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**TOPIC: Assessing the role of decentralisation in rural development: A Case
study of Elundini Local Municipality (ELM)**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, **Nothemba Maya**, affirm that this dissertation is a product of my own work and that all sources have been accurately reported and acknowledged. In addition, I affirm that this work has not been published or submitted to any other institution to obtain any academic qualification.

Signature: 

Date: 21 July 2025

ABSTRACT

Despite decentralisation efforts, rural development remains a critical problem facing local government. To this end, there are no tangible results addressing the challenges of underdevelopment in rural areas. Mohan (2006) states that rural areas are still challenged by high unemployment rates, which leads to urban migration. Poverty in rural areas remains high. This study investigated the role of decentralisation in rural areas of the Elundini Local Municipality.

The study was guided by the Sustainable livelihood approach and Capability approach theories, using qualitative research methodology. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews guided by an interview guide. The total number of participants was 30, all from Elundini Local municipality. Participants included Ward councillors (7), municipal manager (1), LED manager (1), LED practitioner (1), and community members (20).

The findings of the study reveal that decentralisation has improved water and sanitation systems in rural areas of ELM. The provision of water foundations, such as taps and water tanks, has been provided. The study also discovered that decentralisation has resulted in the provision of electricity to several rural communities under ELM.

The study found that ward-based plans that meet the needs of different wards are needed to better understand alternative interventions that can be implemented to improve rural development. Participants emphasized the importance of developing ward-based plans so that the municipality is aware of the various services required by different wards or communities.

Finally, ELM, as a local government encountered challenges of a lack of resources, specifically financial resources, as they are rural based, unable to produce their own revenue, and lastly, they exclusively rely on national government grants.

Keywords: Decentralisation, Rural development, Local government

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AGSA	Auditor-General of South Africa
CWP	Community Work Programme
DORA	Division of Revenue Act
DOCGTA	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
DPME	Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation
DRDLR	Department of Rural Development and Land Reform
ELM	Elundini Local Municipality
GWME	Government-wide Monitoring and Evaluation
LED	Local Economic Development
LGTS	Local Government Turnover Strategy
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MIG	Municipal Infrastructure Grant
MTSF	Medium-Term Strategic Framework
N. T	National Treasury
PSC	Public Service Commission
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
S.A	South Africa
SFC	State Finance Commission

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

This study intends to investigate the impact of decentralisation on rural development. In 1994, South Africa's democratic government adopted decentralisation as the new policy for development. The fundamental element of decentralization is that it guarantees local government decision-making authority. It gives local government the rights to make decisions and address social, economic, educational, infrastructure, and health care elements that affect human development in their local communities. It involves a down-up approach for development. In decentralised services, local government has the authority to develop its areas. Decentralisation is useful to local government as it requires local government to take ownership and control of its resources

Many countries, including South Africa (SA) have embarked on a process to decentralise systems to improve their responsiveness and performance. The World Health Organisation (2016) defines the core objectives of decentralisation as deconcentrating, meaning distribution of decision-making authorities, financial management responsibilities among different levels of government; delegation, which involves government transferring responsibilities as well as administration of public functions for local government to control its affairs, and devolution, in which the national government passes powers to different levels of government. This includes constitutional law reform to formulate the devolution of powers, roles, and responsibilities.

1.2 Background of The Study

Since 1994, South Africa has pursued democracy. The new government pledged to address the socio-economic consequences of apartheid, including poverty, unemployment, and poor living standards in all disadvantaged areas across the country, especially in rural and informal areas. Rural development was presented as an urgent agenda since a greater number of people lived in rural areas. Many policies have since been adopted and implemented to address rural development, including decentralisation of powers and functions. Decentralisation has been implemented by many developing countries, including South Africa, as a strategy for improving rural communities.

Decentralisation has been viewed as a strategy for transferring policy-making, decision-making, responsibilities, and major government functions to lower levels of governance, such as local government, civil society, and the private sector (World Bank, 2013).

Countries have different motives for implementing decentralisation. In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the motive was political and economic transformation, while in Latin America, the main objective was to strengthen the transition to democracy. For Sri Lanka and Indonesia, it was to respond to ethnic and regional conflict (Shah & Thompson, 2004). For South Africa, decentralisation was presented as a means of promoting democratic government (part of it is to improve service delivery), redesigning government and the systems (Feinstein, 2015). Improving service delivery is understood to be the inspiration behind most decentralisation efforts (Junaid Ahmad, 2005)

Decentralisation is generally regarded as an important and crucial catalyst for rural development. It is assumed that decentralisation increases economic development by transferring administrative, fiscal, and political powers to local authorities, who are more efficient at improving and creating the local economy, mobilising economic resources, and providing public services than the central government. Decentralisation makes the government more accountable, bringing it closer to the communities. This gives communities an opportunity to recognise their capabilities well and lead fulfilling and dignified lives (Bergh, 2004).

Rahim (2007) adds that decentralisation is “popular governance that is based on participation and accountability, resulting in local governance being more responsive to citizens’ expectations and more effective in-service delivery”. India is one of the many countries that embarked on decentralisation to improve and promote rural development and poverty alleviation. According to the World Bank (2008), the first central initiative to establish local governments in India was in 1957. The Constitutional amendments of 1992 and 1993 established required provisions for decentralisation in India (World Bank, 2008). According to the Overview of Rural Decentralisation in India (2000) report, states in India have approached decentralisation differently. The overview report highlights political decentralisation as a successful and necessary legal framework. Underprivileged clusters are represented in local elected bodies, and a monitoring system needs to be developed to improve accountability (DeSouza, 2000).

In South Africa, decentralisation was implemented in 1996, resulting in the restructuring of systems and the adoption of a new constitution for the republic. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996) recognises three government spheres, that is, national, provincial, and the local sphere. These spheres

are recognised as exclusive but interrelated, and they all operate based on the authority of the constitution, laws, and policies made by the national parliament. Thornhill (2011) and Susan (2010) emphasise that these three spheres of government are essential to function as a single system of mutual government.

The purpose of decentralisation is not only putting in place effective local government, but it also works towards promoting local government by applying different methods of exercising local powers based on participation, transparency, and accountability. Harris (1982) defines decentralisation as a process of changing rural communities with or without the involvement of state intervention. O'Hagan (2000) further states that rural development is a multi-dimensional approach that includes various sectors and addresses connections between social, technical, economic, political, institutional, and ecological dimensions for rural change. According to Parker (1995), there is no general definition of rural development; however, rural development is interpreted as a process that aims to improve the standard of living for people living in rural areas, assisting them to set their priorities in their communities.

1.3 Problem Statement

Despite decentralisation efforts, rural development remains a critical problem facing local government. There are no tangible results addressing the challenges of underdevelopment in rural areas. Mohan (2006) states that rural areas are still challenged by high unemployment rates, which leads to urban migration. Poverty in rural areas remains high.

Decentralization can aid and enhance rural areas. Fiscal decentralization contributes to poverty reduction in several ways; for example, the closer policy implementers are to the intended beneficiaries, the lower the information expenses in recognizing the

poor and the costs of formulating effective policies. Decentralisation offers an advantage as it brings decision-making nearer to the local people and those making decisions.

Rural communities encounter issues with workforce development, access to capital, infrastructure (roads and services are not being provided efficiently), health, and land use. Rural areas often have limited internet connectivity, fewer educational facilities, an increased rate of livestock theft, and slower economic growth. The inequality in development continues between urban and rural regions.

The Eastern Cape, the province where the study was conducted, is predominantly rural. Currently, over 70% of the Eastern Cape's population lives in rural areas, with a high rate of unemployment, poverty, and underdeveloped infrastructure (Fobosi, 2016). The efforts to increase Municipal Infrastructure Grant allocations to municipalities are inadequate in addressing historical backlogs and citizens' needs (Eastern Cape Provincial Development Plan 2014/2018).

Joe Gqabi, the district municipality under which Elundini Local Municipality (ELM), is a poverty-stricken rural area with underdeveloped towns that largely serve as trading hubs (Eastern Cape Provincial Development Plan 2014/2018). The Elundini Local Municipality (2017) report reflects that the main development challenges are:

Significant unemployment, decreasing employment levels in key economic sectors (Agriculture), and inadequate access to basic household and community services. High dependency on government grants, unutilised suitable land for agriculture and forestry production, lack of value-adding initiatives, unsustainable developmental practices, inadequate energy and water supply, ensuring food security, waste

management cost recovery, and revenue collection. (IDP Report 2018/2019, pp. 122-123.)

As reported by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2016), “the combined service delivery index was highest for metro municipalities at 4.6 and lowest for rural municipalities at 3.3; in terms of provinces, the highest score was Western Cape and lowest was Limpopo, 3.6, Mpumalanga, 3.9 and Eastern cape 3.8”. All the bottom three provinces consist of rural areas. This means citizens in metropolitan municipalities are generally satisfied, and those in smaller municipalities with inadequate access to service delivery are dissatisfied. Based on this Stats SA report, 75% of households in South Africa were unaware that municipalities were actively addressing important matters for this study.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided this research:

- a) Has decentralisation brought improvement to service delivery in rural areas?
- b) What challenges are encountered by the Elundini Local Municipality in implementing decentralisation?
- c) What interventions can be implemented to enhance rural development at Elundini Local Municipality?

1.5 Objectives

This study's principal objective was to assess decentralization's role in rural areas. Specifically, the study sought to:

- a) Assess the improvement brought by decentralisation in the rural areas of Elundini Local Municipality

- b) Identify the challenges encountered by the Elundini Local Municipality in implementing decentralisation
- c) Explore alternative interventions that can be implemented to enhance rural development at Elundini Local Municipality (ELM)

1.6 Significance of The Study

This study focused on the role of decentralisation in improving rural areas. The study will help relevant policy makers of local government, municipal management, the rural community, and officials who implement the policy to understand the challenges encountered by local government in developing rural areas. Various studies have been conducted, and different authors have approached decentralisation in different ways. For example, Nzimakwe and Pillay (2014) focused on upgrading service delivery through decentralisation. They established that the provision of services and good governance in SA can best be achieved through decentralisation, as it is associated with democratisation. They emphasise that as constituents of local government, municipalities are more likely to be accountable to the communities. They support the view that service delivery in South Africa can be achieved effectively through decentralisation.

Chilengo-Butao (2020) submits that decentralisation should be understood from the two perspectives in charge of channelling decentralisation: the political and the administrative. The research outcomes suggest that to understand possibilities to be achieved or outcomes of decentralisation in South Africa, one needs to first understand the complications and political dynamics within local government.

Koelbe and Siddle (2014) conducted an in-depth empirical research study that included 38 municipalities across South Africa. The study revealed that decentralisation has failed to democratize local government and deliver adequate basic services to communities. They identified two related reasons for this failure: overburdening local government and a lack of institutional capacity to implement the legal obligations and principles of decentralisation.

