

Extra-Governmental Relations as Response Strategy to Sustainable Development Goal 1 [poverty]: Lessons from A South African Municipality

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

South Africa is one of the many African countries that have displayed systemic weaknesses in their efforts to realize the United Nations' sustainable development goal (SDG) number one, which is about ending poverty in all its forms everywhere. According to the official data from the World Bank (2014) and Statistics South Africa (2022), over 55% of the South African population lives below the national poverty line. While the government remains an important player in carrying the burden presented by this challenge, it does not mean other able societal stakeholders are exempted from the fight against poverty. Understanding that poverty is more prevalent in rural settings, this study aimed to explore extra-governmental relations as a drive for intensified rural development and poverty eradication in South Africa. The study was largely qualitative and used municipalities in the Mopani region of Limpopo province to argue for more involvement of external stakeholders like the business community and private sector in promoting the general welfare of communities in rural areas. As demonstrated in the paper, South Africa's efforts to eradicate poverty can only materialize when there is an intensified rural development drive that is supported by those in the business sector, but this should also consider a number of conditioning factors that the government, especially at local levels, has to create. The strength of this paper lies in its transdisciplinary nature, as it draws theoretical insights from both the field of development studies and public administration. Recommendations are offered towards the end of the paper.

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Submitted 9 October 2023

Revised 13 November 2023

Accepted 28 November 2023

Citation

Shopola, M. A., & Ramoraswi, M. (2023). Extra-Governmental Relations as Response Strategy to Sustainable Development Goal 1 [poverty]: Lessons from A South African Municipality. *Journal of Education, Management and Development Studies*, 3(4), 77-91. doi: 10.52631/jemds.v3i4.233

Keywords: Local Government; Poverty; Mopani district Municipality; South Africa; Extra-Governmental Relations

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.52631/jemds.v3i4.233>

1 INTRODUCTION

Extra-governmental relations as a practice are predicated on the welfarist role of government (Kahn, Madue, & Kalema, 2016; Shopola & Mukonza, 2020). This means the government's role is to promote society's general welfare. In doing so, the government must build relations with all other community stakeholders to collate their needs and explore the possible roles each can play in addressing societal problems and promoting development. In countries where humanitarian problems such as poverty are beyond imagination, it suffices to encourage governments to engage in extra-governmental relations with able players in solving the problem.

However, the availability of extra-governmental relations as a noble option to address societal problems is not a guarantee for a win; it requires proper policy direction at all levels of government, the right attitude from government leaders, and properly coordinated communication platforms. A cursory scan of the empirical and authoritative literature in South Africa, especially at the municipal level, which is a contextual focus of this study, points to limited regard for extra-governmental relations, and in some cases, there is just poor coordination and fragmentation between government and communities/stakeholders (*Sithole and Another v Sithole and Another*, 2021; *Thabazimbi Local Municipality*, 2021; *Mopani District Municipality*, 2019; *Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality*, 2020).

South Africa is one of the many African countries that have displayed systemic weaknesses in their efforts to realize the United Nations' sustainable development goal (SDG) number one, which is about ending poverty in all its forms everywhere. Poverty According to the official data from the World Bank in 2014 and Statistics South Africa in 2022, over 55% of the South African population lives below the national poverty line. While the government remains a dominant player in carrying the burden presented by this challenge, it does not mean other able societal stakeholders are exempted from the fight against poverty. Therefore, understanding that poverty is more prevalent in rural and semi-urban settings, this study explores extra-governmental relations as a drive for intensified rural development and poverty eradication in South Africa. From the outset, below, the authors present the research approach and methods employed to realize the study aim, and this is followed by the contextualization of South Africa in terms of constitutional obligation to end poverty and situational analysis of local development and poverty eradication through local government.

2 METHODOLOGY

Epistemologically, this study is grounded in critical and interpretative paradigms and, therefore, sought to analyze views of the selected research subjects and existing studies and government reports on extra-governmental relations and poverty issues in the Mopani region. In other words, the data collected combines primary and secondary materials, so the researcher followed a qualitative research approach. Moreover, for secondary data, both traditional and scoping forms of the literature review were followed to identify the nature of research evidence around the government's disregard for potential benefits associated with extra-governmental relations. In contrast, a traditional literature review helps analyze scholastic outcomes on the subject (*Grant & Booth*, 2009).

Mopani District Municipality and locals constituted the population and delimitation of the study. A sample of relevant subjects was purposely deducted from the population, consisting of members and leaders of existing intergovernmental structures at a district level. The initial sample consisted of 12 participants (a mayor and manager per municipality); however, only eight participated. Semi-structured interviews [both face-to-face and telephonic] were conducted, and data was transcribed and analyzed manually with the guidance of data analytical steps from the research literature (*Creswell*, 2019). Accordingly, data was transcribed, arranged, and rearranged, and themes were presented. In the end, the study arrived at a determinative understanding of issues impeding the realization of SDG 1 through local governments in South Africa, which influenced the recommendations and study contribution.

