

## **“Giving people the power to build their own communities”: the experiences of the eThekweni Municipality’s integrated development planning & city transformation process<sup>1</sup>**

Draft paper to be presented at the Africa Planning Conference, Durban, September 17 – 20<sup>th</sup> 2002.

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### **Abstract**

Like other large metropolitan areas in the country, Durban has been grappling with the challenges of city transformation as part of the final phase of the broader, national transition to a post-apartheid, democratic South Africa. Reflecting on the experiences of the eThekweni Municipality in Durban, this paper makes the call for African planners, academics and development practitioners to abandon, or at least more vigorously challenge the somewhat archaic, western development planning methodologies that are very often inappropriate to the African context. It argues that there is a need to develop more home grown, innovative and creative methodological responses to suit our own local conditions and needs.

Citing the ideological and methodological shifts made in the integrated development planning and broader transformation and restructuring process in Durban, it is argued that it is indeed possible to create unique and exciting processes. Processes that move beyond the rhetoric of “people-centered development” to one that in very real terms makes people the focus of planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring development.

1. An enabling legislative framework – necessary but not sufficient condition for change.....01
2. Traditional planning methodologies and paradigms: a critique .....02
3. Towards a new development paradigm: from integrated development planning to holistic development management – reflections from the Durban experience.....05
4. Concluding comments.....10

### **1. An enabling legislative framework: a necessary but not sufficient condition for change**

Our national legislative framework lays a sound foundation for implementing a more people-centered, developmental local government. For the first time in the history of local governance in South Africa, legislation makes communities the central focus by including them in the way local government is defined.<sup>2</sup> This legislative mindset shift, together with the new understanding of the role of local government as a facilitator of social and economic development - rather than a mere dispenser of services to passive recipients, has been widely embraced by planners and development practitioners alike. What is questionable however is the extent to which this legislative framework has been translated into a robust, implementable planning and implementation methodology that successfully translates the intent of the legislation into a *workable process* that can fulfill the developmental aims of local government.

It is argued that whilst both national and provincial planning authorities have provided guidelines for the implementation of integrated development plans (IDPs)<sup>3</sup>, the relevance and appropriateness of these methodologies to a metropolitan area of the size and complexity like Durban, is questionable. The Strategic Management Team of the eThekweni Municipality that was tasked with the responsibility of developing the municipality’s IDP was forced to set aside the traditional linear planning process (as suggested by the Provincial IDP Manual) which involved following “Phases One to Five” in a methodical way, in favour of a more home-grown, strategic, iterative, and citizen-driven approach.

<sup>1</sup> First draft – not for citation. Note also that the views expressed in this paper are the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the eThekweni Municipality

<sup>2</sup> See Municipal Systems Act, Chapter 2 (b) (ii)

<sup>3</sup> Integrated Development Planning for Local Authorities: A user-friendly guide. Published by the Department of Constitutional Development, CSIR and GTZ. (1998). KwaZulu Natal Integrated Development Planning Manual. Published by the Department of Traditional and Local Government Affairs (August 2001)

This assertion in no way suggests inherent weaknesses in the guidelines *per se*. Instead, like other commentators<sup>4</sup>, this paper contends that the application of that methodology is not as appropriate to the eThekweni Municipality as it would be to a smaller less developmentally complex municipality.

Armed with a progressive and enabling legislative framework, and driven by the need to develop a local planning methodology that was strategic and needs based, yet very simple, clear and workable, the city parents went to work.....

## **2. Traditional planning paradigms & methodologies: a critique**

The Strategic Management Team's starting point was to learn from past experiences. Whilst drawing on some of the positive aspects of previous planning and change programmes, it consciously attempted to break with the past typical planning methodologies that each of the erstwhile local Councils had followed. This move away from these approaches was based on the realisation that the impact of such approaches on the lives of citizens was not as initially anticipated. It is useful to note here that this realization has been a common one nationally, as documented in the many assessments that have been made on the performance of IDPs generally<sup>5</sup>.

