in proximity to local citizens who are vulnerable to poverty and hunger, is constitutionally expected to craft local planning strategies that stimulate citizens' engagement and participation in socio-economic development programmes and activities to dissuade them from criminal activity (United Nations Development Group, 2015). Focus areas of perceived strategies to entrench sustainable development goals in developmental local government in South Africa are: data use for the implementation and monitoring of service delivery programmes, fiscal injection, the institutional context of local government provision, and multi-stakeholder engagement for capacity building (Annah-Aggrey et al., 2021).

Data usage for implementation and monitoring of service delivery programmes

Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa (SDGCA) (2020) cautions that the lack of accurate data and its misuse in monitoring institutional performance pose weaknesses for most African countries. Consequently, these African countries are unable to achieve performance and meet targeted indicators for Agenda 2063's radical societal transformation to improve socio-economic conditions and maintain peace and justice (SDGCA,

2020). The scarcity of data to measure and monitor institutional performance makes it impossible for national and local governments to plan and evaluate the effectiveness of their development policies and strategies in achieving the goals of eradicating poverty and creating opportunities for economic growth and employment (Annah-Aggrey et al., 2021). This means that local government institutions in South Africa should design a data management strategy to foster effective integration of high-quality data use and good governance practices. This can be done by ring-fencing funds from the budgetary allocation. Additionally, local government can also align its constitutional mandate of building partnerships through public participation by engaging capable professional institutions and qualified citizens to guide on investing in and improving statistical analysis to pursue and achieve institutional programme indicators and goals as part of service delivery to communities. Effective use of data for performance monitoring and assessment, through relevant and effective statistical instruments, can build the institutional capacity of a developmental local government to establish performance baselines and milestones and to track performance, guided by evidence-based decision-making that can even benefit and guide the national government (Beegle et al., 2016).

A developmental local government in South Africa can learn critical lessons from Kenya regarding how it implemented the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by contextualizing the monitoring system to strengthen the ability of local government to respond to the needs of the poor and marginalized communities (United Nations Development Group, 2015). Through the effective implementation of a data management monitoring system at the local government level, Kenya was able to identify and correct major disparities in net enrolment ratios in primary and secondary education between rural and urban areas (Annah-Aggrey et al., 2021). Effective design, usage, and implementation of a data management system at local government in Kenya had positive ripple effects on the national government through stimulating its responses to undertake correct interventions across the whole country, such as providing free meals programmes and low-cost boarding schools to increase enrolment rates as part of a human and sustainable development pathway (United Nations, 2020). Thus, the exploratory analysis reveals that a developmental local government in South Africa can contribute to societal transformation of achieving sustainable development goals by strengthening the data management system to generate relevant and reliable data that effectively monitors institutional and programme performance progress.

Fiscal injection at local government level

Coupled with practices of corruption, austerity measures implemented by the South African government across all public institutions undermine the ability of local government to provide adequate and effective services, especially in municipalities that are unable to generate their own revenue due to the spatial development of the apartheid legacy (Koma, 2012; Mashapa & Makole, 2025). The above assertion aligns with the World Bank's finding that insufficient financial resources in many African countries threaten the implementation of sustainable development goals at the local government level (World Bank Group, 2018).

The South African government should strengthen intergovernmental relations with local government by collaborating to adopt a strategy that broadens the tax base and improves revenue collection to fast-track service delivery for local citizens (Brookings, 2019). Amongst the activities that the South African government can initiate is to stem illicit capital outflows by unscrupulous large private companies and use those funds as a financial injection for local municipalities. Funds gained from stopping illicit cash outflows should be invested in local government economic development strategies to attract unemployed youth and shift their focus away from criminal activities that have become a means of survival.

Furthermore, capacity-building programmes should be initiated for local government leaders and officials to strengthen their abilities for revenue mobilization, collection, and prudent financial spending that support sustainable development goals' programmes (Annah-Aggrey et al, 2021). When local citizens realize that local governance finances are spent on initiatives that improve their socio-economic development and are aligned with sustainable development goals, they reap benefits. They are motivated to comply with tax collection efforts as part of revenue enhancement.