This research will contribute to the literature on decentralisation in rural areas. Through this research, all entities involved in the development of rural areas at a local level will understand the contribution of decentralisation to improving rural communities. The outcomes of the study will benefit the management of ELM in planning and developing the LED plan, and community members will gain knowledge of their role in the development of their communities.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.7.1 Delimitation

The study was conducted at the Joe Gqabi District Municipality and focused on the Elundini Local Municipality, which covers three towns. However, it was limited to the two towns of Maclear and Mount Fletcher.

1.7.2 Limitations

The researcher did not get all the relevant participants due to the nature of their work and the COVID-19 pandemic regulations, which introduced the “working from home” work condition. Participants were not always in their offices.

Getting access to municipal and community leaders was difficult, especially community leaders, as some of them are rural and have less access to the internet, which allows them to receive and send emails. Development practitioners did not want

to share or disclose information; they wanted evidence that their managers had participated or at least proof that they agreed to participate.

Time allocation for data collection, as data was collected in three different areas, resulted in limited outcomes. Some of the respondents, especially ward councillors, did not send back their response sheets as they promised because they did not have time for interviews and opted to complete questionnaires on their own. To address access as delimitation to the study, participants were assured that the study is only intended for academic purposes, their names will not be published, and no one is being audited in the study.

1.8 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

This study report is divided into five chapters, organised as follows.

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the study, describes the problem statement, objectives, delimitations, and outline of the study's organization.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature related to decentralisation and rural development. It focuses on decentralisation as an international strategy, defines different types of decentralisation, and links them to rural development. The chapter also reviews different sources and opinions of researchers and authors whose work is significant in this research project. It also presents descriptions of the study's variables, namely rural development and decentralisation.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter discusses research design and methodology, population, research sampling, data collection methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, and description of the study area.

Chapter Four: Data presentation, analysis, and interpretation

This chapter focuses on data presentation, data analysis, and interpretation of findings from the field.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

In this chapter, the researcher provides a conclusion and recommendations based on the findings of the study.

1.9 CONCLUSION

As is indicated above, as representatives of the government at the local level, municipalities have been allocated the responsibility of developing their local communities, including rural areas. Rural development continues to be a critical challenge facing local government. There are undeniable indicators showing that municipalities are failing to perform their duties of developing rural communities.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the conceptual and theoretical framework of decentralisation and rural development at the local municipal level. It defines the key terms of the study. The chapter also identifies the different forms and dimensions of decentralisation and clarifies the relationship between decentralisation and rural development. This chapter discusses the various forms of decentralisation. Secondly, it highlights the challenges and concerns associated with decentralised forms of government. The main objective of the study was to measure the role of decentralisation in rural communities.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 Decentralisation

Decentralisation is the process of shifting powers to lower spheres of government to improve service delivery as a way of promoting democratic governance and the participatory approach to sustainable development (Hussein, 2004). It is the transfer of authority, power, planning, decision-making, and resource management from a national to local government to provide efficient and effective service delivery to local communities. It is the transmission of decision-making powers.

According to Ahmad and Talib (2011), decentralisation is a method of transferring authority and power from the national government to the local. Decentralisation entails the removal of tasks from the centre, either functionally or geographically. Functional decentralisation refers to the transfer of authority to perform specific tasks or activities (Asibuo, 1999). Kamau (2012) describes decentralisation as a democratic process in which the government disperses authority, resources, accountability, and rules from

the central government to local entities of government. It is the process by which the central government distributes responsibilities for certain services to provincial or local branch offices (Bergh, 2004). This achieves a form of participatory development. Bardhan (2002) supports the idea that decentralisation is not just about weakening the central authority, nor is it about preferring local elites to central authority, but it is profoundly about making governance at the local level more responsive and responsible to attend to the needs of the majority of the population close to them.

2.2.2 Rural Development

The Comprehensive Rural Development Programme of 2009 defines rural development as the method that enables rural people to be in control of their destiny, dealing with rural poverty and managing their natural resources, as well as adapting their indigenous knowledge to change the world they live in. As defined by Ndimande (1999), rural development is the process of applying different strategies that seek to improve the well-being of rural communities. It is the processes that help to reduce poverty, contribute to the equal distribution of income, and promote and expand local markets. According to the World Bank (1995), rural development is a strategy that is intended to upgrade and change the economic and social life of a specific group of people living in rural locations. It is concerned with economic, social, political, and institutional mechanisms. Rural development is still the top priority for both developed and developing countries, as it seeks to do away with the inadequate living standards of rural areas. Green and Zinda (2013) state that rural development is crucial in developing countries, and it should be human-oriented to improve the human living conditions of rural communities.

Sotiyo (2013) identifies three key components of defining rural development, namely:

Multi-sectoral programs cover not only agriculture but also infrastructure, microfinance, the environment, human resources, and so on.

Rural development's objective is to improve the quality of life of villagers, which includes income, housing, education, health, and access to other public services. Rural development gives priority to the poorest people.

Rural development is thus primarily defined as a general development program conducted in rural areas. It used to be categorised as agricultural development with the intention of increasing crop and animal production.

For this study, rural development is defined as a multidimensional process that seeks to address issues of rural communities by empowering rural populations to earn basic human needs, including shelter, healthcare, food, education, access to adequate transport, technology, and other resources used to develop rural community skills, capacity, and knowledge.

Fourie and Smith (2010) state that rural development's main objective is to improve rural people's living standards through readily available natural and human resources. Its fundamental objective is to improve the quality of life of rural communities, increase income, develop housing, promote education, and provide access to public health services (Sotiyo, 2013), improve productivity, and increase employment for target groups. Other objectives stated by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) in 2015 are:

To improve rural services and support sustainable rural livelihoods.

To increase access to sustainable jobs and skills development.

Develop community and cottage industries

Develop socio-economic infrastructure, including the setting up of rural banks, co-operatives, and schools.

Develop Human resource mobilisation, and

Improve basic service delivery infrastructure, such as roads, hospitals, schools, welfare centres, drinking water, and electricity.

Figure 1: ELM equipment for road maintenance



Photo: By researcher N.Maya

2.3 DIMENSIONS OF DECENTRALISATION

Arguments on decentralisation generally define decentralisation as the transfer of powers, functions, and authority from central government to local government, and that decentralisation democratises service delivery. This transfer of power is in three different forms or dimensions. Authors such as Wittenberg (2006), Stanton (2009), and

Yusuf *et al.* (2016) have recognised and discussed the three dimensions of decentralisation: political, administrative, and fiscal decentralisation. Other authors, such as Hossain (2016), and international groups, such as the WHO (World Health Organisation) and the World Bank, also discuss administrative decentralisation not as a single dimension, and they introduce market decentralisation as another dimension. The three main dimensions of decentralisation.

2.3.1 Administrative (institutional) Decentralisation

Administrative decentralisation means redistributing authority; it puts planning and implementation responsibilities in the care of local civil servants, and they function under the authority of elected local government. (World Bank Decentralization Thematic Team 2013). It involves full or partial transfer of grouped functional duties to the local level, including health care services, operation of schools, management of service workers, building and maintenance of roads as well as waste collection (Hossain, 2009).

Administrative decentralisation, also known as institutional decentralisation, allows several actions and decisions to be taken where people reside, that is, in communities away from the centre. Administrative decentralisation gives community members the right to monitor and evaluate local government performance. According to Vyas-Doorgapersad (2012), in administrative decentralisation, local government is not responsible for job creation; however, it ensures that economic and social conditions are conducive to creating employment opportunities.

Administrative decentralisation refers to “dilution of centrality by distributing various elements of political and administrative activities to non-central offices” (Ahmad &

Talib, 2011), which implies that administrative decentralisation can occur only when one policy is implemented locally.

Political (democratic) Administrative decentralisation

Wittenberg (2006) describes political administrative decentralisation as legislation where functions are transferred to regional or local bodies. It is democratically constituted and involves the transfer of political powers and authority to the local government level. Its manifestation is purely based on elections. In South Africa, ward councillors represent local communities under each municipality.

Vyas-Doorgapersad (2012) divides decentralisation into two levels of local governance and national or high-level governance. At the local level, decentralisation recognises elections as a form of downward accountability, with a component of democracy, while democratic elections encourage local politicians to meet local needs (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2012). At a national level, political decentralisation forces political parties to develop strategies that acknowledge issues of decentralisation and efficient implementation at the public level. Falleti (2005) describes political decentralisation as a set of constitutional amendments and electoral reforms designed to represent sub-national polities, which are local governments.

From a viewpoint of political decentralisation, South Africa still has municipalities that face the challenge of adopting transformation processes. This is because politicians are still using traditional approaches. They do not understand the necessity of capacity-building training to empower their strategic decision-making skills.

Kauzya (2007) discusses two factors that form political decentralisation. The first one is the transfer of powers for selecting political leadership and representatives from central or national government to local government. The second factor is the transfer of power and authority for making social, political, and economic decisions at the local level.

As stated by Cogta (2016) in the handbook, the code of conduct for ward councillors. The role and responsibility of ward councillors are to ensure that municipalities have structured mechanisms of accountability to local communities. Ward councillors act as a link between their communities and the municipal council, providing regular reports through ward meetings and helping the community to pinpoint needs and priority development areas that contribute to the municipality's planning efforts. Their role is to represent communities, they are the facilitators of the community, they also play a role of being a communication link between the government and the local community, and primarily they monitor municipal performance in terms of service delivery, ensuring that projects are being implemented as per IDP plans.

2.3.2 Fiscal (financial management) Administrative decentralisation

Fiscal decentralisation refers to the decentralisation of processes relating to government revenue. Rajeev et al. (2017) explained the revenues involved in budgetary decentralisation: Fiscal includes local government “expenses, the share of overall government expenditures, subnational tax share, and local share of total government employment.” Falleti (2005) defines fiscal administrative decentralisation as “a set of policies intended to increase revenues of subnational governments or local government.”

Vyas-Doorgapersad (2012) emphasises that revenue and expenditure patterns determine Municipalities' capacity to provide services; in other words, if revenue is low, the municipality will not be able to support economic growth and the fight against poverty. Fiscal decentralisation's main aim is to increase the effectiveness of public service distribution.

- *Equitable share from national to local government*

A fair distribution of nationally generated revenue among the national government, the nine provinces, and municipalities is mandated by Section 214(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) each year. The government enacted the Division of Revenue Act (DORA, Act No. 2 of 2013) to accomplish this goal.

SALGA (2012) defines DORA, following Section 214 of the Constitution, as a policy that is supported and calls for national legislation to guarantee that national revenue is distributed fairly among the three branches of government. The first of DORA's primary goals is to distribute revenue fairly among all branches of the government; to help provinces and municipalities plan their budgets, the second goal of DORA is to ensure financial predictability. Lastly, DORA aims to increase accountability and transparency in the processes involved in allocating resources (Division of Revenue Act 2(2) 2013).