It is important at this juncture to perhaps pause briefly and reflect critically at the way integrated development planning processes and methodologies have been designed and implemented, with particular reference to our own experience within the municipality. Whilst the focus of this paper is not about a critical assessment of IDPs and their implementation, it is argued that this is very necessary - as part of the solution to creating more workable and implementable processes lie in developing a deep understanding what needs to change.

Our admittedly limited analysis highlights four critical areas that provide clues to understanding reasons for the limited impact of our previous integrated development planning processes. These are based on common complaints that have been a source of frustration for planners, development practitioners, Councillors and communities involved in previous planning processes. These areas include: the obsession with analysis and data collection; the inherent difficulty or impossibility of sectoral integration; the shortcomings of attempting to treat budgeting and planning as separate processes to be linked at the end and the issue of treating participation as only a means to an end. Each of these will be examined briefly.

### **2.1. Death by analysis!**

The assertion that any sound planning process requires a sound analytical foundation is a reasonable one. That this process should be strongly data-driven (in an age where computer-generated modeling dominates) is also perhaps a fair, yet debatable assertion.

What is clearly problematic however is the unguided, unfocussed collection of sectoral information and the unchallenged obsession of commissioning detailed sectoral analyses which has typified much of our previous planning processes. From the Durban experience, there are literally hundreds of detailed analyses of every sector within the municipal area. The question that remains to be answered however is how these reports were used to inform decision-making that improved the quality of life of the citizens of the municipality.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Mark Oranje and Phil Harrison (2001) "Through and Beyond the Integrated Development Plan: the Challenge of Planning for Big Cities in South Africa.

<sup>5</sup> DDP. (1999) Final Report: Integrated Development Planning Pilot Projects: Assessment Study. Pretoria.

## **2.2. The myth of “sectoral integration”**

What is perhaps more problematic is the reification of abstract analytical constructs through the establishment of institutional structures (e.g. Working Groups) that go beyond analysis to strategy development. The result is a series of Working Groups or Theme Groups e.g. Economic Development, Rural Development, People Development, Social Upliftment, Service Delivery<sup>6</sup> - each of which develop sectoral reports that set out separate detailed strategies based on their detailed analysis, with the intention of delivering a set of projects and programmes. Again what is not made clear is exactly how these sectoral reports will be used and what the outcome of the often laborious and time-consuming exercise tangibly is.

It is not surprising therefore that there has been growing frustration and hesitancy from officials to engage in such sectoral initiatives. Perhaps some of the disillusionment with the detailed sectoral analysis (mentioned above) comes from the limitation of even fairly sophisticated “**synthesis**” processes, which often are abdicated to a small in-house “integrating team” or multi-disciplinary team or more often to an external consultant to generate.

The question that is not often asked is whether sectoral integration is possible at all, or whether it is desirable in the first instance. If one accepts the fact that people’s experience of reality is not compartmentalized into different facets of development, but that it is a single, holistic and complex one, then the notion of artificially attempting to assemble the different parts will have to be challenged.

## **2.3. “Linking” the plan to the budget**

Officials and Councillors involved in previous budgeting processes within the municipality often complain that the way in which the municipal budget is allocated previously was a tiresome and often frustrating process. It was typified by:

- conflicts that arose from the “prioritisation process between projects”, and a sense that some communities were “cheated” or received services and infrastructure at the expense of others.
- major delays, with the budget being approved long after the start of the new financial year, resulting in actual project implementation delays.
- attempting to agree on what projects were needed up front (which often did not address the real needs of the citizens).
- a lack of a systematic and programmatic way of deciding on what projects would happen over a period of time.
- a budgeting process that had little or no relationship with the IDP or overall city strategy, but that was driven by sector inputs and not customer outcomes.

In the latest round of IDP preparation throughout the country, municipal budgeting which was done in isolation from strategy development, was to be “linked” to the IDP. As indicated in Figure 1 overleaf, this was heralded as a bold step in municipal management. Whereas in previous planning processes there was little or no relationship between planning and budgeting, the first round of IDPs intended to “inform” budget processes. In the latest development of IDPs the linking of the two separate processes is therefore regarded as a progressive if not radical break with tradition. The usefulness of this approach in its application to large metropolitan areas however is questionable. Certainly this has been the experience in the case of the eThekweni Municipality. A more appropriate planning and budget response is needed.

