



DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT MODEL (DDM) AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR WATER SERVICES LEGISLATION, PLANNING AND REGULATION



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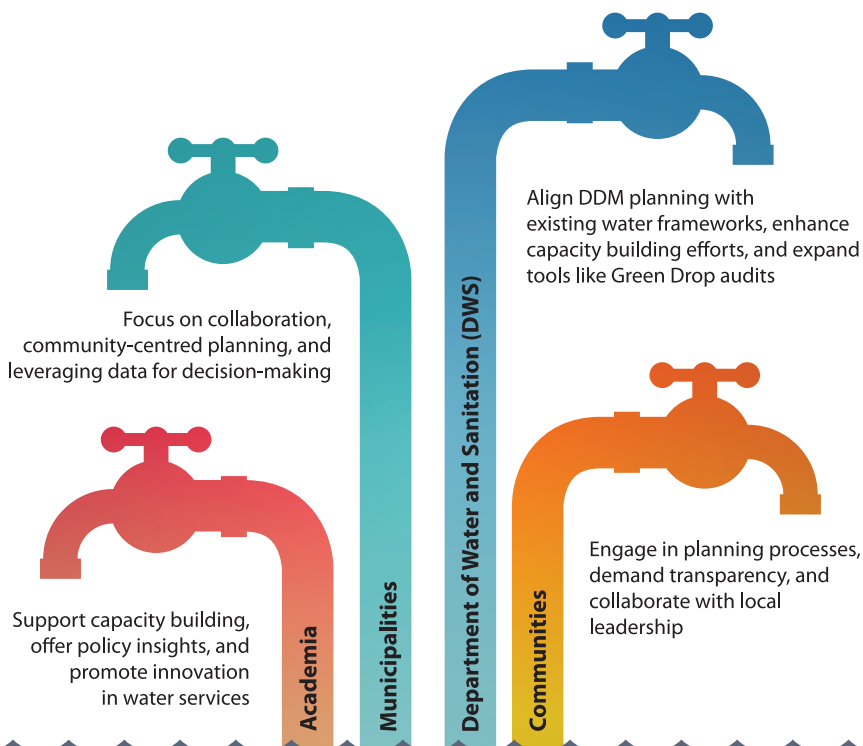


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The District Development Model (DDM) offers a strategic framework for intergovernmental coordination and integrated planning, with the potential to transform water service delivery in South Africa. This booklet provides an analytical overview of the DDM's implications for water services, identifying both opportunities and challenges.

Key findings include:

- **Policy and legislative context:** While the DDM aligns with South Africa's constitutional principles of cooperative governance, gaps in regulatory alignment and explicit legislative references impede its institutionalisation.
- **Administrative complexity:** With an abundance of existing plans such as Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), Water Services Development Plans (WSDPs), and other frameworks and instruments, the DDM's introduction of One Plans adds another layer of planning that risks duplicating efforts and increasing administrative burdens.
- **Challenges in the water services sector:** The water sector faces unique challenges that complicate the DDM's implementation, including inadequate revenue, poor asset management, lack of technical capacity, no model for faecal sludge management, and the need to revisit WSA allocations. Planning on the basis of municipal boundaries further exacerbates these issues, as water resources often span across provincial borders.
- **Opportunities for the DDM:** Despite these challenges, the DDM presents opportunities for improving regional collaboration, enhancing accountability of district WSAs to local municipalities, and streamlining processes such as the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) approval.



Key recommendations per stakeholder



01 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Approach

Effective water service delivery and management are critical imperatives for sustainable development and societal well-being. This research investigates the DDM as a strategic framework aimed at improving service delivery through enhanced intergovernmental coordination and integrated planning. The DDM, introduced through the President's 2019 directive, seeks to address the challenges posed by fragmented governance structures and siloed approaches that have hindered service delivery, particularly in water services.

Commissioned by the WRC in May 2023, this study focused on evaluating the DDM's implications for water services legislation, planning, and regulation. By assessing the DDM's alignment with water services processes and examining its practical implementation, the study aims to provide insights into the DDM's capacity to accelerate service delivery and improve coordination across all levels of government.

Key research objectives included:

- Informing policy- and guiding decision-making processes.
- Exploring challenges and opportunities in water services delivery within the DDM framework.
- Providing guidance on aligning the DDM with water services legislation, planning, and processes.
- Examining the role of WSAs and the implications of district-level governance in the water sector.

1.2 Methods

The study employed a multi-phased research approach, beginning with a literature and legislative review to establish the theoretical and legal foundation for understanding the DDM's application in water services. The second phase involved extensive stakeholder consultations to gather diverse perspectives and ensure the study's findings are both practical and relevant. This included webinars, workshops, and direct

engagements with stakeholders from various spheres of government, academia, and civil society.