3 SITUATIONAL OVERVIEW OF SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS ROLE IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL NUMBER ONE (POVERTY)

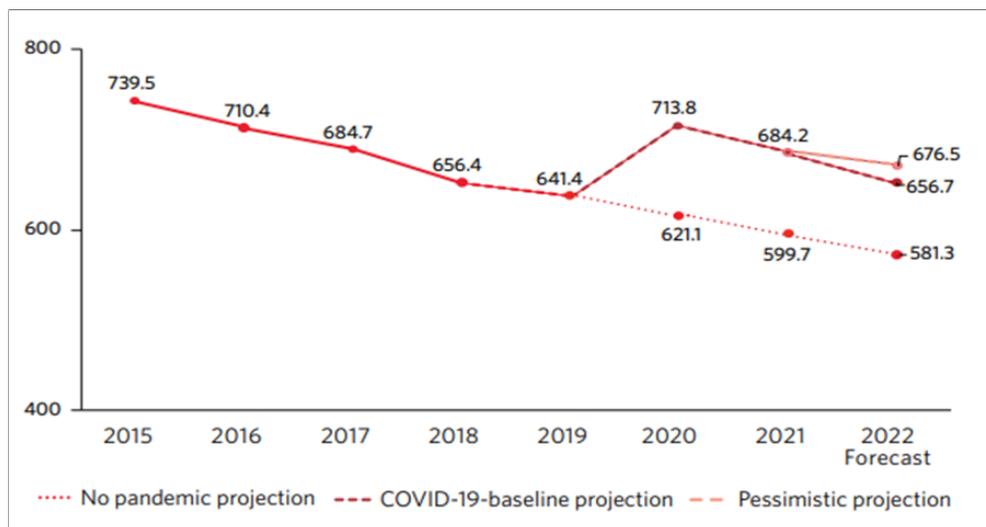
This part of the study is significant as it paints contextual issues for consideration. This is presented in three interrelated segments. The first one considers the locus of SDGs, SDG1, and South Africa's involvement in the United Nations front. The section is a scene setter and provides background on the legislative framework informing the role of local government and the policy mandates in the fight against poverty. Lastly, it provides trends and failures around poverty alleviation.

3.1 United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal Number One: The International Picture

Framed under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and adopted by the member states of the United Nations (UN) in 2015, SDGs are said to provide a “shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future” (*THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development, 2023*). There are 17 SDGs, and each goal is identified by a number symbolizing its prioritization status. Of course, SDG number One, which constitutes a unit of analysis in this study, is Poverty. This is followed by 16 other interconnected SDGs, including quality education, gender equality, and access to cleaning and sanitation. The agreement between the involved nations, South Africa included, is built around the collective awareness and the urgent need to actualize the 17 SDGs for peace and sustainable development. Information on the SDGs is archived in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, a division (in the United Nations) tasked with the enormous responsibility of providing substantive support and capacity-building for the SDGs and their related thematic issues, including water, energy, science, and technology among other things (*THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development, 2023*).

The latest report on SDG1 detailed a grim picture of the world’s situation regarding poverty dynamics (*The Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2022*). The dynamics considered the impact of COVID-19 and the Russia–Ukraine war. Accordingly, the SDG report as shown in Figure 1, between 2015 and 2018, global poverty continued to decline, dropping from 10.1% to 8.6%. This means that the number of people living on less than \$1.90 per day has declined from 740 million to 656 million during this period.

Figure 1. SDG report on the global poverty



Source: Adapted from *The Sustainable Development Goals Report (2022)*

Between 2019 and 2020, the world's poverty rate increased sharply, from 8.3% to 9.2%, the first extreme poverty increase since 1998 and the largest since 1990. This erased the long-standing gains over the past four years. This also means that another 93 million people around the world have been pushed into extreme poverty due to the epidemic. Since then, there has been little progress in catching up to the pre-COVID trend. The forecast for 2022 estimates that 75 million people will live in extreme poverty before the epidemic. The rise in food prices and the broader impact of the war in Ukraine could push the number to even higher levels, reaching 95 million by 2030, and the world is further away from achieving its goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030 (*The Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2022*).