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<sup>6</sup> As established in the preparation of the Durban Unicity Committee’s IDP process (1999)

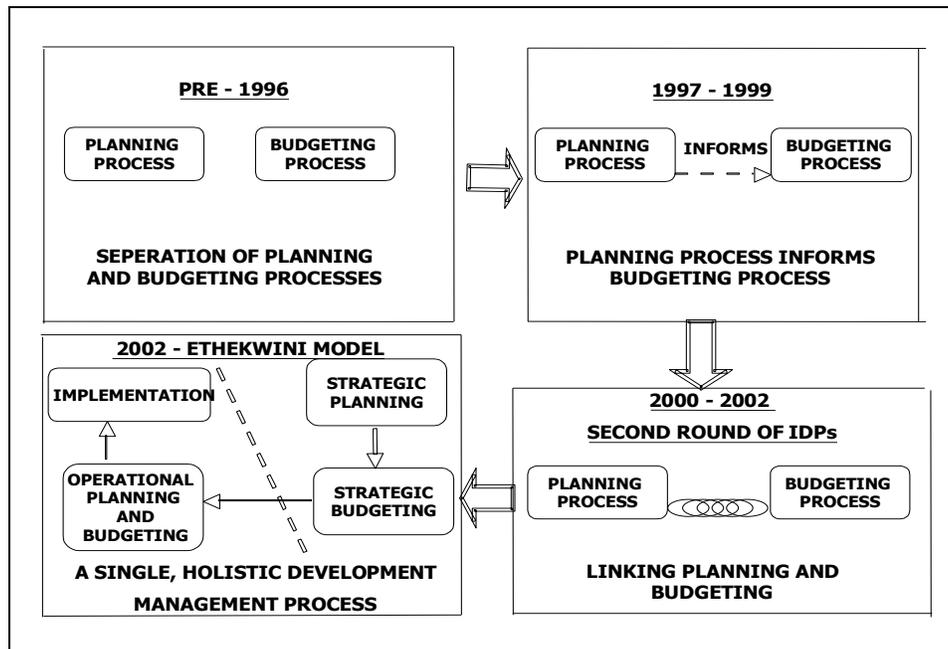


Figure 1: The changing relationships between planning & budgeting processes

#### 2.4. Real participation or pseudo-participation?

To argue that previous (integrated development) planning processes did not actively involve communities and other key stakeholders is not a fair assessment. The first round of IDPs that the erstwhile Local Councils of the municipality engaged in, made great strides in that communities were consulted through workshoping processes and the Local Councils made attempts to involve communities at each stage in the preparation of their respective IDPs.<sup>7</sup> The emergence of “Consultative Forums” was heralded as an important breakthrough in bridging the chasm between local government and civil society structures at that time.

An honest and critical assessment of these consultative processes however will reveal that the underlying philosophy that drove such processes was that in order for local government to deliver on its mandate it was necessary for communities to participate - in what was essentially the Councils’ Development Plan. More importantly, the scope for real decision-making by citizens was limited, given the design of the overall methodology. Whilst citizens “needs” were determined, these were often recorded more as project “wish lists” that were to be prioritized by the Council, given its limited resources. The result of such a process (which is often underplayed) is a real sense of community disappointment and disillusionment with a process that raises expectations and fails to deliver. The need to move away from such almost “pseudo participation” was an important driving force in the quest for a better, more people-focused methodology.

#### 2.5. Why does such a dysfunctional system perpetuate itself?

In examining each of the above four areas that are based on very real complaints, there is an overwhelming need to determine the reason why such an arguably dysfunctional planning system continued(s) to perpetuate itself. **This paper argues that part of the answer to this vexing question lies with the planning and management policies, principles and the concepts that municipalities often unquestioningly follow.** These policies (often in the form of guidelines) are to a large extent functionally or sectorally-based.<sup>8</sup> The question that needs to be asked then, is what is the underlying root cause for policies, principles and planning concepts that are inappropriate in meeting the development challenges that are being faced.