A key deliverable in this phase was the workshop report, which synthesised discussions from the webinar titled “DDM and Water Services: A Promising Model?” held in November 2024. This engagement provided critical insights into the DDM’s feasibility and its ability to address systemic challenges in water services.

1.3 Limitations

While the study offers valuable insights, a few limitations should be acknowledged:

- **Stakeholder availability:** Despite efforts to engage widely, some stakeholders were unavailable during the consultation phase, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives captured.
- **Scope of implementation analysis:** Given the nascent implementation of the DDM, the study primarily evaluates its potential rather than established outcomes, which limits definitive conclusions about its long-term impact on water services.





02 CONTEXT

2.1 Overview of the DDM

The District Development Model (DDM), introduced in August 2019, seeks to address South Africa's long-standing governance challenges that undermine effective service delivery, economic development, and spatial equity. The model is designed as an integrated, district-based approach to foster cooperation across all spheres of government – national, provincial, and local – and to strengthen partnerships with communities, the private sector, and civil society (CoGTA, 2021).

Philosophy and objectives

At the core of the DDM, is the “One District, One Plan, One Budget” philosophy, which integrates planning, budgeting, and implementation processes to ensure that government resources are utilised efficiently and equitably. Each of South Africa's 52 district and metropolitan municipalities is required to develop a “One Plan”, aligning national strategies such as the National Development Plan (NDP) and Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) with local needs (HSRC, 2022).

Challenges the DDM seeks to address

The DDM aims to resolve systemic issues, including:

- **Fragmented planning and budgeting:** Departments and entities historically operate in silos, leading to inefficiencies.
- **Spatial inequalities:** Persistent disparities between urban and rural areas result in unequal service delivery.
- **Poor intergovernmental relations:** Misaligned priorities across spheres of government hinder coordination.
- **Resource inefficiency:** Ineffective localization of national policies, such as the NDP, delays progress.
- **Stakeholder exclusion:** Limited participation of civil society, traditional leaders, and the private sector in planning processes.

Through integrated planning and collaboration, the DDM strives to create a cohesive governance system, driving sustainable development and rebuilding public trust in government institutions.

2.2 Legislative and policy framework

The DDM is deeply embedded within South Africa's legislative framework, emphasizing cooperative governance and intergovernmental collaboration. However, gaps remain in aligning certain legislative instruments with the DDM's objectives.

Key legislation supporting the DDM

The DDM aligns with the following legislation:

- Constitution of South Africa (1996): Section 41 enshrines principles of cooperative governance, providing the foundation for intergovernmental collaboration.
- Water Services Act (1997): Guides municipalities in ensuring access to equitable water services.
- National Water Act (1998): Focuses on sustainable water resource management.
- Municipal Systems Act (2000): Establishes Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) as central tools for municipal planning, harmonised with the DDM's One Plans.
- Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act (2005): Provides mechanisms for coordination between government spheres, aligned with the DDM's objectives.

Legal challenge: constitutionality of the DDM

In *Democratic Alliance v Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (700/2022) [2024] ZASCA 65*, the Democratic Alliance (DA) argued that the DDM infringes on the autonomy of municipalities as guaranteed by Sections 151 and 156 of the Constitution. The court acknowledged the DDM's objectives of fostering cooperative governance but ruled that the mandatory adoption of One Plans could infringe on municipal independence. The judgment called for refinement of the DDM framework to better balance intergovernmental collaboration with constitutional mandates for municipal autonomy.

2.3 Implementation progress of the DDM

Phased implementation approach

The DDM's implementation has progressed through the following phases (COGTA, 2024):

- Establishment (2019–2020): Development of the DDM concept and launch of pilot sites in eThekweni, OR Tambo, and Waterberg districts.
- Piloting (2020–2021): Creation of district profiles and initial One Plans.
- Institutionalisation (2021–2025): Integration of DDM principles into governance systems and structures.
- Sustainability (2025 onward): Focused on ensuring the long-term viability of the DDM (CoGTA, 2021).

Key achievements

- Profiles and plans: Completion of district and metro profiles and introduction of draft One Plans for 46 districts and metros.
- Technical support: Establishment of DDM hubs and quality assurance panels.
- Digital tools: Development of the Information Management System (IMS) for data-driven decision-making.

Challenges and success factors

While the DDM has made significant progress, challenges persist:

- Stakeholder buy-in: Limited acceptance of the DDM by some municipalities and stakeholders.
- Integration gaps: Weak alignment between One Plans and existing IDPs.
- Resource constraints: Financial and technical capacity limitations at the district level (HSRC, 2022).