Another case in point that a developing local government can learn from is Rwanda, where the local government created an enabling environment for private-sector investment by maintaining roads, electricity, and other basic services, thereby creating opportunities for assistance (World Bank Group, 2018). Maintenance of basic services such as well-maintained roads and infrastructure, availability of electricity, and cleanliness in different cities, together with investment in SDGs goals in Rwanda, improved Rwanda's World Bank ranking in terms of the 'Doing Business' index from 150th in 2008 to 29th in 2018 (Brookings, 2019). These low-hanging-fruit achievements by the local government in Rwanda led to a threefold increase in private investment, thereby providing a financial injection at the local

government level (Brookings, 2019). The analysis of the situation in Rwanda's local government suggests that if it fulfills its constitutional mandate to provide and maintain basic services efficiently and effectively, it can attract investment through public-private partnerships to create a revenue base that complements the government's fiscal allocation. As public-private partnerships grow and increase financial investment in a well-managed local municipality, job creation and entrepreneurial activities enhance local economic development and help secure peace and stability for a country.

Reassessing institutional context of local government provision

The context of local government in South Africa is perceived as the weakest link in effective service delivery due to a lack of skilled professionals who understand the complexities of governance (Mashapa & Makole, 2025). By virtue of local government being at the bottom of the hierarchy in the three-tier intergovernmental relations, it is viewed as unimportant, lacking prestige, and as having weak cadres from the governing political party, who are deployed without administrative and professional competencies and requisite moral and ethical conduct. South Africa should reassess its local government context by ensuring that leaders who are deployed are astute and knowledgeable in public governance and administration so that they can

drive local government by appointing senior and ordinary public officials on professional merit rather than political affiliation (Makole, 2022). Annah-Aggrey et al (2021) concur with the notion of professionalizing local governance by illustrating that effective functioning of local government requires strategic implementers who understand the goals of sustainable development. This further implies that human capital and adequate resources should be shifted to the local government level because it is a terrain where citizens engage with government through public participation, decision-making processes, and holding government accountable for the delivery of services.

McLennan and Ngoma (2004) caution that local government in South Africa should not be treated as a junior partner within the cooperative governance system, but should be granted sufficient autonomy to make decisions that involve and benefit citizens. This means that a developmental local government system in South Africa should be characterized by a degree of decentralization in decision-making, policy, and programme implementation, so that the national government does not unduly restrict it and remains agile and flexible in carrying out its constitutional mandate. A major policy dissonance in South Africa is that while crime and destabilization occur at a local level, policing powers rest at the national

level, which undermines local government's ability to combat crime and maintain peace and stability, which are central to socio-economic development for sustainable development.

Liberia's local government system provides a good example of how decentralizing power to the local level has contributed to the implementation of sustainable development goals (United Cities and Local Governments, 2019). Among the positive measures brought by the decentralization of local government in Liberia were the development of government commissions that improved collaboration and coordination across different counties and the sharing of revenue between the central and local governments (Annah-Aggrey et al., 2021). Administrative and fiscal reforms can be effective in strengthening local government in South Africa, enabling vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and people with disabilities to actively participate in local government administration by designing targeted programmes that improve their socio-economic conditions and advance sustainable development goals.

Multi-stakeholder engagement for capacity building

Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice, and building strong institutions can be effectively localized and implemented at the local government level, which is closer to the communities on the ground. It

therefore requires honest engagement among local government leaders and multiple stakeholders to discuss different perspectives and approaches on how communities can collaborate with local government through available institutional mechanisms to promote peace and stability, thereby contributing to sustainable socio-economic development. The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (2015) acknowledges the unique role of local government in being closer to the people and thus responsible for driving multi-stakeholder engagement to build human and institutional capacity that can support effective strategies to promote peace, security, and stability within local communities. United Nations Development Group (2015) emphasizes the collaborative role of local government in building a network of partners by engaging with individuals, professionals, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations to consolidate professional knowledge and skills, thereby enhancing its capacity to implement development strategies and programmes in society. Annah-Aggrey-Annah et al (2021:19) delineate that partnering with academic and professional institutions can contribute technical knowledge and skills relating to developmental and sustainable approaches towards programme implementation. Civil society can have a buy-in and take ownership of local developmental processes by conducting needs

analysis for programmes targeted to improve living conditions within marginalized communities and strengthen peace and stability. Similarly, the business sector can strengthen public-private partnerships with local government by contributing financial resources to drive community development programmes that can result in socio-economic development with long-term sustainability impacts (Munzhedzi, 2020).