<sup>7</sup> See in particular Durban’s North and South Central Local Council (1998), North Local Council (1998) and the Inner West Local Council’s Integrated Development Plan (1998).

<sup>8</sup> Even when these are not functionally or sectorally-based, practioners lack the methodological tools to translate the theory into practice, and therefore retreat into their own “boxes”.

## **2.6. Finding the Core Cause of the Problem**

To strike at the heart of the matter it is argued that conventional, dominant planning discourse has been dominated by a conceptual framework that is perhaps best described as “**fragmented and activity-based thinking**”. Characteristically, this approach assumes that reality is made up of a number of isolated parts that are static. In order to understand the “whole”, this approach argues that there is a need to break it up to its component parts, and do a detailed study of each part. It is only through this detailed analysis of each of the parts that the solution will emerge.

Such an approach to planning therefore starts with breaking up the whole into parts and allocating the different parts to different teams to develop strategies for dealing with each part. In the process of dealing with each part, the participants are awakened by the discovery of integral interrelationships among the various parts. Consequently, institutional mechanisms such as Co-ordinating Committees are therefore established in an attempt to “recreate the whole” or bigger picture. The underlying belief that underpins this philosophy is that “the whole is the sum total of its parts – if one gets the isolated parts right, the whole will emerge”.

It is this limited frame of reference, or way of thinking about development and its management, that is arguably the single most important cause of a system that does not work. It is further suggested that there does not appear to be enough of a drive to invent new more locally based, creative and innovative approaches to planning and managing development.

In the next section, a framework is suggested that hopefully can contribute towards laying a new foundation for an African renaissance in development planning and management.

## **3. Towards a new development paradigm: from integrated development planning to holistic development management**

### **3.1. The search for new ways of thinking about development**

If we accept the assertion that inappropriate conceptual frameworks lie at the heart of the problem, then the challenge is moving beyond a mere critique, towards the creation of a bold new and more appropriate world view. This, it is argued was perhaps the first critical (unrecorded and unannounced) methodological challenge that faced the newly established eThekweni Municipality.

Fundamental to the approach adopted in the Council's transformation and restructuring process<sup>9</sup> (which includes the preparation of the Integrated Development Plan), is a conceptual framework best described as “**holistic and results-based thinking**”. This approach is located within the “**systems theory**” school of thought and has a view of organizations that is perhaps best described as “**results-oriented, and process-based**”.<sup>10</sup> Whilst the methodology is homegrown in order to suit the eThekweni Municipal context, it has also been influenced to an extent by the Theory of Constraints (TOC) – a management philosophy developed by Dr. Eliyahu M. Goldratt.

The local government application of this development approach is characterised by understanding reality as being made up of a number of interdependent parts that are in a constant state of change and development. A change in one part, it is argued therefore will lead to a change in another. The changes are both gradual and revolutionary and the revolutionary changes are as a result of gradual changes.

In this approach, the most appropriate way of intervening is to first and foremost **define the purpose** or **GOAL** of what is to be achieved. Thereafter, the challenge is to clearly **define the process** that delivers the purpose and only then is the **interrelations among the parts** that are involved in the process identified (see Figure 2 below).

<sup>9</sup> See also the eThekweni Municipality's Transformation Plan (February 2002).

<sup>10</sup> The reader is also referred to the set of readings on process-based organisations which have been packaged for the municipality as a Competency-based Performance Management (CPM) training pack by Cornell Brand (2001).