Overall, these challenges and success factors will be further analysed in Section 4. The findings will shed light on the practical implications of these challenges, providing a deeper understanding of how they affect the DDM's overall effectiveness and opportunities for improvement.



03 ANALYTICAL FINDINGS OF THE DDM AND IMPLICATIONS ON WATER SERVICES

3.1 Policy- and decision-making

Regulatory framework and amendments

The DDM is supported by legislative instruments such as the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act (IGRFA) and the Municipal Structures Act, emphasizing coherence in government planning. However, the lack of explicit reference to the DDM in these frameworks creates gaps in its institutionalization. For instance, while amendments to the IGRFA aim to enhance intergovernmental coordination, they fall short of explicitly incorporating the DDM, hindering its formal recognition and long-term sustainability.

Stakeholders, including SALGA, stressed that formalising the DDM through legislative amendments is essential to embedding its principles into governance practices. Academia highlighted that the absence of a clear regulatory mandate for the DDM risks it being perceived as a political initiative rather than a governance framework. The recently published DDM Regulations (May 2023) provide practical guidelines for municipal implementation but lack comprehensive provisions for critical sectors such as water services.

Integration with existing planning frameworks

One of the key objectives of the DDM is to harmonise planning frameworks across government spheres. However, consultations revealed overlapping mandates and a lack of clarity in aligning One Plans with existing frameworks such as Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and Water Services Development Plans (WSDPs). This misalignment often leads to administrative burdens and duplication of efforts, complicating the implementation process.

The DWS highlighted progress in incorporating the DDM into water policy initiatives, such as the Water and Sanitation Services on Privately Owned Land policy. However, the integration of such initiatives into the broader DDM framework remains inconsistent, particularly in aligning sector-specific priorities with district wide objectives.

3.2 Challenges and barriers

Government coordination and role delineation

A significant challenge in implementing the DDM is the entrenched silo mentality within government entities. SALGA identified fragmented governance structures as a key barrier to effective coordination. Without clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between national, provincial, and local governments, achieving cohesive intergovernmental planning remains difficult.

The consultations also revealed tensions between district and local municipalities over resource allocation and decision-making authority. Stakeholders emphasized the need for clearer frameworks to define roles, reduce overlaps, and foster collaborative governance.

Financial and capacity constraints

Financial and technical capacity constraints pose significant barriers to the DDM's implementation in the water sector. Municipalities, particularly in under-resourced districts, struggle with inadequate budgets and limited access to skilled personnel. Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) highlighted that the process for accessing funding, such as the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG), is cumbersome and often inaccessible for smaller municipalities.

In addition to financial limitations, a lack of technical expertise further exacerbates the challenges. Many municipalities do not have sufficient engineering capacity to manage complex water infrastructure projects. Stakeholders have called for targeted capacity building programmes and greater resource pooling at the district level to address these gaps.

Data management and integration

Effective data management is critical for evidence-based decision-making under the DDM. However, inconsistencies in data collection, storage, and sharing across government spheres undermine its potential. The lack of a unified data management system results in fragmented information, making it difficult to plan and monitor water services effectively.

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of developing a centralised data platform to consolidate information across districts. Such a platform would enable real time monitoring, facilitate better decision-making, and improve accountability. Academia also highlighted the need for enhanced data literacy among government officials to ensure the effective use of available information.

Community involvement and engagement

While municipalities are mandated to engage communities in planning processes, these efforts are often treated as compliance driven exercises rather than meaningful engagements. Stakeholders emphasized the need to move beyond a tick box approach to foster genuine, sustained community involvement. A more bottom-up approach to planning, where community insights drive decision-making, was highlighted as essential for aligning water service plans with local needs and priorities.

The webinar discussions revealed that community engagement can serve as a double-edged sword. When effectively implemented, it opens spaces for innovation and collaborative problem-solving. However, poorly executed engagements can create additional red tape and constrain progress, emphasising the need for strategic, well-structured approaches to community involvement.

3.3 Coordination and collaboration

Institutional arrangements

The DDM relies on robust institutional arrangements to facilitate coordination across government spheres. CoGTA plays a central role in overseeing the implementation of One Plans and establishing District Hubs to support intergovernmental collaboration.

These hubs serve as technical support centres, pooling resources and expertise to address local development challenges.

Despite these efforts, entrenched silos within government departments continue to hinder effective collaboration. SALGA noted that unclear mandates and overlapping functions often lead to inefficiencies and duplication of efforts. To address these issues, stakeholders have called for strengthened institutional frameworks and clearer role definitions.