Municipal source of income

Based on literature from SALGA and STATS.SA municipalities have two income sources, namely fiscal transfers and municipal-generated income. Fiscal transfers refer to grants from the national government, such as the Municipal Infrastructure

Grants (MIG). Municipalities can also generate their own income. Penxa (2017) identified the 3 ways used by municipalities to generate income. The first is property rates, which refers to buildings/ businesses and homes; the second is service charges, including water, electricity, waste removal, and sanitation, and the third category is fines, which includes penalties for infractions of bylaws, traffic infractions, and past-due service payments. Some towns rent out their amenities, like recreation centers and sports fields, to make money. One key indicator of a municipality's independence is its capacity to make money independently.

This means municipalities are funded by government grants and subsidies. The division of these grants is regulated by the DORA Act since not all municipalities can generate them. The government has set measures for ensuring fair use of grants and subsidies, regulations that bind municipalities to work towards fulfilling their objectives stipulated in their development plans.

- *Municipal Finance Management Act*

The Municipal Finance Management Act (Act 56 of 2003) was enacted to guarantee the sustainable management of the financial affairs of municipalities and other local institutions. It creates provisions to align the municipal budget and IDP for accurate decentralisation implementation.

- *Current condition of Fiscal Decentralization in South Africa*

The South African government generates income through SOEs (State-owned enterprises) and Tax revenue. The revenue is collected using the Income Tax Act through SARS as an autonomous agency. The four main tax revenues are PIT (Personal tax income), CIT (Company tax income), VAT (Value added tax), and ICD

(Import VAT and customs duties). Revenue collected by SARS goes to the National Treasurer, who allocates the budget for the state, as they control the state's public finances and promote the national government's fiscal policy. According to the SARS financial report 2022/3 SARS collected a total of R2.07 trillion in revenue.

According to the Treasury release, the local government revenue and expenditure report 2022/23, municipalities received an infrastructure and capacity grant of about R8 billion.

The state of local government finances and financial management report (2023) mentioned that local government finances declined, with more municipalities in distress and poor management, and that municipalities lack capital access and rely on grants. High creditors' payment periods and escalating amounts owed to creditors, especially pension fund contributions, Eskom, and water boards, are causing municipalities to struggle to settle their creditors.

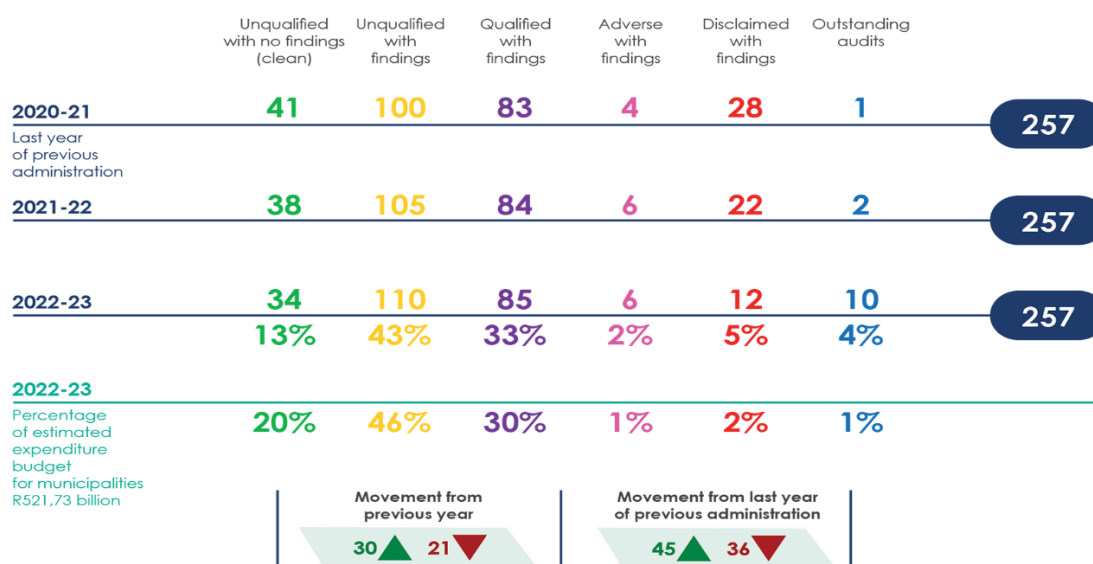
Most financially struggling municipalities use conditional grant funding for their operations, actions that fall outside the scope of the grant provisions, particularly regarding salary payments and council members' entitlements. For these purposes, municipal councillors should face consequence management as this activity represents financial wrongdoing.

The 2022/23 financial results revealed a declining state of local government finances and financial management. The number of municipalities in financial distress increased from 157 in 2021/22 to 168 (65 percent) in 2022/23, which is concerning. These results indicate that the performance of most municipalities is deteriorating.

The most significant issue South Africa encounters at these lower levels of government is political. Intervention in financial administrative functions by the local political leaders is systemic, and organizational corruption by managers appointed through political means. The main point in favour of decentralization is that local authorities operate more efficiently and attentive to the requirements of the population while also being subject to greater accountability of responsibility than national government frameworks and in geographical terms local governments turn into an essential channel for establishing an effective remedy for comparing advantages and expenses for providing services (Alfano, 2009).

Most municipalities have very high levels of corruption or financial misconduct, to the extent that very few municipalities get clean audits from the Auditor-General.

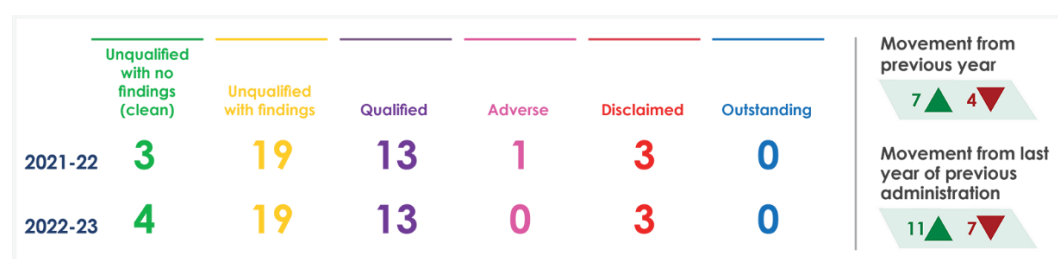
Figure 2: Audit outcomes – municipalities



According to the MFMA report (2020/23), the audit outcomes have not improved meaningfully since the end of the previous administration's term. The unqualified results with no findings stem from municipalities submitting their financial statements either late or not. In addition, municipalities could not supply auditors with proof of

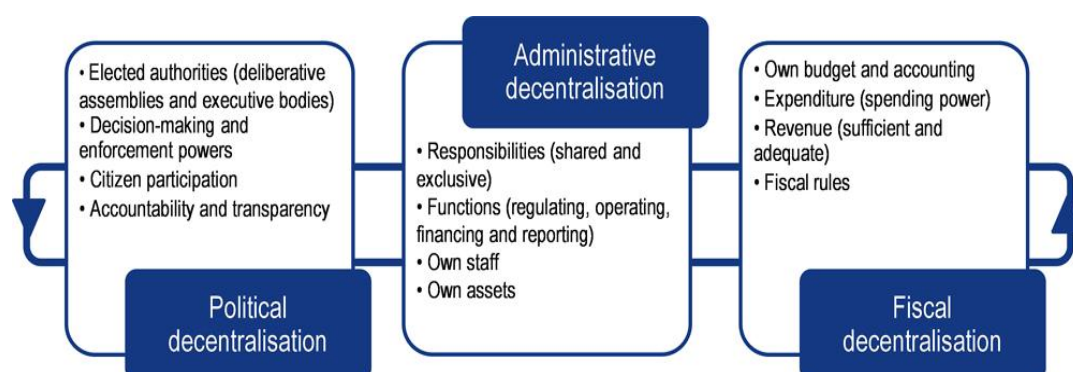
much of the data in their financial statements; hence, the auditors could not offer an opinion on the credibility of these statements or ascertain how the funds received for the year were utilized.

Figure 3: Audit outcomes for Eastern Cape municipalities



Joe Gqabi District Municipality maintained its clean audit due to a strong organizational culture, competent staff, and effective oversight. Joe Gqabi's commitment to clean governance meant that it was able to sustain its clean audit despite having vacancies in its finance unit. However, they managed to achieve only 43% of their targets despite spending 57% of their budget on service delivery and infrastructure. This is largely due to ageing infrastructure, prolonged project design stages for water infrastructure projects, and delays in procurement processes.

Figure 4: Three main dimensions of decentralisation.



Source: OECD multi-level governance studies 2019

2.4 FORMS OF DECENTRALISATION

The implementation of decentralisation takes place in different forms. Decentralisation is not applied uniformly (Yusoff *et al.*, 2016; Stanton, 2009). Most authors discuss three forms, namely, Deconcentration, delegation, and devolution.

2.4.1 Deconcentration

Deconcentration is the handoff of duties, authority, and workload from the federal to local levels of government. (Barle, 2000). It happens when the federal government divides up the work of providing services to local communities without fully transferring decision-making authority. As a result, representatives answer to central departments for decisions rather than making them independently. Schneider (2003) refers to this as a weak system of decentralisation. The central government forms structures that allow opportunities to work closely with local people (Siddle, 2011). Lanti (2005) believes that the accomplishment of decentralization is determined by the level of autonomy given to local governments in handling their responsibilities.

2.4.2 Delegation

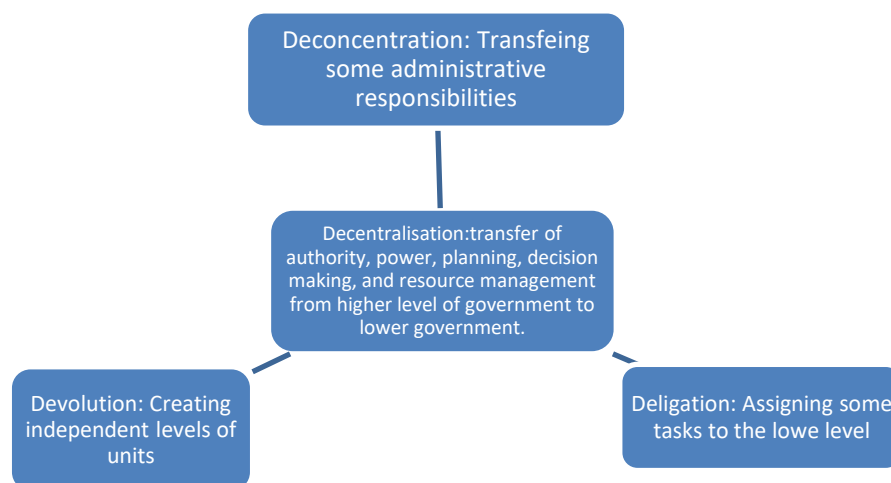
Delegation is the process of handing over policy responsibilities from central to local government or organisations not directly administered by the central government (Siddle, 2011). Delegation means the transfer of authority and managerial responsibilities to an organisation (that is capable) of planning and implementing activities. These powers may be technical or administrative (Barle, 2000). This form of decentralisation is about legal principles of delegating powers to perform duties.