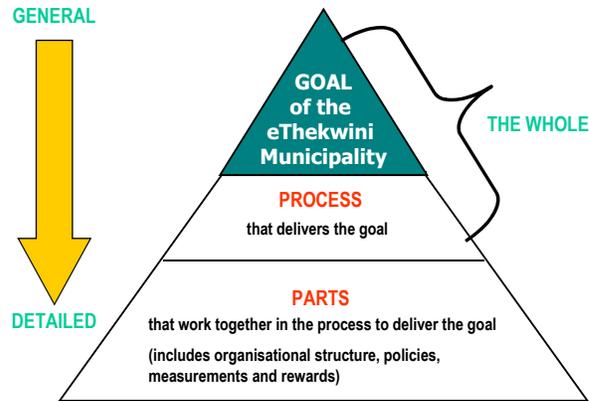


FIGURE 2: SIMPLIFIED MODEL: eTHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY TRANSFORMATION METHODOLOGY

Any useful focused analysis, according to this worldview, focuses on the relationships among the parts. In this way, the big picture is always borne in mind when focusing on the parts. The whole is therefore always more than the sum total of its parts – in fact one can only understand the part within the context of the whole.

### **3.2. Translating this results-based framework into a unified holistic development plan:**

Using this new conceptual framework a transformation plan was designed by senior management based on a range of workshops that allowed all the voices of the internal and external stakeholders to be heard. This transformation plan was then revised and refined through a series of workshops during which all stakeholders actively shaped the form and content of the plan.

The transformation plan deals with two important aspects of local governance. In the first instance it is about ensuring that the municipality's focus always remains on improving the quality of life of all its citizens. The challenge therefore was to design a **sustainable management process** that could successfully transform a planning process that has been previously very inward-focused into a more **dynamic, citizen-focused process** that is able to contribute to improving the quality of life of all residents within the municipal area. Clearly, this process challenges the municipality's traditional planning paradigms and approaches to governance.

In the second instance, the challenge confronting the municipality is to transform its internal machinery so that it can be an **effective service delivery agent**. Hence whilst the Municipal Systems Act calls for planning with the citizens and ensuring participation, the challenge is to also ensure that the municipality's **organisational structure** is changed to one that can deliver services in a more effective and efficient manner. The eThekweni Municipality's Transformation Plan therefore focuses on building a citizen-focused organisation that has both:

- a citizen-focused plan (Integrated Development Plan), and
- citizen-focused internal machinery. This involves designing a new **organisational structure, terms of reference and budgets** that are outputs-based (i.e. outputs that are expected by the service users and not according to the internal logic of the organization); designing a new set of **rules and policies** that guide the behaviour of the entire organisation and putting into place a new set of **measurements** that will reinforce the expected organisational behaviour.

Central to what is now become to be known as “the new way of doing business” within the municipality, is the notion of *holistic development management* – as a response to moving beyond the *integrated development plan*. This invokes a more powerful understanding, since “integrated” almost suggests the need to bring together disparate parts and *development planning* alludes to merely one part of a development management process that also involves budgeting, implementation and evaluation.

### 3.3. The Starting point: Redefining the GOAL of the municipality

With the enactment of a range of national legislation<sup>11</sup> that intend to give effect to a more developmental local government, municipalities throughout the country have been challenged to revisit their understanding of their *raison d'etre*. The eThekweni Municipality's attempt to deal with this challenge of re-defining the purpose of local government and how it will need to respond to its new role was debated at its first strategic planning workshop held in May 2001. It was then concretized through the municipality's adoption of the Long Term Development Framework (LTDF), which enshrined a new purpose statement that laid the basis for a new way of doing business in the Council.

What is fundamentally different about the strategic approach taken in the eThekweni LTDF is the clear and unequivocal re-definition of the **GOAL or PURPOSE** of the municipality. In line with the Municipal Systems Acts' developmental local government objectives, and its focus on local government playing a "facilitatory", rather than "dispensary" role, the driving force behind the Councils' LTDF is the need to move towards a **people-centered approach** to development.<sup>12</sup> **The new agreed upon purpose statement as documented in the adopted LTDF is as follows:**

*New Purpose Statement of the eThekweni Municipality :*

*" The purpose of the eThekweni Municipality is to facilitate and ensure the provision of infrastructure, services and support, thereby creating an enabling environment for all citizens to utilise their full potential and access opportunities, which enable them to contribute towards a vibrant and sustainable economy with full employment, and thus create better quality of life for all."*

*- From the LTDF, adopted May 2001*

From the above purpose statement, it is clear that the LTDF and the municipality's transformation process is founded on the premise that citizens and interest groups themselves will also have to take actions to achieve developmental results.