3.2 Poverty Dynamics in South Africa: A National Picture

Wessels and Potgieter (2021) state that the state exists to perform three broad categories of functions in society, namely, (i) care and protection, (ii) promoting quality of life, and (iii) enabling mechanisms for success. In actualizing the second category, Hobbes et al. (1651) contends that “whereas men, by ancient inevitable, become unable to maintain themselves by their labor; they ought not to be left to the charity of private persons; but to be provided for.” In the words of the South African President, promoting quality of life epitomizes ‘a caring state’ (*President Cyril Ramaphosa: State of the Nation Address 2019 | South African Government, 2019*). Therefore, for purposive interpretation, whether the state ‘cares’ may be judged by its ability to alleviate poverty and to the extent that the caring state demonstrates inertia inequality levels will deepen, migrations and social unrest, among other things, find refuge. Promoting quality of life – particularly poverty alleviation – is a constitutional obligation in South Africa. This is firstly apparent in the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic 1996, where the promise is made to improve the quality of life of all citizens and free each person’s potential. More importantly, the state’s role in ending poverty is further foregrounded in Chapters 1 and 2, specifically in Sections 1 and 27 of the Constitution 1996. Section 27 (1) of the Constitution categorically states that:

Everyone has the right to access health care services, including reproductive health care, sufficient food and water, and social security, including appropriate social assistance if they cannot support themselves and their dependents.

To actualize the preceding constitutional imperatives, the democratic government of South Africa adopted the macro-economic plan in 1994, the Reconstruction Development Programme, which prioritized the building of new homes (the so-called RDP houses), electrification, access to clean water and land redistribution (*Reconstruction and Development Programme, 1994*). Some promises were met within the set time frames, and many are still pending. It must be highlighted that the inclusion of municipalities, as the focal point of this study, follows the constitutional orientation of public administration in South Africa, which, through section 140, read together with sections 151, 152, 153, 154, and Schedules 4B and 5B of *Schedules 4B and 5B of the Constitution (1996)*, recognizes municipal governments as the implementing agents of the government as a whole, especially when it concerns basic services like water, housing, electrification, and sanitation.

Despite this, in terms of policy, many other policy frameworks after RDP were adopted, including the current National Development Plan Vision 2030, and all of them recognized the significance of addressing SDG 1, owing to the country’s signature in the United Nations. South Africa is one of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa with high poverty levels, and this will be discussed in detail in one of the sections below. At thirty, South Africa seems to have not been consistent in the fight against poverty, and this section, apart from highlighting the country’s critical problems, is an attempt to make sense of how local government responds to poverty in rural spaces where poverty is deemed rife. To do so, the author ask the following deliberate question: Where are the poor? This question is important for understanding local and rural development dynamics in South Africa, especially the local government’s quest to fight poverty twenty-two years into local democracy.

In 1998, just four years into democracy, the government commissioned a scientific investigation to assess the state of poverty and inequality in the country, and part of the major findings were that most of the poor people in South Africa lived in rural areas (*Poverty and Inequality Report, 1998*). This particular finding corroborated with the *South Africa - Income and Expenditure Survey (1995)*, which found that the poverty ratio in rural areas (i.e., the percentage of poor people living in rural areas) was 70% and that the poverty rate in rural areas (i.e., the percentage of poor persons) was approximately 70 percent, compared to 30 percent in urban areas.

Meanwhile, the Table 1 provides a retrospection and summation of the journey concerning poverty conditions 1995. It is regrettable to note that despite changes made by the new democratic government through policy and many initiatives to fight poverty, regression has been reported instead of progress (Congress of South African Trade Union [COSATU], 2022).

Table 1. Rural/Urban Distribution of Poverty

Location	Population Share	Poverty Share	Poverty Rate
	(%)	(%)	(%)
Rural	50.4	7.16	70.9
Urban	49.6	28.4	28.5
All	100	100	49.9

Source: Adapted from the *South Africa - Income and Expenditure Survey (1995)*.

According to the World Bank indicators, poverty in South Africa is closely linked to food insecurity. As a result, households with a lack or severe lack of food access increased from 18.8% in 2019 to 20.6% in 2020 (*Food Security | Rising Food Insecurity, 2022*). In other words, as correctly summarised by a researcher at Wits University, one in five South Africans is at risk of hunger (Mtintsilana, 2023). This fact and the findings portrayed in the *Gini index (World Bank estimate) -South Africa [Online]* (n.d.) shows about South Africa being the most unequal country globally cannot be isolated from the country's historical context. That is, the inequality is due largely to the history of exclusion and discrimination on race and gender and the lack of economic growth in recent years (Purfield, Im, & Inchauste, 2014). More specifically, the exclusion has been directed to the majority African communities and blacks in particular.

Looking at the number of interventions the government sought to make since 1994, it can be said that it has not turned a blind eye to the poverty situation (*Reconstruction and Development Programme, 1994*). The support grant system (which mostly caters to children, the elderly, and people living with disabilities) is said to be the main and acceptable but not a sustainable plan to fight against poverty. Triegaardt and Patel (2005) concurs with the above view and refers to the Child Care Grant, introduced by the government in 1998 (Department of Social Development), to argue that the grant systems are preventative, as opposed to the general belief that they reduce poverty. The intention of this grant is solely to assist low-income families in meeting the basic needs of children, and the same idea applies to the grant for the elderly and people living with disabilities. In addition, there is a consensus among academics, government, and those in policy-making houses that creating jobs is the only feasible and perhaps best solution the state can do to address poverty among citizens.