2.4.3 Devolution

This third level is described by Yusoff *et al.* (2016) as the transfer of authority and responsibilities concerning legal powers in decision-making, finances, and

management, resulting in local government being accountable to its local people. This means that local government gets authority outside the control of the central government. Schneider (2003) states that the devolution system seeks to improve government performance in service delivery and functions, bringing government closer to people. Furthermore, Barle (2000) and Schneider (2003) submit that the devolution system can reshape the political landscape, give local government clear and legal geographical boundaries where they exercise their authority and perform duties, and allow independence and autonomy to local government.

Figure 5: Summary of forms of decentralisation



2.5 BENEFITS OF DECENTRALISATION

Andreas, Nicolas, and Herald (2016) refer to local autonomy as a highly valued component of a local government structure designed to strengthen communities. Decentralisation allows the transfer of powers to reach components of lower units, such as local municipalities. Increasing autonomy through decentralization is one way to raise the standard of governance. It also promotes local government autonomy.

Local autonomy is when local communities have freedom and independence. Chapter Seven of the Republic of South Africa's Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) grants municipalities the authority to manage local government affairs. Likewise, Act 32 of 2002, the Municipal Act, stipulates that the “municipality must establish appropriate mechanisms, processes, and procedures to enable the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality”. This results in the community being active and involved in decision-making. It considers citizens not as subjects who choose their governing bodies through elections (Tori, 2014).

Decentralization is frequently discussed because it can enhance governance by fostering a more responsive and accountable government. Decentralisation has been applied by many developing countries worldwide for its famous motive, namely “bringing government close to people,” which creates a friendly development environment. When citizens are close to the government, they get equal opportunities to raise their concerns, and their interests are reflected in public services and policy. Throughout the country, the public gains power in decision-making processes. Decentralisation creates a government that is easy to reach. It also provides local leaders with the experience to govern.

The need to develop rural areas was one of the many factors that led to the adoption of the decentralization approach. Sutiyo and Muharjan (2017) submit that for rural communities to benefit from decentralisation, factors need to be carefully considered. These factors include budget development, local capacity, social capital, and community participation.

Serving others or performing tasks assigned to an official are standard definitions of service delivery. It is the ability to manage or employ resources. This delivery act can

involve creating, providing, and transporting items to the designated recipient or delivering outcomes in line with expectations and promises. (Crous, 2002). “Service delivery is concerned with the provision of products or services by the government to a community to which it was promised or provision of that which is expected by that community” (Riekert, 2001).

A primary effect of decentralization is enhanced service provision. The World Bank (2008) makes the following assumptions about decentralization:

- Local governments have a greater understanding of the preferences of their constituents.
- Residents may be more willing to pay taxes for services rendered in line with their needs and met by their local authorities, and
- Local governments are better equipped to address community needs.

When decentralisation policies are adequately designed, the programs involved can result in positive local governance institutions and service delivery. Utilizing time series and cross-sectional data for numerous nations, Zhukavskaya and Enikolopov (2003) established that decentralisation contributed to service delivery.

2.6 CHALLENGES OF DECENTRALISATION

Ahmad (2005) discusses some common challenges associated with decentralising service delivery, including an increase in corruption rates and a lack of transparency and accountability. Public service delivery is a two-way process requiring two role players (citizens and policymakers) to collaborate for accountability. In this case, citizens are called clients with the right to hold policymakers accountable for their services. Weakness or poor service delivery occurs if the relationship is broken.

Lack of capacity and the need to increase skilled staff at the local government are the key arguments against decentralisation. These pose an ongoing challenge that even well-structured political and non-political teams still fail to overcome in South Africa (Siddle, 2011). Appropriate management systems, including accounting, tax administration, auditing, reporting, and economics, are among the skills. Lack of capacity creates poor policy formulation and implementation.

Service providers at the lower tier are not big enough to sustain their bureaucracies (Wittenberg, 2006). Local government cannot create, manage, and maintain its public finances. Ahmad *et al.* (2005) indicate that the local tier receives less money than before decentralisation.

In theory, decentralisation is a system that is expected to produce positive results and quality public service delivery (Akpan, 2008). Decentralisation is designed to drive development, strengthening economies to enhance citizens' well-being (Jean & Paschal, 2015). In South Africa, decentralization was implemented and embraced for all the right reasons. It first pledged to establish democratic institutions of decision-making at all levels and guaranteed to encourage public involvement in governmental processes.

However, Koelble and Siddle (2013) argue that decentralisation has not fulfilled its promises. The fact that South African local government is in a state of "paralysis" and non-functioning lends credence to their argument. Protests in service delivery are common, which demonstrates this. Breakfast *et al* (2021) supported Koelble. They declared that despite the time of more than 25 years, violent protests and the delivery of services have left a democratic South Africa engulfed in flames, with most of these protests taking place in the local municipality. As a result, decentralization is

complicated and predicated on many fundamental ideas that do not apply to the situation in South Africa.

Even though decentralisation has been regarded as the “saviour” of the nation, particularly the poor rural citizens, it created unnecessary complications, including divisions amongst cultural and ethnic groups. For instance, in South Africa, Limpopo Province in 2016, Venda and Tsonga people in the Vuwani District Municipality destroyed public infrastructure in violent protests caused by municipal boundaries at Vuwani. People blamed the municipality for employing and developing one group. Again in 2011, 12 community members of Matatiele joined together in a mass action March demanding that Matatiele town and surrounding rural areas be under Kwa-Zulu Natal Province instead of the Eastern Cape.

Furthermore, according to Smoke (2003), decentralisation has created poor articulation of roles and resource distribution as a process of authorisation and responsibility transfer from one high level of governance to another. It has caused tension in intergovernmental settings, resulting in a lack of accountability and cooperation within government.

2.7 DECENTRALISATION GLOBALLY

Decentralisation has been adopted in many developing countries. According to Sutiyo and Maharjan (2017), in most cases, countries implement decentralisation because of economic and political factors. Decentralisation resulted from the advancement of the Panchayati Raj System (Sodhi & Ramanujam, 2006). Based on the 2005 Overview of Rural Development in India, political decentralisation has been successful, with a legal framework in place. This has resulted in India being the best in political

decentralisation, meaning that elections are held regularly with good participation, and this type of decentralisation is easy to implement.

In the case of Latin America (LA), research conducted by Philip (2009) shows that decentralisation originated internationally. Before the implementation of decentralisation in Latin America, there was extraordinary economic growth, even though the regions in those countries had worse conditions in terms of growth. For instance, decentralization in Brazil produced the federal government, states, federal districts, and municipalities as the three levels of government. (Shan and Bomfim, 1994).

2.7.1 India

More than 27 years have passed since India initiated the decentralization laws enacted by the Indian parliament. Since that time, local public services have aimed to be provided through decentralized governance. This is thought to be the outcome of democratic decision-making and enhanced service provision, Rajasekhar (2002)

India has a large population, making it difficult to run the country on a two-tier government. Chakraborty et al (2016) stated that in India, the process of decentralization was abstracted during the pre-independence period. The planning of decentralization started with the five-year plan strategy from 1951 to 1956, The strategy acknowledged the need to divide the planning process into levels at the federal, state, local, and district levels; however, it did not offer a comprehensive framework outlining the specifics of how this was to be done. Decentralisation as three-tier governance was introduced, and the constitution was amended to empower democracy and make it more effective and powerful. Thus, the country moved from the state and central government (Johnson, 2003). India is ranked the lowest in

administrative and fiscal decentralisation (World Bank, 2008). Based on Hatti and Sonawane's (2010) findings, fiscal decentralisation is not stable in India, resulting in states selecting their own State Finance Commission (SCF) responsible for allocating and creating resources. The SCF faces the challenge of accessing resources required by local bodies owing to unclear transfer of functions.

According to Atomic Energy Education Society (2022), the notion that issues and difficulties are best resolved locally and that residents are more aware of the issues facing their communities and what can be done to better serve them motivated India to embark on its decentralization process. According to officials, decentralization would also motivate community members to participate actively in decision-making. Decentralization is recognized and emphasized in the Indian Constitution. It provides a proper framework for effective governance.

2.7.2 Russia

Andreeva and Golovanova (2003) report that in the early 1990s, Russia embarked on decentralisation under political and economic reforms. However, there were no identified strategies for implementing the policy. Decentralisation was preferred owing to its public functions. First, because of the transfer of financial responsibilities, the budget became more effective as it brought public authorities closer to local people and made authorities accountable. Secondly, regarding budget revenue, mobilising responsibilities made it possible to define the detailed structure of the revenue and other revenue collections. The decentralisation policy matched local policies and preferences.

2.7.3 New Zealand

Lewin (2016) points out that New Zealand embarked on decentralisation in 1989, focusing on the education system. Each school was given independence, including schools having their own charter, budget, governing board, and control over staff and facilities.

2.8 DECENTRALISATION IN AFRICA

Decentralisation is highly recommended for local and international development and is assumed to be conducive to development, particularly for local government. African countries also embarked on policy reforms regarding governance (World Bank, 2001). Steiner (2007) states that decentralisation gained popularity in developing countries because of its goals. Since it brings the government closer to the people, it is thought to be the level of government that reaches out the most to local communities, intending to improve infrastructure, economic growth, service delivery, health care, poverty eradication, and the development of rural areas.

2.8.1 Uganda

In Uganda, decentralisation was initiated in 1992 because of its central goals concerning development. It brought limited autonomy to decision-making. It created conflict between politicians and civil servants, mainly because councillors are not recruited based on their education. However, they are politically elected, yet they receive far higher salaries than administrators (Francis & James, 2005). Furthermore, according to Steiner (2007), decentralisation promoted corruption in Uganda. Possible causes of corruption were delays in transferring funds from central to local government, low salaries and arrears, and unjustified loss of important documents.

2.8.2 Zimbabwe

The Republic of Zimbabwe has supported decentralisation as a developmental policy for over two decades. However, its objectives have not been the same; they shifted from time to time (Government of Zimbabwe, 1999). Conyers (2003) has described this change of objectives in detail. Decentralization was implemented in Zimbabwe in the 1980s to "coordinate and streamline" the various agencies involved in national development. Tasks were assigned to provincial, district, and local development agencies according to a hierarchy plan. (Conyers, 2003). Conyers (2003) adds that in the early 1990s, decentralisation became an instrument to promote "democracy" as well as "rationalising" the public sector; the focus shifted from the development of committees to elected local authorities. Based on the research conducted by Nyikadzino and Doorgapersad (2022), the government of Zimbabwe also perceives decentralisation as a mechanism for rural development through service delivery.

