

Strengthening Capacity of Local Government in Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces



Building capacity of local government to deliver basic services to the poor

South Africa

1999 – 2005

Client:
European Union and dplg

South Africa has seen dramatic improvements in municipal service delivery. National policy has established minimum service delivery standards. As the number of local governments has been consolidated to 284, responsibilities for service delivery and implementation have been increasingly decentralised to local levels. Development plans have been crafted for nearly all municipalities.

But much remains to be done: too many South Africans remain in substandard housing, without safe or reliable water or sanitation services, in areas without trash pickup, good public transportation, or electricity. According to the most recent Census (2001), 5 million had no access to safe water, an additional 6.5 million were using unimproved water sources, and more than 18 million still lack adequate sanitation. And despite the promise of a transformed South Africa, the historically marginalised – living in informal settlements, squatter camps, urban slums, and rural areas – are left behind.

To reduce the potential for frustration and social unrest, as exhibited by recent demonstrations for improved services, the South African government must meet citizens' expectations. Unless the government addresses backlogs urgently and demonstrates continued improvements, South Africa's long-term stability could be threatened.

In 1999, ECI*Africa* and Gruppo Soges (Italy) were contracted to work in selected local and district municipalities in two provinces in South Africa to improve service delivery through capacity building and assistance in the design, tendering, funding and management of infrastructure projects. The key focus areas of the programme were: enhancing the capacity of national and provincial governments to support local municipalities; improving the ability of local governments to create, operate and maintain infrastructure; improvement of financial management and generic management skills of municipal officials and councillors; and the creation of infrastructure projects, each with a capacity building component. Over 30 municipalities participated in this programme, of which twenty-one municipalities received direct EU funding for infrastructure projects, primarily for, but not limited to, roads, drainage, street lighting, water and sanitation, and solid waste collection and disposal.

Based on successful performance, the Programme was extended twice. By the end of 2005, targeted local governments in Limpopo and Mpumalanga province were better able to deliver services to poor communities through enhanced skills, systems, planning, organisation, and resources. Thousands benefited from roads projects, improved water supply and sanitation, and better effluent treatment.