Local government can empower local communities to take ownership of sustainable development programmes by translating them into local languages to maximise stakeholder participation and contributions, thereby overcoming language barriers (Aggrey-Annah et al., 2021). There should also be capacity-building programmes for the local community to monitor the implementation of sustainable development programmes, so that local leaders and officials can be held accountable for their service delivery records. This implies that local government should therefore take leadership to promote cross-fertilization of ideas through multiple stakeholder engagements and capacity building initiatives. As a result, ordinary community members will have confidence in a democratic, participatory process that is inclusive, demonstrates accountability, builds confidence, and views local officials as partners in development rather than politicians with ulterior motives.

The role of the local government sphere in South Africa is central to the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal on peace, justice, and strong institutions, because violent protests stemming from lack of service delivery occur at the local level and undermine peace and stability, with ripple effects across the country. If people on the ground are actively engaged in building societal mechanisms and institutional strategies to promote peace and stability, these approaches strengthen national government policies. Hence, they are practically implementable and fit for purpose. Failure to align local government strategies with targeted indicators of Sustainable Development Goal 16, which are promoting peaceful co-existence in a country, ensuring that every individual and community has equal access to justice, and strengthening good governance mechanisms across all sectors of a society (Matamanda & Nel, 2024), undermines legislation and policies which remain hollow and do not find resonance with the masses on the ground.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The article conducted an exploratory analysis to systematically examine how the South African local government adopts a developmental posture to advance the Sustainable Development Goals of peace, justice, and strong institutions, in response to its constitutional mandate to improve socio-economic conditions for local

citizens. It further emphasized the alignment of constitutional provisions on local government with efforts to improve service delivery through public participation, socio-economic development, and the Sustainable Development Goal on peace, justice, and the building of strong institutions. It is argued that the entrenchment of the Sustainable Development Goal on peace, justice, and building strong institutions can enable local government to strive towards achieving a transformational and developmental trajectory outlined in the National Development Plan: Vision 2030. By pursuing a developmental local government that adopts Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators, South Africa's local government can help mitigate poverty, inequality, and unemployment, leading to sustainable development for local citizens. The narrative further argues that entrenching Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions can strengthen good governance mechanisms within local government and empower communities to address corruption and hold local leaders accountable for service delivery. This is because a lack of accountability destabilizes local government institutions and undermines peace and stability in many localities in South Africa.

Using a desktop analysis methodology, secondary documents related to local government, good governance, and sustainable

development were reviewed and analyzed. The thematic areas that the article focused on to illustrate how sustainable development goals can be entrenched in the local government system in South Africa are: public value as a theoretical framework, current challenges in the local government system in South Africa, conceptualization of a developmental local government in South Africa, and integration of sustainable development goals with a developmental local government. The findings from thematic analysis outlined strategies to strengthen local government in South Africa and to entrench the Sustainable Development Goals of peace, justice, and strong institutions. The adopted strategies are the use of data to monitor local government performance, fiscal injection at the local government level, reassessing the institutional context of local government provision, and multi-stakeholder engagement for capacity building.

Based on a systematic analysis of the article, the following recommendations are proposed to contribute to entrenching the Sustainable Development Goal on peace, justice, and building strong institutions within a developmental local government in South Africa:

- A developmental local government in South Africa should institutionalize transparency, democratic participation and accountability by strengthening its institutional

mechanisms to build trust amongst local communities so that they can share ideas about approaches and programmes that can bring about peace and stability in local communities to enable socio-economic development.

- Sustainable development goal on peace, justice and building strong institutions at local government sphere can be localized through open participatory democracy between local government leaders and local communities during development of integrated development planning process where budget and programmes can be identified and discussed at ward committee meetings to garner ownership of community members.
- Local municipalities and communities should collaborate to jointly design service delivery charters that factor sustainable development programmes to be pursued in a local municipality to bring about socio-economic development and mitigate criminal activities. As such, service delivery charters should encompass monitoring mechanisms and timeframes to hold local government leaders and officials accountable for performance.

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