2.8.3 Botswana

According to the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA, 1993), decentralisation in Botswana has been supported by government consistency since Botswana's independence. It has been trusted as a method for promoting decentralised charges from central to local government, particularly to the regional council, to promote the distribution of resources to local communities and to enhance the implementation capacity of all local authorities at the district level.

Kempe (2003) submits that decentralisation in Botswana is mainly carried out and implemented by town, district, and city councils, the three levels of government. The outcomes of decentralisation in Botswana stipulated by the Republic of Botswana (1995) are unique, and Botswana has benefited in many ways since it embarked on decentralisation. For example, it managed to develop local government, with urban

councils dominated by national political parties, boosting the awareness of local government in Botswana.

2.8.4 Mozambique

According to Weimer (2012), decentralisation in Mozambique started in the early 1990s, following the conclusion of the civil war in 1977. It was founded on two fundamental dimensions: administrative and political decentralisation under a Local Government Act that created local authorities.

Decentralisation in Mozambique was promoted around the peace-building context; thus, at the organisational level, it solved the requirement for political stability to achieve stabilization. It was the answer to the need for economic recovery, as it provided an understanding of local features that contributed to the war, demanding that the government get closer to rural communities (Roberto, 2016).

2.8.5 Namibia

According to the Minister of Regional, Local Government and Housing (MRLGH, 1998), decentralisation in Namibia was implemented in 1998, and it was believed to upgrade sustainable development fast and improve the government's capacity to plan and administer development. All this sought to improve democracy and development. As Anne (2003) stated, the implementation of decentralisation was ensured through establishing new structures in all regions involving different parties. This means that the central government has shifted planning roles and decision-making powers to lower levels of government.

2.9 DECENTRALISATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The primary goal of decentralization in South Africa is to moderate or close the gap between democratic policies and the populace, as stated in Section 152 of the

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996). This was accomplished by giving the local government more power and responsibility over the national government. Establishing a democratic and accountable government for all communities—rural or urban—was the goal.

According to Jean-Paul *et al.* (2014), decentralisation strengthens governance by creating a development environment, promoting a government that is easy to reach, and allowing citizens an equal opportunity to raise their public interests and policy formulation. Decentralisation promoted and developed local leaders, allowing them to gain leadership experience.

Decentralisation is the fundamental strategy for improving and creating better governance (Siddle, 2011). After 1996, when SA established decentralisation, some supporting documents were formulated in support of decentralisation. These documents contributed to establishing guidelines, laws, and the formulation of decentralisation strategies. The Republic of South Africa's Constitution, the Provincial Development Plan (PDP), the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), the Municipal Act, and development frameworks are among these documents. In conclusion, decentralization in South Africa has led to the creation of local government as an independent branch of the state.

2.9.1 Decentralisation and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

In addition to defending human rights, the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) upholds democratic values like freedom and equality. It ensures that every citizen has access to necessities and goods and services. Three levels of government—national, provincial, and local—were established by the Republic of South Africa's Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) as independent, distinct, and interconnected. (Pillay and Nzimakwe,

2014). Fuo (2015) specifies that the constitution of South Africa consists of bills of rights that hold up the idea of decentralisation, ensure services meet socioeconomic challenges using available resources, and acknowledge participatory democracy (Pillay & Nzimakwe, 2014). Decentralisation is a systematic approach to transferring powers, resources, and responsibilities from the central level to the local level. In South Africa, decentralisation is indicated in Section 151, Chapter 7 (status of municipalities) of the constitution, which asserts the authority of municipalities to manage local issues within their communities. Municipalities represent government at the local level and have been given the directive by the constitution to deliver a democratic and accountable government for local communities

This means that municipalities are entirely responsible for their actions and will be able to explain why they have made the decisions they have made.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 considers municipalities as constituents of local government and has the responsibility for providing services to people in a resource-efficient manner; the services must not be harmful to human beings as well as to nature, and they must last long enough for the next generations to use them. As the Constitution specifies, these services include health care, education, housing, social welfare, water services, electricity, sanitation, and transport. Decentralisation promotes good governance in three solid ways: It increases the public sector's accountability and responsiveness and boosts service delivery's effectiveness and efficiency. (Grindle 2007). Stanton (2009) states, "the more autonomous local governments are, the more extensive decentralisation is".

2.9.2 South African Municipalities and Decentralisation

Three categories of municipalities are defined under the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996). There are 278 municipalities in South Africa, comprising 226 local, eight metropolitan, and 44 district municipalities. Most South Africans' basic needs were not met by the apartheid-era local government system (Local Government, Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000); therefore, several programs were developed to close the gap at the local level in municipalities to ensure the effectiveness of decentralisation. These programs include the following.

Local Economic Development (LED)

Several researchers and authors, such as Meyer (2014) and Malazia et al (2020), describe LED programs as one of the most important means of connecting with regional businesses. Its purpose is to decrease poverty and generate employment; it also allows and inspires local communities to work together towards sustainable economic growth and development. The local government White Paper of 1998 specifies the local government's role in upgrading society's social and economic development. "Municipalities' central responsibility is to work with local communities and discover sustainable, possible ways to meet their needs and improve the quality of their lives". The White Paper also states that the local government plays a significant role in job establishment and the improvement of the economy.

Through LED programs, the government can generate seasonal and informal work opportunities for local people, including in the tourism and agriculture industry, where local people start businesses such as Bed and breakfast outlets, restaurants, hiking

trails, horse riding, and traditional dance groups, and where farmers create seasonal jobs during the ploughing and harvesting season to promote the local economy.

Integrated Development Plan (IDP)

The IDP is the principal master plan that guides the planning and development of local government; it coordinates local and further spheres of government toward improving the quality of life for local citizens (Sowman & Brown, 2006). Mawson (2002) describes the IDP as a valuable element for the development of local government, as it is necessary for each municipality to track progress, increasing transparency and accountability.

The White Paper on Local Government (1998) stipulates that municipalities should create their IDP with precisely defined plans and goals for the municipality in five years. This document provides the general policy framework for IDPs, which are reviewed every year.

According to the White Paper (1998), IDPs are intended to promote sustainable integrated communities, accelerate service delivery, effectively use available capacity, and attract funds for the local economy and development. The Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000), which mandates that municipalities create IDPs, supports the IDP strategy.

The White Paper on Local Government declares that an integrated development plan is a planning framework that assists municipalities in accomplishing their developmental directives. The IDP helps a municipality focus on environmental sustainability and develop strategies for poverty alleviation, health care, quality education, and adequate basic services.

The legislation recognizes IDPs' role in achieving LED, so any municipality's IDP must include LED in its plan. Malefane and Mashakoe (2008) claim that LED and IDP are "power twins"—municipal interventions intended to address the problems and resentment stemming from South Africa's protracted apartheid.

IDP is a development mirror that reflects what the local government has done. It is through IPD that managers can identify the challenges and areas that need improvement in their sectors. Local government has strategies to track development in a five-year plan, and community members are involved in suggesting and approving what the municipality has proposed.

Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG)

The Municipal Infrastructure Grant program was established in 2003 with approval from the South African Cabinet. (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2004). This grant aimed to combine municipal infrastructure programs such as LED, water services, sports and recreation, and transport. MIG was approved because infrastructure programs were uncoordinated and were managed by different departments. Municipalities "could not regulate infrastructure projects within their jurisdiction. Some projects were handed over to municipalities without resources for operation and maintenance" (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2004).

The major challenge in rural areas of the Eastern Cape is infrastructure, which leads to poor development and service delivery. However, despite policies such as MIG, rural areas still have few, if any, services in terms of sport and recreation, which supports the idea that municipalities use one approach for rural development, namely agriculture. Thus, there are fewer opportunities for personal capacity development.

Local Government Turnover Strategy (LGTS)

LGTS is a strategy that was established by Cogta in 2009. This strategy was motivated by the assessment of municipalities conducted to establish reasons for municipal dysfunction and poor performance. According to Enaifoghe (2022), South African municipalities face challenges in service delivery due to diverse public demands, leading to protests. However, many strive for quality and adequate service provision. Many local municipalities in South Africa face serious challenges such as poor management, poor service delivery, and weak or unclear integration between the LED and the IDP. Five goals of LGTS are covered in the State of Local Government Report (2009): making sure municipalities meet the basic needs of communities; creating a clean, accountable, and responsive local government; enhancing the performance, professionalism, and functionality of municipalities; and extending national and provincial policy, support, and oversight to local government. Partnerships between communities, civil society, and local government are also strengthened by it.

The local government turnover strategy addresses the obstacles to municipal professionalism and performance. LGTS outlines the regulations that bind municipalities to be responsible and accountable for every decision, resulting in professional and regulated institutions not influenced by political representations. It outlines fair appointment regulations for better functionality, in which qualified and experienced people are employed.

Community Work Programme (CWP)

This program was approved by the SA cabinet to address the second economy. According to Bruce (2015), CWP was introduced as a pilot program in 2007 and implemented by Cogta in 2010. The CWP contributes to access to a minimum level of

regular work, and it is a local initiative aimed at the most deprived areas where market-based employment cannot be promptly accessed (Philip, 2008).

According to data provided by DOCGTA (2017), CWP covers 208 sites in 201 municipalities in South Africa. It is one of the job opportunities that requires a minimum level of education and experience, and it has no gender or age specification. Its target is to improve the situation of disadvantaged homes, especially in rural communities.

Figure 6: CWP workers before going to sites.



Photo: by researcher N. Maya

2.9.3 Policy for Decentralisation

Truman (2017) defines the decentralisation policy as the outline of the government's goals. It sets out the method, principles, and goals. Gedion (2021) reckons that policy development ensures the effective implementation of decentralisation. The Southern African government has implemented the following policies and legal frameworks.

White Paper on Local Government

The Parliamentary Monitoring Group describes the White Paper as a broad statement of government policy produced by the government setting out future legislation on a specific sector or issue. According to the White Paper on Local Government (1998), municipalities have several responsibilities, including collaborating with local

communities to find sustainable ways to meet their needs and enhance the quality of their lives, supporting the social and economic development of local communities, acting as their representatives, defending human rights, and providing for their most basic needs.

Policy framework

South Africa has adopted many highly developed frameworks. These reflect all the characteristics of a decentralised system (Siddle & Koeble, 2016).

Municipal Systems Act (MSA) for Local Government

Act 32 of 2000 gives municipalities the fundamental ideas, tools, and procedures they need to improve their communities' social and economic standing gradually. According to the Constitution, the MSA provides the methods for implementing municipal powers and functions. The Municipal Systems Act and the White Paper on Local Government provide regulations that strengthen and mold ties between communities and municipalities. They both advocate for community engagement and partnerships, figuring out ways to advance long-term development so that sustainable development is possible

2.9.4 Monitoring and Evaluation of Decentralisation

Monitoring is the process of gathering, analysing, and reporting data on inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact, including external factors, to give managers, stakeholders, and decision-makers progress reports. The Policy Framework for the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (2007) defines this. Steinich (2000) states that monitoring is the systematic process conducted after a program's

implementation, and it uses present data to track a program's progress toward achieving its goals.