In 2009, the Cabinet approved the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP), which aims to enable rural people to take control of their lives with the government's support. According to the South African Year Book (2015/2016), the Department of Rural Development and Land Affairs through the CRDP reported that infrastructure development has contributed to 503 365 households gaining access to clean running water, about one million gaining access to sanitation and just above 11 million gaining access to electricity. Due to these and many other interventions that the government has put up to support this rural development program, one of the few research conducted in 2015 shows that the program, despite being hampered by a number of structural and financial issues or lack thereof, has been a success in areas like housing, electricity, fencing, and household gardens (Sebiloane, 2015). The study was limited to Limpopo province in a selected area; however, it can be said that the extent of SRDP in the fight against poverty is yet another area that needs extensive research.

Furthermore, in decentralized governance systems, local governments always represent the whole government in service delivery and local and infrastructure development matters. In South Africa, local government is described as the sphere closest to the people or the face of government (Tshamano & Shopola, 2021). This is due to the system's accessibility to the people, as section 151 of the *Schedules 4B and 5B of the Constitution (1996)* declared that municipalities should be established in every corner of the republic's territories and the array of basic services placed in their hands. There are 257 municipalities in South Africa, eight of which are metropolitans, 44 are districts, and the rest are local municipalities. Apart from ensuring the availability of clean water, sanitation, and housing to citizens, municipalities are responsible for local economic development (LED) and infrastructure development, two important facets in the fight against poverty. On the

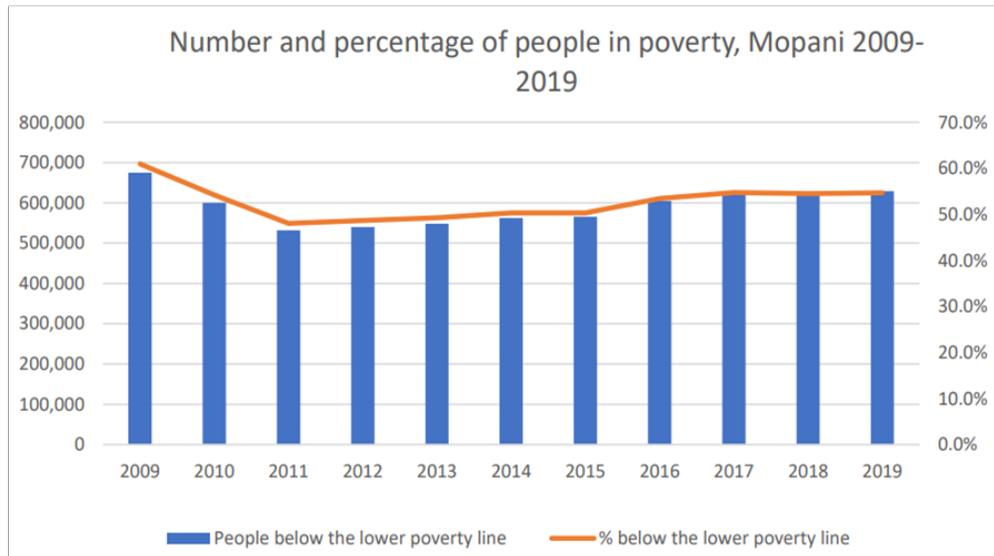
latter responsibility, the arrangement since 2003 has been that the national government, through COGTA and National Treasury, will fund municipalities through numerous grants like Municipal Infrastructure Grant, to which many municipalities have proven weaknesses in the planning and spending such grants (*Introduction of The Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG), 2004*). Regarding the second responsibility, the LED, each municipality is expected to create an enabling environment for existing and small and medium businesses to operate. According to the White Paper on Local Government (1998) and the National Development Plan Vision 2030, small businesses are the backbone of the economy, and municipalities must always seek to protect and promote them. However, the predicament with this noble practice is that many factors, including financial viability and economic activities within municipal jurisdiction, determine its success.

The White Paper (1998) characterized poor revenue base as a structural challenge that has far-reaching implications on the municipal ability to render basic services and poverty alleviation. The most affected municipalities in that regard are those in predominantly rural areas (*Manyaka, 2014*). Despite this, a scan of municipal achieves in Limpopo, North West, and Mpumalanga shows some rural municipalities do not have rural development and indigent policies, which are key to poverty alleviation, separate from IDPs. Where there are indigent policies, a lack of support and funding is cited (*Nkomazi Local Municipality, 2021; Ditsobotla Municipality, 2023*).

