

Measuring Access to Government Services in the Rural Poverty Nodes of South Africa

Information Brief 1

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Access to government services needs to be optimized

An accessibility study done in the 15 Integrated Sustainable Rural Development (ISRD) nodes in South Africa concluded that much still needs to be done by government departments in the development of their access norms and standards and in optimizing the location of government services. This study was conducted amongst the eight government departments of Health, Education, Home Affairs, South African Police Service (SAPS), Justice and Constitutional Development, Labour, the Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS) as well as the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). Accessibility studies assess the ease with which people can reach the nearest government service (e.g. school) using the existing road networks and different modes of transport (e.g. walking, bus, taxi, car).

The well defined norms and standards of the Department of Education showed that in some of the ISRD nodes there was a significant under provision of secondary schools. Suggesting that the Department may have to provide different access norms and standards for secondary schools or develop strategies to improve access to them for learners. In contrast the access norms and standards of SASSA showed that the provision of social grant pay points could be optimized by significantly decreasing their numbers within all the ISRD nodes. The accessibility study also showed that there was a need for access norms and standards to be



incorporated into the criteria used by the SAPS to locate police facilities closer to the people. Thusong Service Centres were shown to be not optimally located using the access norms and standards generated in the study. It also showed that there is a need for more Thusong Service Centres in the ISRD nodes.

Placing accessibility studies in a policy context

The Constitution of South Africa states that the national government should provide legislation to ensure equal opportunity and equal access to government services. The Batho Pele White Paper emphasizes the need to improve geographic access to public services. To accomplish this, the Public Service Regulations established the need for departmental Service Delivery Improvement Programmes (SDIP) that will amongst others include standards and mechanisms for improving access to services. The Public Administration Management Bill sets out to find the most effective service delivery models and systems, defining service delivery standards, aligning government structures and ensuring their cooperation in the provision of services.

To accomplish this, the South African government has adopted an integrated approach to the delivery of services, by implementing one-stop service model or integrated service centres, more commonly known as Thusong Service Centres. Accessibility studies are one of the few approaches that can be used to optimally

locate government services. To do this, access norms and standards, including travel times or distances and the capacity of government facilities to service the demand within reach of them must be defined.

Access norms and standards need to be developed by departments

Only the Departments of Education and Home Affairs as well as SASSA have developed their access norms and standards. All departments need to complete their access norms and standards. This includes providing differentiated access norms and standards for sparsely populated areas, urban versus rural areas and for different types of services. This should be done in consultation with other government departments and stakeholders. The completed access norms and standards should be published in the Government Gazette for public comment. The access norms and standards of the Department of Education provide a good example of what should be done by other government departments.



Accessibility studies key to service delivery in South Africa

The SASSA and Department of Home Affairs are the only two departments that have undertaken accessibility studies and are using the results to improve the provision of their services. Accessibility studies can assist departments in developing their access norms and standards and evaluating them. These studies also allow departments to optimize the provision of their services. Accessibility studies should be done

nationally by departments. Input should be obtained from citizens on what factors should be used in deciding on the optimal location of government services. The human resources with their different skill profiles situated at services should also be taken into consideration. The condition of existing facilities (e.g. availability of water, electricity and sanitation) and the availability of equipment (e.g. telephone) are factors that should influence the prioritization of services.

Optimally located existing infrastructure should be used

Gaps in the provision of services and areas where there is an oversupply can be identified. New services may be built to fill the gaps. A cost effective way in providing services can be done through the use of mobile facilities, especially in the more remote and sparsely populated areas. Existing services that are optimally located should be used where possible.

In the provision of more permanent structures departments need to consult with one another to ensure the provision of integrated service centres, especially optimally located Thusong Service Centres. Existing facilities of government departments, parastatals (e.g. Post Office, libraries) and the private sector (e.g. banks) should be used wherever possible to provide services to the people.

Government forum on accessibility

To facilitate the use of accessibility studies government departments recommended that a discussion forum be established. The forum would be used to discuss the development of access norms and standards, the maintenance of spatial data and sharing information on mechanisms to improve service accessibility. A key area that this forum should look at is the access norms and standards needed to identifying the optimum location of Thusong Service Centres. It is recommended that the dpsa assist in establishing this forum.

For further information please refer to the final report. Contact Trevor Holdsworth at the Dept of Public Service and Administration (dpsa) on (012) 336 1040 or trevorh@dpsa.gov.za