Evaluation is defined as a time-bound or periodic exercise that aims to provide useful information and answers that guide the decisions of managers and other stakeholders, Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation (GWME) Policy of 2007. Thus, tracking progress and aiding in decision-making are two functions of monitoring and evaluation as a management tool. According to the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (2014), M&E evaluates government accountability, expands decision-making, improves programs or policy performance, and provides knowledge about what works and what does not regarding policy and functions. The main government stakeholders in M&E are the Public Service Commission (PSC), the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), the National Treasury (NT), and the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA). These are briefly discussed below.

Public Service Commission (PSC)

PSC's primary duty is to keep an eye on and assess matters pertaining to the administration of all values listed in Section 195 of the Constitution. This covers morality, responsibility, efficacy, and equity. PSC gives the legislature and other stakeholders information, technical analysis, recommendations, and advice. who have powers in decision-making (PSC News, 2014). PSC evaluation includes human resources practices, service delivery, and service delivery models, etc.

Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME)

DPME is a government-recognized department that was established in 2004 with the vision of improving government results and impact on society. The department tracks

the progress of the country, the challenges it still faces and solutions to address recognised challenges.

National Treasury (NT)

The NT is a division of the South African government in charge of overseeing national finances. NT is given the mandate by Chapter 13 of the Constitution of RSA to ensure transparency, and comprehensive financial control, promote government fiscal policy, coordinate microeconomic policy, and manage budget preparation process and accountability in public finance management.

Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA)

AGSA is a government office that was recognised in 1996, and which is intended to support democratic governance. As suggested by the slogan 'auditing to build public confidence', the role of this office is to check government spending, as to whether public money was used for its purpose. This process is called an audit and is done yearly. The focus of this audit is on fair presentation, reliable and credible performance, and compliance with all laws and regulations (Audit General, 2019).

The measures mentioned above are government measures and legislation that seek to improve governance in terms of development; they monitor accountability and transparency in all three spheres of government. These measures also look at the challenges encountered by the government and coordinate policies. This means administration should be smooth, all processes should be followed, and funds should be managed in a fruitful manner and for the right purpose.

2.9.5 Current status of South African municipal finances

The South African government earns revenue via SOEs (State-owned enterprises) and tax collections. The income is gathered under the Income Tax Act via SARS as the designated representative. The primary sources of tax revenue include PIT (Personal income tax), CIT (Corporate income tax), VAT (Value-added tax), and ICD (Import duties and customs taxes). Revenue gathered by SARS is directed to the National Treasury, which distributes the budget for the state since it manages the public finances and supports the national government's fiscal policy. As stated in the SARS financial report for 2022/3, SARS collected a total revenue of R2.07 trillion.

The Treasury's local government revenue and expenditure report for 2022/23 indicates that municipalities were allocated an infrastructure and capacity grant of approximately R8 billion.

The 2023 report on local government finances and financial management indicated a decline in local government finances, highlighting an increase in distressed municipalities with inadequate management, while noting that municipalities face limited access to capital and depend on grants. Extended payment terms for creditors and rising debts, particularly for Pension Funds contributions, Eskom, and Water Boards, are causing municipalities to face challenges in settling their obligations to creditors.

Many financially challenged municipalities utilize conditional grant funding for their operations, engaging in activities exceeding grant provisions, especially concerning salary disbursements and council member benefits. Therefore, municipal councillors should face accountability, as this behavior constitutes financial misconduct.

The financial outcomes for 2022/23 showed a deteriorating condition of local government finances and management. The number of municipalities facing financial difficulties rose from 157 in 2021/22 to 168 (65 percent) in 2022/23, which is alarming. These findings suggest that the performance of most municipalities is declining.

2.10 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.10.1 Capability Approach

This theory provides the basis of social science in general. The theory of the capability approach contends that “social arrangements should aim to expand people’s capabilities and freedom to promote or achieve what they value doing and being” (Alkire & Deneulin, 2008). Its principal element is human well-being, what people can do and be, individuals’ choices, and freedom and participation (Ingrid, 2005).

Three main concepts form the capability approach, namely:

Functioning: different valuable activities that people or a person value doing or being, contributing to people’s well-being. These include safety, health, employment, and being able to do what you want when you want to. When all these needs are met, people can function.

Capacity: Describe the need to have freedom and the various functions achieved. They are the fundamental and meaningful freedoms a person must enjoy the life he desires and has a reason to value.

Agency: refers to the capacity to carry through value-driven goals and refers to a person who works towards bringing change to life.

Lorella (2007) identifies the basic needs capabilities as a concept of meeting basic needs linked to human needs, freedom, and well-being.

2.10.2 Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA)

The sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) is defined by Serrati (2017) as a method of creating a change in the lives of people who have experienced poverty and have thus been disadvantaged. It recognises that everyone has the capability and resources that can be developed to improve lives. First, SLA clarifies what people are looking for regarding the means of subsistence essential to a person's well-being. Second, the strategy is grounded in norms. "On the ideas of capability, equity, sustainability". This approach assists in promoting development activities (Leinert & Burger, 2015).

It is people-centered, meaning that its focus is on improving local communities. Schenck and Louw (1995) supported Serrati, stating that SLA prioritizes people and includes them in all programs and projects designed to help them. They say that local communities must participate, share, and cooperate to achieve local people's empowerment.

Development can be sustainable when people meet or satisfy present human development needs while sustaining nature to provide natural resources. Development should not compromise nature, Ellis (2000). It is dynamic if there is constant positive change and progress in development.

The Department for International Development (DFID) (2000) lists five key elements of SLA that need to be considered in development. These are:

Livelihood consists of the capacities, resources, and pursuits necessary for life.

Human Capital includes all factors required by humans to achieve livelihood goals, such as abilities, expertise, labour capacity, and health.

Social Capital: These are social resources that people attract when pursuing livelihood outcomes.

Physical Capital: This covers the fundamental physical structures, like adequate water supply, transport, shelter, access to information, and affordable energy. All these are needed to support livelihood.

Financial Capital: This refers to the resources required by people to achieve their livelihood objectives.

Natural Capital refers to all useful natural resources that promote livelihoods, such as access to water, forests, air quality, erosion protection, and land.

While the study is informed by two theories, namely the Capability Approach and the Sustainable Livelihood Approach, it is solely guided by the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA). The SLA style best describes the purpose and aim of the study. Its aim is not only to portray reality in any detailed setting. However, it is planned as an analytical structure that holds the complexity of livelihoods, understands influences on poverty, and identifies where interventions can best be made.

This study aspires to determine the impact of decentralisation in changing rural areas under the Elundini local municipality and to define the challenges the local government encounters in implementing decentralisation. It also sets out to identify interventions for challenges raised regarding rural growth.

The principal emphasis of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach is on enhancing human well-being. It is a people-centered approach that puts people first. This means that SLA equally focuses on all aspects of human livelihood, including social, financial, physical, natural, and human capital. It supports people in realising their potential and

strengths. SLA acknowledges the impact of political institutions and processes (e.g., trade unions, political parties), policy and legislation, social organisations, and government. The Sustainable livelihood approach promotes development that does not compromise other resources; it promotes development that is sustainable from generation to generation. Similarly, the capability approach focuses on building human capacities, emphasising the need for the elimination of impediments while creating a conducive environment for people to develop. This can be achieved by initiating local municipality programmes that are aimed at developing individual community members, thereby developing communities. Both these theories were employed in the study under the premise that decentralisation should rather be viewed as a tool to strengthen the local municipalities, especially in rural areas, thereby bringing development.

2.11 CONCLUSION

Based on the definitions of decentralisation above, decentralisation is the handoff of authority, duties, funds, and federal and local governments' obligations. Decentralisation empowers local government by allowing an opportunity for autonomy in ensuring quality service delivery to its communities. The implementation of decentralisation is based on different dimensions and is influenced by forms of decentralisation. Like other developing countries, S.A. implemented decentralization to close the gap between democratic policies and communities, including rural areas. Decentralisation is thus believed to be a system that makes the government responsible for the people it governs.

Even though decentralisation has been adopted in many countries, it still has some disadvantages. Bergh (2004) has documented some potential disadvantages of

decentralisation, including the fact that, without sufficient funding, duties could be delegated to local levels, making providing quality services even more challenging. Since the higher level of government is accountable for development guidelines, establishing necessary measures may happen in a monitoring manner, encouraging the effectiveness of subnational government (certain regions). Rather than enhancing local accountability, it might enable local elites to seize functions and benefits, which could result in corruption within the decentralization process. Services may be provided less effectively locally if there is a lack of technical and administrative capacity. Accountability and capacity remain the most common challenges, creating debate in decentralisation. Unclear distribution of responsibilities, especially in fiscal decentralisation, is also a challenge.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

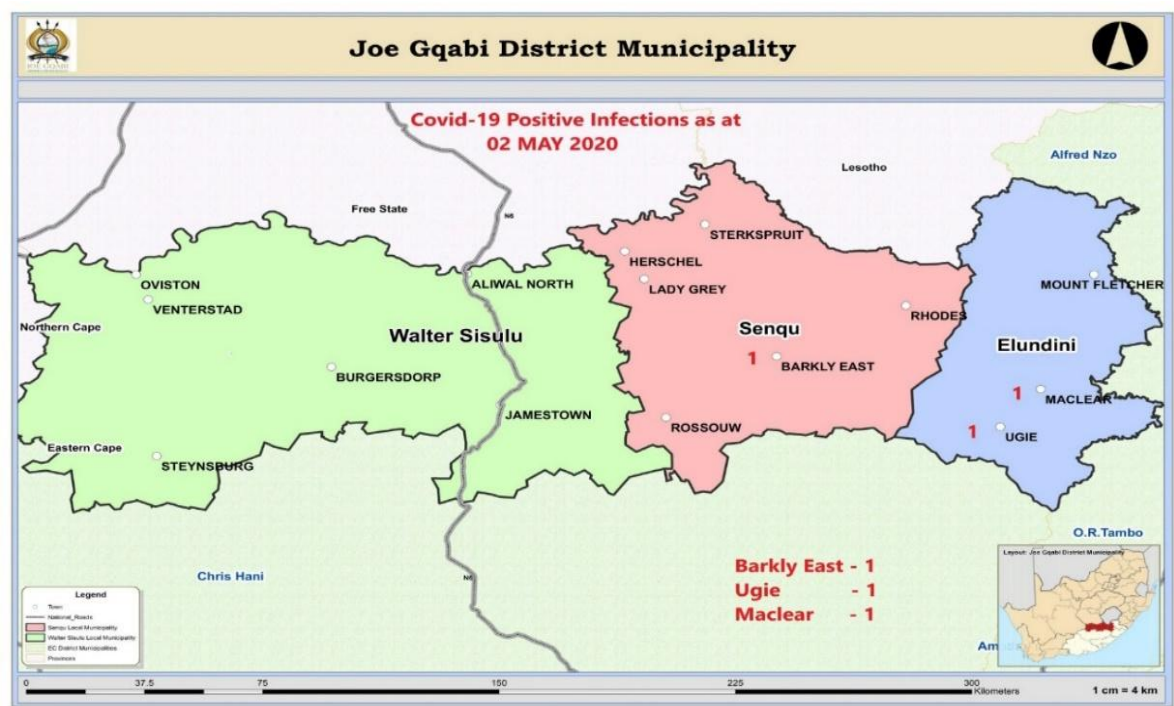
This section discusses and stipulates a detailed description of the research methodology and the study area. First, the chapter starts with the research paradigm; it then provides a thorough explanation of various research techniques and justifies the researcher's choice of research methodology. The main topics of discussion are the research sample, data collection, data collection tool, data analysis, ethical issues, and challenges. The chapter also describes the study area and the municipality where the study was conducted.