3.3 Poverty Dynamics at The Selected Case Study: Mopani District Municipality

This study's contextual focus was Mopani District Municipality in the Limpopo province of South Africa. Mopani District comprises five dependent local municipalities: Greater Letaba, Greater Giyani, Maruleng Municipality, Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality, and Greater Tzaneen Municipality. Recent statistics show that the six municipalities in the Mopani region collectively account for over 1 million people as of 2019 as shown in Figure 2, amongst whom 628,941 (54,7%) live in poverty. According to the upper poverty line definition [by Stats SA], the number of people living in poverty is higher than 674 588 in 2009.

Figure 2. Poverty levels in Mopani Region as of 2019



Source: *COGTA (2019)*

Accordingly, the poverty rate in each region of the municipality of Mopani district is the highest in the Greater Giyani area, with a total of 76.9%. The lowest percentage of people living in poverty is observed in Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality, with 58.6% living in poverty, using the definition of the upper poverty line. The average annual income of the household in the district is R14 600, approximately the same in the province and about half of the country (R29 400) (*COGTA, 2019*).

According to Swanepoel, Beer, and De Beer (2016), poverty cannot be separated from unemployment. In 2018, the unemployment rate in Mopani District Municipality was 16.32%, lower than that of the province (19.4%) and South Africa (27.31%). The same year, Mopani's labor force participation rate was 50.2%, significantly higher than the 41.7% in 2008. Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipality had the highest labor force participation rate, with 56.0% in 2018, increasing from 48.5% in 2008. Greater Giyani Local Municipality had the lowest labor force participation rate of 42.9% in 2018, which increased from 37.3% in 2008 (COGTA, 2019).

Another important element that seems to have troubled the district municipality and its locals in ensuring that the needs of people are addressed is poor governance. Mopani District Municipality was under mandatory intervention by the provincial government early this year following its ten consecutive poor audit outcomes. One of the authors in the current paper recently conducted a study that looked into the functionality of IGR forums and found that such did not exist (Shopola, 2022). This finding propelled the current study. This study is of the view that the design of existing local government planning frameworks such as IDP, LED indigent policies, etc., lack particularity and have insufficient space for extra-governmental relations, especially when it comes to poverty eradication, hence the perpetual growth in poverty levels in rural areas.

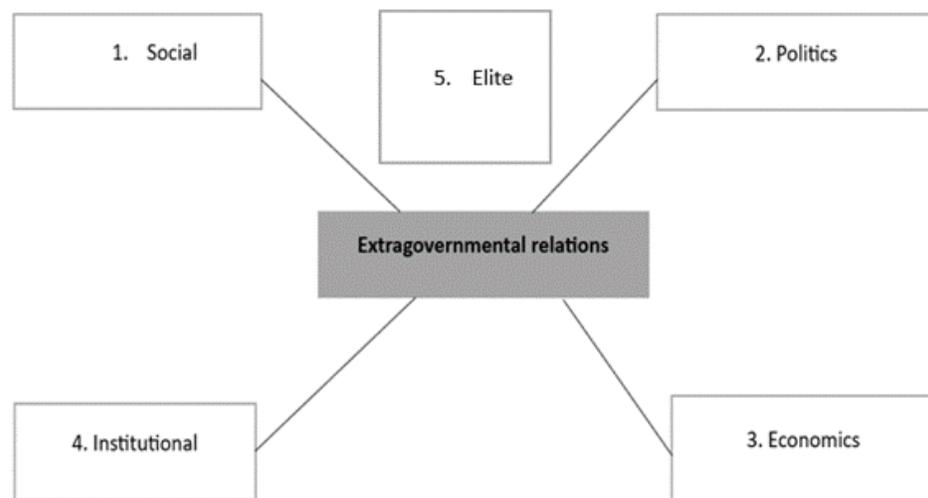
4 EXTRA-GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents the conceptual framework on which extra-governmental relations are synthesized as the analytical concept in this study. Theoretical insights are also sourced to support the study's contentions regarding poverty and municipal response in South Africa.

4.1 Extra-governmental relations conceptualized.

Extra-governmental relations can be traced to intergovernmental relations (IGR) and refers to relations between government and external institutions (Shopola & Mukonza, 2020). They are explored in this study to devise a reasoned approach that embattled rural municipal governments like MDM can follow to improve their strategies in realizing SDG1.

Figure 3. Extra Governmental Relations Model



Source: Adapted from Van der Waldt (2016)

Extra-governmental relations are born from the idea that the state's primary role is to promote society's general welfare. This idea, however, recognizes the epistemological shifts in public administration where governments partner with various stakeholders to achieve their goals, including the relationship between the state and citizens. Indeed, despite being predicated on the

need for government to account for its actions, these kinds of relations also offer private citizens and/or non – governmental institutions the to directly influence policy implementation, generation, and distribution of resources for development and improved living conditions through partnerships with government. As depicted in Figure 3, extra-governmental relations consist of four categories of relations, namely, social, political, economic, and institutional extra-governmental relations.