The role of local government in this context then, is to provide an environment for citizens to act and achieve results that enable them to satisfy their needs. This then makes it possible for the municipality to achieve its stated outcome of a HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE for all citizens within the municipal area.

In the past, local government concerned itself only with its own detailed local government **activities** that it has to perform (e.g. planning for projects, tendering, budgeting, etc) in order to produce a final **output** (e.g. park, clinic, hall, etc). No cognizance was given to how it should work with other service providers who delivered related outputs, or services that will need to directly support local government outputs. The function of local government was considered complete once the physical products were "delivered" to passive recipients.

The process-based view of the organisation however, and indeed national legislation now requires municipalities to move beyond merely providing these services *The eThekweni municipality's new way of doing business is about actively facilitating a process whereby citizens as customers of local government use the outputs delivered as their own starting point or input, to engage in a process which involves them taking action and using the outputs delivered the municipality to deliver results.* It is only once these needs have been satisfied through action taken by the citizens themselves that the outcome is met.

### 3.4. Designing a holistic process that delivers the goal

Having redefined the goal of the organization as the starting point, a new understanding of *people* being the focus of local government's existence was being developed. The next important step was to design a process that could deliver effectively on the new goal.

What is perhaps most unique about the eThekweni approach is the design of a *single holistic process* that moves from strategic and visionary statements of intent, through to a process that combines planning

<sup>11</sup> Local Government Transition Act (209/1993), Municipal Structures Act (117/1998) and the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000)

<sup>12</sup> The reader is referred to the Long Term Development Framework – final version, dated November 2001

and budgeting for development, through to implementation and evaluation. The focus is on separating what is strategic from what are more operational issues (see Figure 3 below).

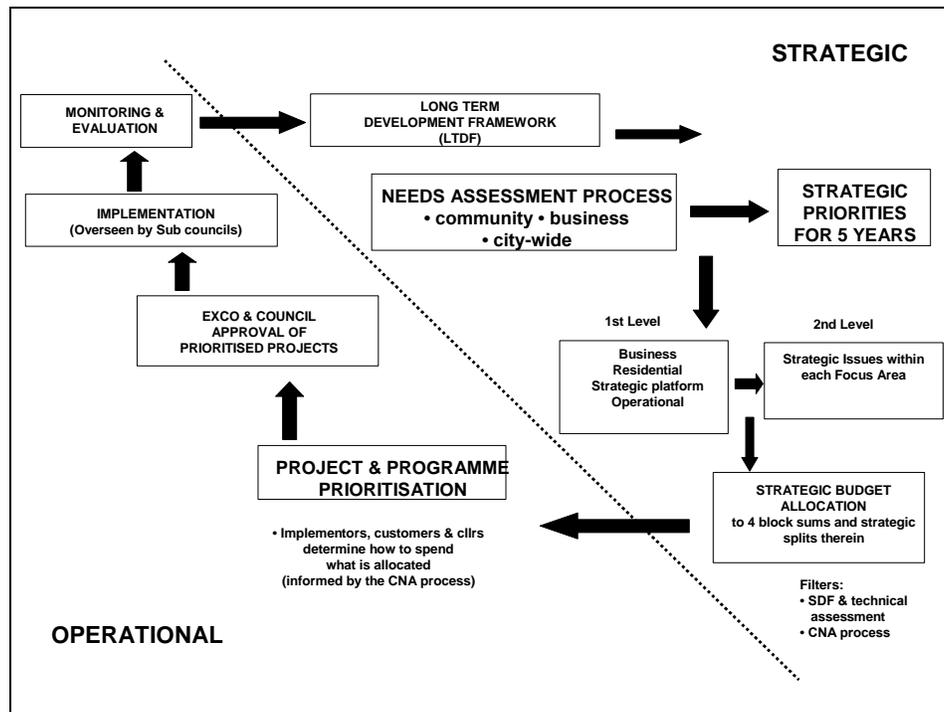


Figure 3: A single holistic development management process – eThekweni Model

As alluded to earlier on, the conventional planning process involves a process of analysis; strategy development; project packaging; integration and approval. The holistic development management model sets aside this methodology in favour of a more suitable approach that can deal with the challenges that Durban faces.