This study used qualitative research methodology, which is used to discover in-depth information about people's behavior and experiences. Qualitative research best complemented the study as it sought to acquire a full understanding of decentralisation in rural development. Data was collected using in-depth interviews. Contributors in this research included community development officers, municipal officials, political representatives, and community members.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

This study was carried out in the Eastern Cape province, which is on the southeastern coast of South Africa and is divided into two metropolitan municipalities, namely Buffalo City Metropolitan and Nelson Mandela Bay, and six district municipalities, namely Alfred Nzo, Amatole, Chris Hani, Joe Gqabi, Sarah Baartman, and O.R. Tambo. The study focused on Elundini Local Municipality (ELM), under Joe Gqabi district municipality in the north-eastern part of Eastern Cape province. This study was conducted in two (2) small rural towns that form Elundini Local Municipality (ELM), namely Maclear and Mount Fletcher.

Figure 6 Joe Gqabi District Municipality Map



Source: By Google Maps

Figure 7 Elundini Local municipality May (highlighted in red)



Source: By Google Maps

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) describe a research paradigm as a conceptual lens through which the researcher analyses a project's methodological aspects. It guides the selection of research techniques and the procedures for gathering and analysing data.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) proceed to describe paradigms as products of human creation that identify the researcher's perspective, as this aids in creating meaning from the data. As a result, the research paradigm describes how meaning is created using the information gathered from personal experience. The phenomenology research model was used in this study. This model was chosen due to its qualities, which include its application in qualitative research to characterize an individual's experiences with a particular phenomenon; its attempt to dispel prejudices and preconceived notions about human experiences and emotions; and its flexibility in responding to specific circumstances. (Rodriguez and Smith, 2018). The study sought to arrive at results that are not biased and results that are not based on assumptions but on experiences.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Akhtar (2016), a research design is a design of research, He defines it as a conglomeration that produces essential sections of a research project. It is a strategy for the suggested research project. De Vos et al. (2005:132) describe research design as a proposal or plan outlining the researcher's intended methodology for the study. This study adopted a qualitative research methodology, as it is appropriate for fulfilling the study's objectives and addressing the research questions. Qualitative research allows the researcher to get the inner experiences of participants

(Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It studies things in a natural setting, developing an understanding or interpreting the existing situation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2009).

This methodology's primary justification for adoption is its ability to gather comprehensive data on rural development from various sources. Qualitative research facilitates the researcher's ability to investigate the field flexibly, evaluate data, and produce reliable results. The qualitative approach uses various knowledge claims, investigational techniques, and data gathering and analysis procedures.

Data is collected through semi-structured interviews and is led by an interview guide. This design was selected for its suitability to produce quality results. Secondary sources of information, such as textbooks, journal articles, and government legal documents related to decentralisation and rural development, are considered. The research adopted a qualitative approach to understand the social issues of the directly involved people. In qualitative research, the researcher gets the inner experience of participants, and it provides a holistic understanding of participants' views and actions (Juliet & Anselm, 2008; Ritchie & Lewis, 2009).

3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

As Mark (1996) described, a population is several groups, people, families, communities, and organisations that participate in a research study and share traits that the researcher finds interesting. Generally, in research, the term "population" refers to all features, including people, things, and events, that satisfy the sample requirements to be included in a study. Specifically, Burns and Grove (2003) believe that the population consists of all the components that satisfy a specific predefined standard to be included in the study. It can be objects or individuals with some key or common characteristics. Population helps the researcher generalise the results found

to the entire grouping. In this study, the population refers to residents and employees of Elundini Local Municipality (LLM), such as LED practitioners and municipal management, community leaders such as ward councillors, and community members.

3.6 SAMPLING AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

According to Rafeedali (2016), a sample is an individual selected to represent a group of individuals from a particular population to gather the required information regarding the group. To make sure the sample has the same fundamental qualities as the population it is taken from, it must be carefully chosen. The current study used convenience sampling, also referred to as accessibility. Convenience sampling is the process of choosing a set of people thought to be typical of the intended audience. It gets to individuals who meet certain criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at the given time, and willingness to participate in the research (Ilker et al., 2016). The selection process is not biased; everyone in the population can be chosen to participate. The sample size of this study comprised 30 participants, made up of 20 community members, 7 ward councillors, one municipal manager, 1 LED manager, and 1 LED practitioner.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

When conducting research, gathering data is a crucial step. The researcher determines the nature of the data needed, then chooses a sample from the population and determines a suitable instrument to collect data from the sample. Muhammad (2016) characterizes data collection as the process of gathering and analysing information on relevant variables in a predetermined, methodical way that makes it possible to respond to research questions, test hypotheses, and assess results.

For this study, data were gathered using in-depth interviews. The data is collected from rural communities in two towns under ELM, Mount Fletcher and Maclear. Municipal managers, LED managers, ward councillors, and community members were interviewed to establish their views on the role of decentralisation in promoting rural areas and the difficulties they encounter when employing decentralisation as mandated by the national government.

The data collection process is guided by an interview guide. The researcher gives the participants the interview guide and reads it aloud to them. Then, the participants are allowed to ask questions and clarify what they do not understand. Participants are allowed enough time to respond.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

In this study, the researcher used in-depth interviews. This form of interview is a qualitative research method, and its primary goal is to explore in depth the respondents' points of view, perspectives, experiences, and feelings (Brouneus, 2011). The advantages of interviews mentioned by Muleya (2013) are that respondents can open up in a private setup; Interviews are a practical method for rapidly gathering a lot of data and a good way to gather detailed information. This research technique worked so well for this study because the participants gave insightful, situation-specific details, which helped the researcher gain a more comprehensive understanding of what was happening and why.

Karim (2013) states that a questionnaire is a tool for gathering comprehensive and precise data that consists of a set of closed—or open-ended questions. The interview guide used by the primary informants was different, as they had different roles in implementing decentralisation. Municipality management, practitioners, and ward

councillors had the same set of interview guides, but the one for community members was different. The interview guide for community members was translated into isiXhosa to accommodate those with language challenges associated with the use of English.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a critical procedure following data collection. It evaluates and converts data using analytical and statistical tools to discover helpful information. It interprets data for easy understanding. The process of making sense of research participants' perspectives and judgments of circumstances, along with the related patterns, themes, categories, and recurring similarities, is known as data analysis (Cohen et al., 2007). It refers to the techniques used to transform gathered data into an understanding, explanation, or interpretation of the subjects and circumstances under investigation—the study in question employed thematic data analysis.

Thematic data analysis, according to Kiger and Varpio (2020), is a technique for analysing qualitative data that entails looking for, analysing, and reporting recurring patterns throughout a data set. In the process of creating codes and creating themes, this procedure explains data and interpretation. Kiger and Varpio (2020) identified the benefits and drawbacks of using thematic data analysis. The benefits include allowing researchers to summarize, highlight important features, and interpret a wide range of data. The fact that thematic analysis has been more popular than other methods is that it is prone to inconsistent or improper use of terminology compared to other methods with more well-defined and less flexible frameworks.

After data collection through interviews, the first step was to collect the interview transcripts and go through the data to get an overview of the collected data. The

researcher applied an inductive approach, allowing data to determine themes. The second step was the process of reading and merging notes to develop codes and coming up with short codes. The codes were then grouped to generate themes. Lastly, the researcher defined and named themes and developed easily understandable names for each theme in the context of research questions. The researcher also searched for other possible explanations for the data and their linkage. In this study, research analysis was done manually.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research was guided by the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Policy. Considering that the researcher worked with people in this research, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). As Orb et al (2001) stated, ethical consideration is the relationship and power between the researcher and participant. Copper (2003) further explains that the main objective of ethics in research is to ensure that everyone involved is protected and safe; no one is harmed or suffers consequences after or during the research activity. The researcher acknowledges that all parties involved in research need to be safe and protected.

The researcher explained to the participants their right to anonymity. Furthermore, all participants were informed about the purpose of the research conducted, given the opportunity to ask questions, and provided with clarity on the research before signing informed consent forms. They were also informed that there were no risks associated with participating in the research. Harm may be physical, psychological, social, legal, or cultural. Participants were also notified that they could terminate their participation whenever they felt the need to. The participants were assured of confidentiality.

3.11 CONCLUSION

The study adopted a qualitative research methodology. The qualitative research method was selected because it assists the researcher in understanding the phenomenon of interest. Furthermore, qualitative research is known to help bring new information or explain unusual situations that could not be identified through large-scale quantitative methods. In addition, in a qualitative study, there is flexibility in that the researcher can adjust data collection procedures during the data collection process, as new matters may arise when collecting data. The research design, population, sample, methods of data collection, and ethical considerations were discussed. The next chapter presents and analyses data.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The presentation of data and interpretation of findings presents empirical data to address the three research objectives, namely:

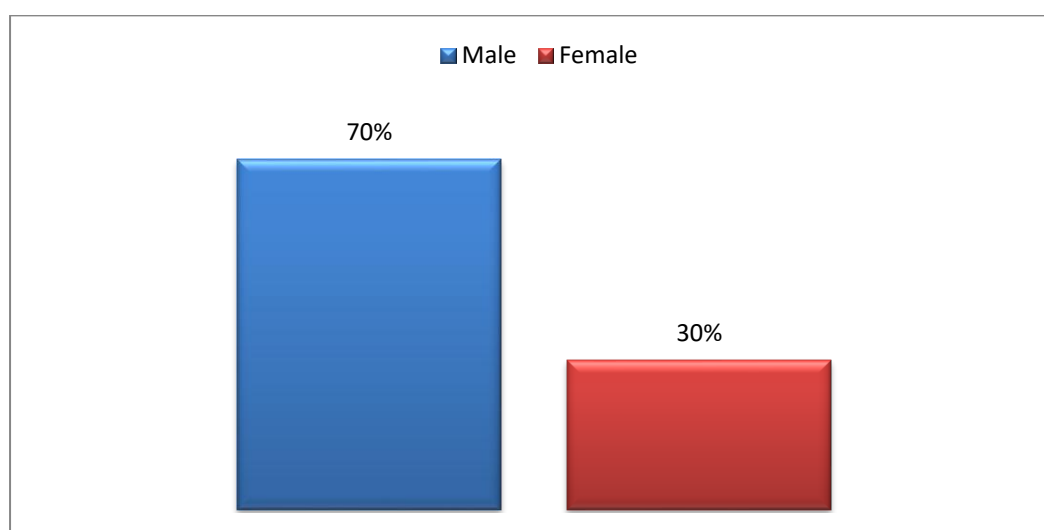
- To assess the improvement brought by decentralisation in rural areas of the Elundini Local Municipality.
- To identify the challenges encountered by the Elundini Local Municipality in implementing decentralisation, and
- To explore alternative interventions that can be implemented to enhance rural development at Elundini Local Municipality.