- *Social extra-governmental relations have to do with the government's involvement in addressing welfare matters such as unemployment, housing shortages, health services, and other social phenomena in a coordinated manner (Kahn et al., 2016; Van der Walddt, 2016).*
- *Political extra-governmental relations – these relations comprise contact between political office-bearers and the electorate. It has to do with political parties recognizing the norms and values of the community. These include “the relationship with the media, relationship with the voters during the election season, and lobbying efforts supporting specific policies” (Phakathi, 2016).*
- *Economic extra-governmental relations aim to bring all important state sectors, including the private sector, to ensure economic stability in the country, province, or local area. According to the *National Development Plan vision 2030 (2012)*, these relations are crucial for stability and economic growth and further provide positive ground for partnerships with private sector organizations. Therefore, necessary economics and financial frameworks are important to drive these kinds of relations (Kahn et al., 2016; Phakathi, 2016).*
- *Institutional extra-governmental relations – exist between related institutions (Van der Walddt, 2016). Partnerships with non-state actors like the South African Association of Public Administration and Management (SAAPAM), which often partners with the government to find practical solutions through academia. Relationships with these institutions are significant as they establish channels with like-minded people or groups who have demonstrated an array of knowledge in their fields, making them important to public institutions. They are often analyzed through the triple helix theory.*
- *Elite extra-governmental relations – the last form of relations in extra-governmental relations, this is concerned with private persons who wield influence in society and are given attention by the government. These people (i.e., Mike Nkuna of Masingita Shopping Mall/or public figures or other successful business people) or organizations sometimes (e.g., Motsepe Foundation) can influence the policy direction of their country, province, or local authority. Their influence can be direct or indirect.*

This study believes that social, institutional, and elite extra-governmental relations can be important in assisting the government in eradicating poverty. Despite the NDP in 2012 calling for these relations, public institutions such as municipalities have no proper systems to realize and unlock opportunities from extra-governmental relations. It is regrettable that the current frameworks and platforms that these relations should be playing out [that is, the IGR Forums] to the benefit of municipalities in the fight against poverty are not readily prepared, and in some cases, they are not functional, at least in two – thirds of the district municipalities in the entire country (Shopola, 2022; Niekerk, 2015). Poverty eradication is a priority SDG in the UN's 2030 vision and South Africa and is purported to be the government's biggest confrontation in the post-apartheid period. Therefore, the limited attention paid to extra-governmental relations despite perpetual failures to reduce poverty is surprising.

4.2 Theoretical Support

The theory of geographical disparities supports this study. This theory recognizes that geographical disparities cause poverty. Attempts to portray poverty by geographical differences led to the emergence of poverty geography (Abdulai & Shamshiry, 2014). According to Bradshaw (2007), these poverty causes include rural poverty, ghetto poverty, de-investment in cities, southern poverty, third-world poverty, and other problems that exist separately from other theories. This theory focuses on the fact that in some areas, people, institutions (municipalities in the case),

and cultures lack the objective resources needed to generate prosperity and income, and they lack the power to claim redistribution. Understood from the context of this study, the theory of geographical disparities finds an evidential base in the White Paper on Local Government's (1998) characterization of challenges facing municipalities in post-apartheid South Africa, also confirmed by numerous studies (Tshamano & Shopola, 2021; Manyaka, 2014; COGTA, 2019; Steytler, Fessha, & Kirkby, 2006).

These reports point to structural challenges of planning and revenue collection in rural municipalities due to geographical disparities. Municipalities like Cape Town Metropolitan (formerly Good Hope), the City of Joburg, and the City of Tshwane, to mention a few, have benefited from the large infrastructures inherited from the apartheid government. It is a common cause that these infrastructures came through geographic spatial planning of government, where infrastructural developments and decent service provision were mainly concentrated on the white settlements for Europeans.

The post-democratization process, in ensuring that democracy reaches everyone throughout South Africa, led to the establishment of new municipalities, such as those in the Mopani region in 2000 (COGTA, 2019). Steytler et al. (2006) found that geographical disparities strongly impact municipalities' ability to collect revenue, and therefore, with this deficit, meeting constitutional obligations and fighting poverty becomes difficult. Abdulai and Shamshiry (2014) correctly assert that poverty conditions close to poverty lead to widespread poverty and that the attraction of businesses and firms away from other places to certain places implies the likelihood of the "other places" being poor. In this case, the current study attempts to push for new methods to activate the participation of private people and businesses in the fight against poverty in rural areas. The next section presents the research methodology and findings from the case study.