The eThekweni Municipality process began with the development of a Long Term Development Framework (LTDF) in May 2001. This Framework outlined a strategic framework for action over a twenty-year period. This was not a legal requirement not a guideline laid down by planning legislation. It was however borne of the need to charter a longer-term framework of action. Such twenty-year plans are not an uncommon practice in other cities internationally. The other steps in the new holistic development management process involved the following:

### Assessment of Customer Needs

Having an overall strategic framework, the first step in developing the city's plan involved determining the extent of the set of challenges identified in the LTDF. This was done through an extensive, **rigorous customer needs assessment process** that was run throughout the city. In addition to 100 ward needs assessment workshops, separate workshops for small, emerging and organized businesses were conducted.

Workshops for city-side stakeholders were also conducted. The focus of each of these workshops was to ascertain real needs, rather than projects. These needs were to inform a strategic process that determined the way the city budget is allocated.

Perhaps it is important to record here, that the abovementioned needs assessment process itself is worthy of documentation and study as it reflects a unique, home-grown methodology and spirit of doing things in a way that reflects local culture and identity. For example, each local workshop and sector workshop began with a prayer, served (traditional) meals for all participants and was deliberately structured in a way that ensured that all participants were most comfortable, at ease and able to express their views. At the "Big Mama 2" Budget Workshop for example – held at a venue that was "blessed" by community workers who invoked the presence of the Divine a day before the deliberations - will have

been most interesting to international observers, especially how the seemingly formal session suddenly broke into song, ululation and dance prior to the “way forward” discussion on the city budget allocation.

### **Strategic Prioritisation**

The municipality’s methodology also attempts to make strategic choices about the best way to allocate scarce resources. The needs assessments and the long-term development framework (LTDF) influenced the prioritising of 4 key strategic areas namely:

- Residential community support
- Business community support,
- Strategic/platform infrastructure
- Operations support.

Within these four strategic areas, sub-priorities were identified:

Residential community support: housing, social infrastructure and physical infrastructure.

Business community support: regeneration, business support and flagship projects

Strategic/platform infrastructure- bulk services.

Operations support: plant and equipment, new buildings and strategic internal infrastructure.

These sub-priorities were largely informed by the needs arising from the extensive needs assessment exercise.

It is important to note that a process of strategic budgeting involves making hard choices about broad resource allocation upfront and helps provide a framework for local decision-making around what projects will happen when.

The needs obtained through the needs assessment process was tested against a strategic technical process which involved interrogating the data that emerged; comparing them with existing information and developing proposed technical interventions. A key strategic filter was the Spatial Development Framework (SDF) which helped provide guidance on what strategic infrastructure was needed and where this should happen.

### **Strategic Budget Allocation**

The process involved allocating block sums of money to the 4 key strategic priorities listed above and then dividing up the block sum allocation to cover the different sub-priorities (also listed above).

### **Project and Programme Prioritisation**

This step marks the beginning of what is regarded as an operational level process, which is more detailed and requires the actions and efforts of a range of stakeholders. At area level, communities, Councillors and area management teams will prioritise projects and programmes with the funds made available to them, utilising the needs assessment data collected previously. What is unique and exciting about this process is that it is a highly interactive process between the actual customers of the project, elected politicians and the administration who collaboratively determine the nature of the project.

### **Approval by EXCO and Council**

Programmes and priorities will be submitted for approval by EXCO and Council.

### **Implementation**

Implementation will take place at a local level by all stakeholders, co-ordinated by area offices who will implement using facilities, resources, etc of Council and other service producers.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Central to the municipality’s new way of doing business is to ensure that its interventions are relevant and actually do enable its residents to improve the quality of their lives. It is therefore imperative that a simple, workable and sustainable monitoring and evaluation system is put in place that allows the municipality to measure its successes and take corrective actions where necessary.