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)

The DDM presents an opportunity to enhance collaboration between public and private sectors in water services provision. Academia emphasized the potential of PPPs to address capacity gaps and leverage additional resources for infrastructure development. However, stakeholders cautioned that such partnerships must be carefully managed to ensure alignment with public sector objectives and community needs.

3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

A robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework is essential to assess the DDM's effectiveness and ensure accountability. CoGTA has developed preliminary indicators for evaluating the implementation of One Plans, but stakeholders noted that these metrics need further refinement to capture sector-specific outcomes, particularly in water services.

The DWS highlighted the success of existing tools such as Green Drop and Blue Drop audits in improving municipal performance and accountability. These initiatives could serve as models for developing comprehensive M&E frameworks under the DDM. Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of transparent data sharing and public reporting to build trust and drive continuous improvement.

3.5 Early Impacts and Good Practices

Policy innovation

The DDM has facilitated innovative policy approaches, such as the Water and Sanitation

Services on Privately Owned Land policy. This initiative demonstrates the model's potential to address complex service delivery challenges through coordinated, district wide strategies.

Capacity building

District Hubs have emerged as a promising mechanism for building technical capacity and supporting municipalities in implementing the DDM. These hubs enable resource pooling and provide access to specialized expertise, addressing critical capacity gaps.

Data driven decision-making

The establishment of the National Strategic Hub has enhanced data-driven governance by consolidating information across districts. This platform enables evidence-based planning and resource allocation, ensuring that interventions are targeted and effective.





04 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Department of Water and Sanitation

- **Enhance water service integration:** Align DDM planning processes with existing water service frameworks like WSDPs and IDPs to prevent duplication.
- **Policy and capacity support:** Strengthen support for WSAs through district hubs, offering technical expertise and capacity-building programs tailored to local challenges.
- **Advance data driven decision making:** Expand and integrate tools like Green Drop, Blue Drop, and No Drop audits into the DDM's broader monitoring and evaluation system to enhance transparency and accountability in water services.

4.2 Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs

- **Clarify legislative mandates:** Introduce amendments to the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act and related legislation to explicitly formalise the DDM and ensure its alignment with governance priorities.
- **Enhance intergovernmental coordination:** Strengthen the role of district hubs as platforms for intergovernmental collaboration and ensure they are adequately resourced to fulfil their mandate.
- **Advocate for community engagement:** Implement sustained community outreach programs to ensure the DDM's principles are understood and supported at the grassroots level.

4.3 South African Local Government Association

- **Support municipal capacities:** Provide municipalities with ongoing training and technical assistance to enhance their ability to integrate the DDM into water service planning and delivery.
- **Promote best practices:** Develop a repository of successful DDM initiatives and share these with municipalities to inspire innovation and adaptation.

- **Address governance gaps:** Advocate for clearer delineation of roles between local and district municipalities to ensure streamlined service delivery.

4.4 Municipalities

- **Prioritize collaboration:** Work closely with district hubs and other municipalities to pool resources and expertise, particularly in areas with limited technical capacity.
- **Focus on community centred planning:** Actively involve local communities in the development and implementation of water service plans to ensure alignment with their needs and priorities.
- **Leverage available data:** Invest in improving data collection and utilization for evidence-based planning and decision-making.

4.5 Academia

- **Capacity building:** Collaborate with municipalities to design and deliver practical training programs aimed at addressing technical skills gaps in water management.
- **Support policy development:** Offer independent research and analysis to refine the DDM's framework and enhance its effectiveness in the water sector.
- **Promote innovation:** Facilitate pilot projects and innovative approaches to water service delivery through partnerships with local governments and communities.

4.6 Communities

- **Engage actively:** Participate in consultations and planning processes to ensure that local needs are adequately represented in the DDM's implementation.
- **Advocate for transparency:** Demand regular updates from local governments and WSAs on the progress of water service delivery plans.
- **Collaborate with leadership:** Partner with traditional leaders and community organizations to strengthen collective advocacy for improved water services.



05 CONCLUSION

The DDM represents a transformative opportunity for governance and service delivery in South Africa, particularly within the water sector. Its success hinges on addressing persistent challenges, including role ambiguity, financial constraints, and limited stakeholder engagement.

Achieving its full potential requires:

- Strengthened policy and legislative alignment.
- Enhanced financial and technical support to municipalities.
- Genuine and sustained community participation.
- Robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure accountability.

By adopting a collaborative and data-driven approach, the DDM can serve as a powerful tool for achieving sustainable and equitable water service delivery, ensuring that the needs of all stakeholders are effectively met.



NOTES

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