5 RESEARCH FINDINGS: POVERTY ERADICATION THROUGH LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM – RESPONSES FROM MOPANI DISTRICT MUNICIPALITIES

This section presents the findings. This finding relates to the participant's responses to the question: Do extra-governmental relations exist in Mopani?

If so, how beneficial are they to the district's poverty eradication strategies? An additional question related to whether there has been a buy-in on extra-governmental relations from stakeholders in helping the municipality fight poverty. As indicated earlier, the participants consisted of mayors, speakers, and municipal managers of the six municipalities in the Mopani region. Their answers to those questions are captured below.

5.1 Participants responses

- ✓ **On whether the available mechanisms for proper facilitation of extra-governmental relations**

One Municipal Manager (Manager 1), a male aged 50 – 60, said, "no... Arthur [name of the researcher] ... you see, if you can look at our district IDP, there is a portion where we outlined the IGR structures available in the municipality so far... I can't say if we strictly have extra-governmental structures exclusively for donors and others who can help us. And the current structure... is more of a support than anything else".

One mayor from these municipalities (Mayor 11), a male, said the following: "We have IGR forum but am not sure if its mandate has to deal with poverty issues directly, but there is another called Speaker's Forum which I think has a direct relationship with people out there. But look, during our IDP planning, we make sure that business forums are engaged, and one problem that I have noticed is that the nature of engagement is similar to the one we normally do with the general citizens ... you know... where they share their needs, and the challenge is that we are guided by the mandate and process. Ours on that day is not to market the municipality".

Another municipal mayor (Mayor 10) indicated that the municipality would need a fully functional structure on extra-governmental relations, *“one that takes a deep focus on rural investment... but even if we identify some land where we can develop something for our people... there are people called Ntonas and Magoshi [Traditional leaders] who often give us difficulties in securing the land”*.

Asked why rural poverty seems to be growing sharply in the region, the preceding (Mayor 10) blamed business people for lack of support and dividing municipal councils through manipulation and bribery. In verbatim, he said, *“there is a mushrooming business of oil filling stations currently in our region, and because Mopani as the competence holder has been very strict in following normal process and laws of our country, some business people will go to the locals and influence them to issue licenses in the name of ‘we want to grow our rural economy and end poverty’ but how? ... then that’s when we found elements of corruption... that councilors approve things that are not their competence. Then I am saying business must come and talk to us and see if we can’t fight together”*.

Asked the same question on why they think, the Speaker (Speaker 13) in one municipality echoed the previous participant that there is a disconnect between business and Mopani District *“because big businesses that we have are betraying us. ZZ2 [the largest vegetation farm in Limpopo province] has been doing what it likes there... instead of employing people, it takes foreign nationals only to exploit them and pay them anything below the national minimum wage. Yet we do not have channels as the authority in the region to call him to order... provincial government has not done so and will never happen”*.

✓ On stakeholder buy-in

Responding to whether some prominent people or organizations have shown interest in the municipal poverty alleviation program, the majority of participants indicated there had not been a clear indication from the majority of businesses and that where big businesses show interest, they approach politicians. The matter becomes political more than extra-governmental projects. However, one mayor (14) indicated that *“in my municipality... there is some serious relationship that we have with prominent people, which has nothing to do with the district municipality. The issue is that we manage some things like... a desire to invest in rural areas, such as building community projects or investing in NGOs that create employment for our people in rural spaces... yes we negotiate them at political level”*.

Asked whether partnerships are sometimes discouraged by institutional performance, Mayor 14 concurred with Managers 3 and 5 that how municipalities have been performing is detrimental to extra-governmental relations on two fronts. One is that *“when the private sector hears about corruption, they pull back their resources, and we are unable to convince them back”* (Manager 5, female). The other concern was expressed by a mayor (14) who narrated: *“Uhm my brother, trust is important in the eyes of private people who want to assist the municipality... Imagine you want to build partnerships with the VBS-addicted municipalities. But I am saying let’s fix our administrations and attract various organizations to contribute to building resilient and strong government institutions if we want to end poverty”*.

5.2 Discussion of findings

This study aims to establish extra-governmental relations as a drive for intensified rural development and poverty eradication in South Africa. However, specific to the question raised, the authors wanted to confirm whether extra-governmental relations have found expression in the municipal operations in the Mopani region and, secondly, to find out if such practices have been beneficial in the fight against poverty.

Regrettably, it can be said that extra-governmental relations have not been fully embraced in the Mopani region despite the growing levels of poverty. As contended elsewhere in this study, instruments such as indigent policy and LED, widely embraced by local government to eradicate poverty, have proven insufficient. I argue that even self-funded municipal policies like the indigent policy benefit from vibrant extra-governmental relations, especially the social and elite extra-governmental programs (Kahn et al., 2016).