### **3.5. Implementing the *parts of the process* that together will achieve the goal**

Logically then, it stands to reason that a consideration of each of the component parts of the process is done only after goal definition and the mapping out of the process that will best deliver the goal. A range of critical transformation programmes and projects have emerged from this process. Given that these fall beyond the scope of this paper, these are only mentioned here briefly. Some of the projects include the Customer Service Improvement project, Area-based Co-ordination, Organisational re-design and a project aimed at the redefinition of the role of support departments. The important point to be made is that if any of these projects had been conceptualised, packaged and implemented earlier, – without the formulation of the big picture and in isolation from each other, their impact would most likely have been minimal if not counter-productive.

### **3.6. How does the new citizen-focused model deal with the negative effects identified in the previous planning process?**

#### ***Focused and strategic analysis***

The new approach, allows data collection and analysis to be focused and strategic. Given that it no longer happens as the first step in the process, the collection of irrelevant and unnecessary data is eliminated. With the establishment of a clear goal and a process to deliver the goal, the collection, manipulation and analysis of data can play a powerful role in assisting the parts of the process deliver the goal. Before commissioning any investigative research or analysis the question that is now asked is how will this data help achieve the goal of the organisation.

#### **Beyond “sectoral integration”**

Clearly the “holistic development management” process makes sectoral integration superfluous. There is no longer the need to bring together disparate parts together or to align them, as they are all part of a single unified process. A common, shared understanding of the purpose, and the process to be followed to achieve the purpose is far more powerful than superficial attempts at “integration”. The energies released during this process, and the maximization of synergies between the parts of the process are noteworthy in the eThekweni experience.

#### **A single planning, budgeting, implementation and evaluation cycle – no linkages necessary!**

The holistic development management process also makes the need to link planning and budgeting process superfluous. The eThekweni model eliminates the previous frustrations experienced in this regard. By budgeting strategically up front as part of the same single process, planning for projects become easier as stakeholders know what budgetary constraints exists. They are now enticed to creatively explore other funding sources and new more cost-effective methods of implementation. These are all effects of a single, holistic development process.

#### **Citizens the focus of the plan – not an add on**

The underlying theme provides the entire transformation process in the eThekweni Municipality is that of putting people first. Whether it is the city’s new Vision which is about improving the quality of life of its people, or the new goal of the municipality which is about enabling people to take action, or the city’s IDP – the People’s Plan or the city budget – the People’s Budget campaign, it is clear that the new focus of the Municipality is on it’s people. In such a process “participation” can never be an add on – it is a fundamental and integral part of the new way of governance.

### **4. Concluding comments**

The experiences of the eThekweni Municipality in attempting to practically translate the legislative intent of “developmental local government” is academically exciting in that it offers a new home-grown, alternate model for managing city development. More importantly, it gives hope and inspires ordinary citizens to engage with local government in a developmental process aimed at improving the quality of their own lives.

The initial comments and feedback on this approach from organs of civil society, business, labour, development practitioners, tertiary institutions and other spheres of government all indicate that the new way of doing business is not just appropriate but very necessary. At the presentation of the draft IDP to the national assessment panel (facilitated by the Department of Provincial and Local Government), the unique strategic approach to budgeting as part of a single holistic process was commended.

Whilst the accolades and positive feedback is encouraging, it has to be acknowledged that laying a solid foundation through the establishment of a new framework for action is only the starting point. It is easy for planners and other development practitioners working within the municipality to slip back into the “activity-based and parts thinking” mode of operation. At the time of writing this paper, the municipality has been gearing itself to meet with the challenges of implementing the new way of doing business. Clearly, if the municipality is to achieve its goal, then the sustained and ongoing commitment to the approach from all stakeholders is critical.

In conclusion it is perhaps worth noting that that the monitoring, and careful documentation of the experiences of the eThekweni municipality in their transformation process is important not just academically, but because of the learning potential that it offers to other cities in similar municipal contexts in the (southern) African continent. It is important for us, as African planners and practitioners to draw from these lessons in our quest to improve the quality of lives of all the people that we serve.