Further, the observation around disregard of extra-governmental relations in Mopani is resonant, first, within the existing intergovernmental framework in the district municipality (Mopani District Municipality, 2016) and second, from the participants' responses and it must be remembered that these participants are leaders of these municipalities and conveners of intergovernmental relations. According to Table 2, MDM has four IGR planning structures, and none of these entertain extra-governmental relations, not even by textual expression. Therefore, Manager 1 correctly asserted that extra-governmental relations are largely disregarded.

It can be said, however, that the notion raised by other participants that extra-governmental relations are seamlessly embedded in the municipal frameworks is a fair point, but it can be contested. On the political extra-governmental relations, which concerns contact between voters and the elected representatives (Van der Waldt, 2016), yes, it can be suggested these relations are legislated. Still, to the extent that they are not beneficial to the former in a manner that positively impacts the general welfare of society, such characterization may not capture the gist of what extra-governmental relations are about.

Table 2. IGR structures in Mopani

Intergovernmental planning structure		
Forum	Participants	Responsibility
District intergovernmental relations (mayors' forum)	Executive mayors, mayors, traditional leaders and municipal managers	Coordinate inter-municipality relations between district and local municipalities
District ward committee forum	District speaker, ward committee representatives	Inputs on the IDP and its implementation
District manager's forum	Sector Departments' District Managers, Municipal Managers, Municipal Senior Managers (Directors)	Coordinate inter-governmental relations at district level between municipalities and sector departments
Clusters	Councillors, Municipal Managers, Municipal Senior Managers (Directors)	Coordinate policy issues affecting government at a district level (between sector departments and municipalities)

Source: Adapted from (Shopola, 2022 with information from Mopani District Municipality, 2016)

The literature recognizes extra-governmental relations as a noble opportunity to get private citizens involved in job creation and other social welfare issues (Phakathi, 2016; Van der Waldt, 2016). Including these practices within municipal planning and policy implementation can assist in building a strong LED base and improve the institution's financial viability (Manyaka, 2014). The theory of geographical disparities further supports this contention. This theory sees the Mopani region as one of the poverty-stricken regions due to its location, which cannot help the municipality financially. Infrastructure development has been slow; skills are being migrated while poverty increases. These problems reduce business prospects in the region, especially businesses that can result in large employment.

Moreover, the findings reveal that the private sector, groupings, and influential people in rural areas have not shown sufficient interest in supporting the district's rural development and poverty eradication plans. However, some municipalities have programs that are working. This is understandable because, according to the leader's responses, the district has specific frameworks to coordinate extra-governmental activities. Van der Waldt (2016) correctly states that this kind of relationship demands coordinated systems with which the municipality can interreact and ensure stakeholders rally around a common vision. That is poverty eradication through rural investment and job creation.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recognizes the significance of poverty eradication and proposes that local governments re-examine their role in the fight against poverty. Unlike other issues, poverty eradication tops the

international, national, and local agendas. As this study has shown, the United Nations agreement is that poverty must end, and countries must actively identify areas where poverty is manifest and rally resources around those. Unfortunately, as this study demonstrated using Mopani District and its locals as a case study, very little is done to appreciate other means to fight poverty, such as extra-governmental relations. This is despite many of these municipalities experiencing geographical disparities to meet societal needs independently. Generally, the findings in this study show that there is just no interest whatsoever in Mopani to institutionalize, embrace, or at least recognize the notion of extra-governmental relations and its potential to support and enhance municipal poverty-eradicating strategies. The following recommendations are therefore proffered:

- Amendments to the district IGR planning framework to cater to extra-governmental relations.

There is a need for the district municipality to revisit its framework for district or intra-local governmental relations and to re-focus the scope of IGR to cater to serious issues of poverty and rural development. This includes finding a textual expression of extra-governmental relations in municipal planning, where the mandate is large to discuss welfare issues. This will not need a legislative amendment into the *Intergovernmental Relations Frameworks Act [IGRFA], 13 of (2005)*, as others may suggest, but requires a district council resolution. Furthermore, the suggested changes ought to reflect the significance of SDG1 as an important treaty that the United Nations has signed.

- Municipal profiling of key extra-governmental stakeholders .

In institutionalizing extra-governmental relations, as the preceding suggests, the municipality must do municipal profiling not only of the local or rural businesses but also of the existing elites in every rural area. According to Phakathi (2016), every community has an elite or elite organization. Other organizations that need not necessarily hail from rural spaces can be approached, i.e., SALGA or SAPAAM, for administrative and managerial approaches that will help the municipality improve its policy and systems.

- Inter-municipal cooperation

This is the last recommendation. Given the persistent decrease of government efforts to fight poverty on one side and the growing levels of poverty on the side, there is a need for an integrated municipal approach where the UN coordinates all municipalities of the member states to share experiences, possible prospects, systems, and policies that can assist in deal with rural poverty and development.

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