To achieve the above objectives, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 community members. In addition, key informant interviews were also conducted. These key informants comprised two ward councillors, one municipal manager, one LED manager, and one LED practitioner. Thematic analysis was used to come up with answers and achieve research objectives. The following section presents demographic details of the community members and key informants who participated in the study.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHICS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

This presents data on gender, age, and occupation. The figure below shows the gender distribution of the participants.

Figure 4.1: Gender distribution of community member participants

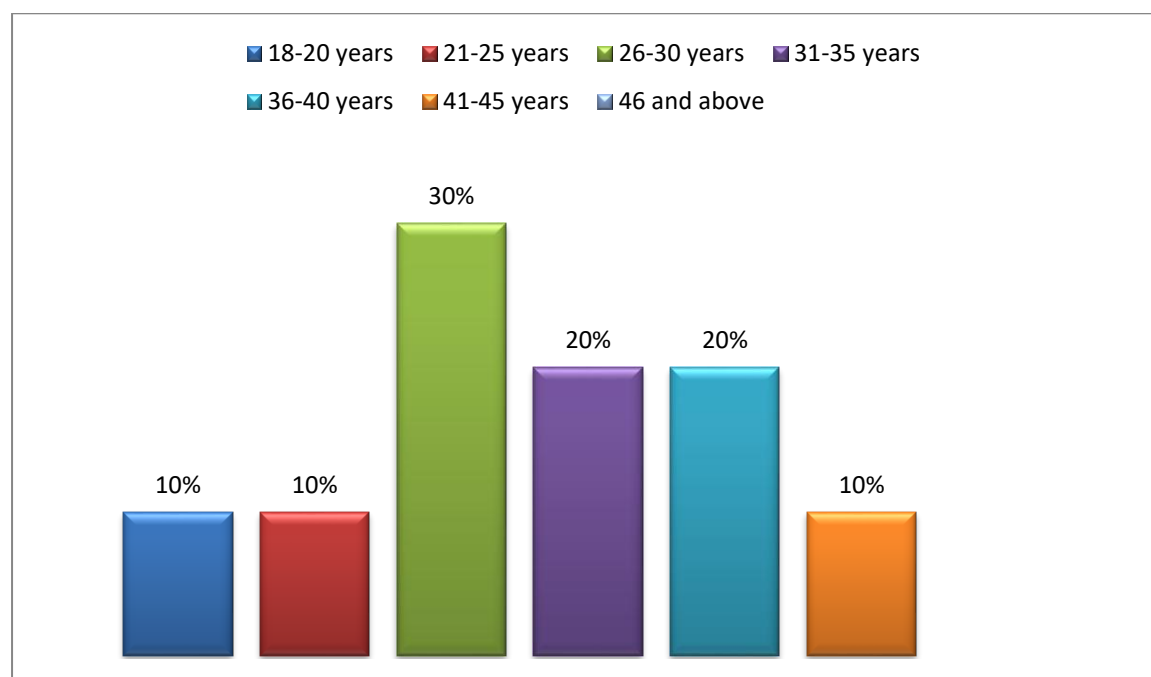


Source: Field notes

Seventy percent of those who participated in primary research were men, while 30% were women. The data clearly show that the results obtained are more likely to be skewed in favour of male members of the community. The researcher was curious as to why there were more male participants than female participants. According to most participants, males in that community were more interested in local community development and service delivery. In contrast, females were more concerned with caring for their households and children. According to Uduji and Okolo-Obasi (2018), women in rural areas face barriers in economic participation. Women in rural areas are less likely to work; when they do, they earn less than men (Nhamo & Mukunza, 2020). According to the literature, rural women are frequently concentrated in low-skilled, low-productivity, low-paid or unpaid jobs with long working hours, poor working conditions, and limited social protection. Furthermore, they bear a disproportionate share of the burden of unpaid care and household work, such as food preparation, caring for children, the sick, and the elderly (Uduji & Okolo-Obasi, 2018). The reasons

mentioned above could be some of the factors that contributed to women's low participation in this study.

Figure 4.2: Age distribution of the participants

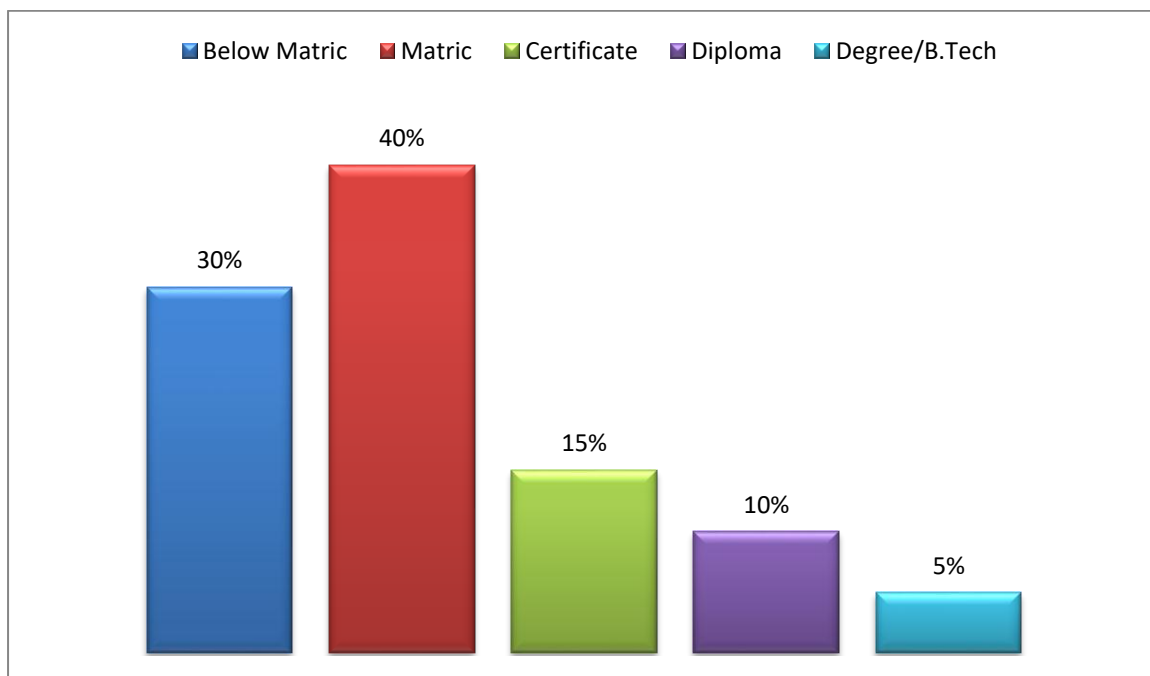


Source: Field notes

Figure 4.2 above shows that most of those who participated in the study were over 26. This was demonstrated by the number of those between the ages of 26 and 30 and those between 31 and 35, constituting half the participants. Notably, most participants were young people, indicating that they value the importance of decentralisation in rural development. According to Cameron (2018), young people contribute to improving the economy and infrastructure facilities, and they promote empowerment opportunities among rural youth to achieve better living conditions. Furthermore, Mishra (2021) observes that youths contribute to the rise and development of social life in rural areas, making them more appealing places to live, and that it is thus critical for them to be interested in rural development decentralisation. Decentralisation in

rural development will help create jobs for youths because it creates an efficient and dependable administration, intensifies and improves local development, and better ensures the rights of the local population to have a voice in government for their needs to be met (Cameron, 2018). As a result, the above age groups' findings clearly show the importance of decentralisation in rural development for youths, as evidenced by their participation in this study.

Figure 4.3 Educational Qualifications of Community Members

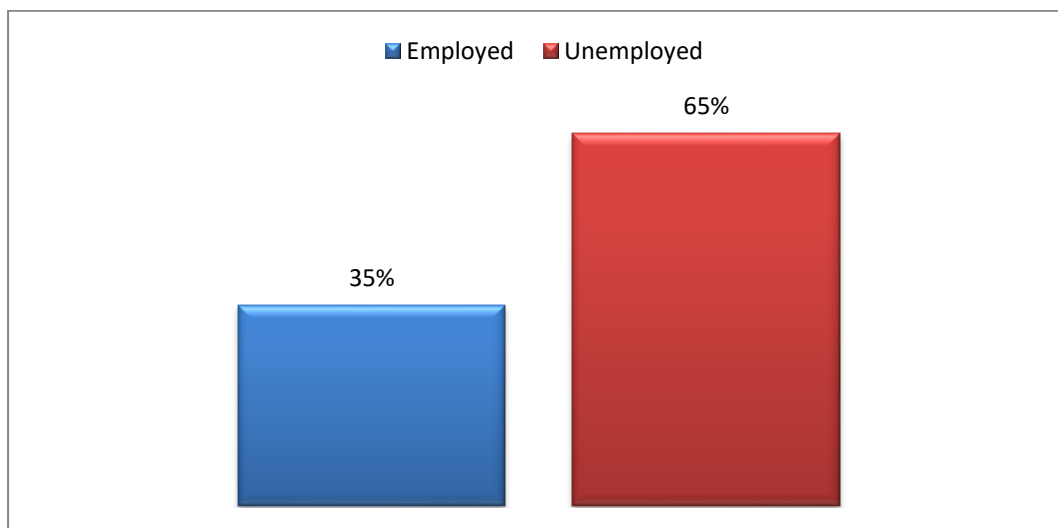


Source: Field notes

Community member participants were also asked to indicate their academic qualifications. The figure above shows that most participants had below matric as their highest level of academic qualification. This group was followed by those who indicated they had qualifications below the matric level. The other participants indicated they had diplomas while 10% had post-matric certificates. The remaining few community members indicated that they were degree-holding. Considering the

number of participants who had at least a matric certificate and above as their highest level of qualifications, the findings obtained in this study imply that the community members in this study had basic education. Considering other variables constant, the educational qualifications of the participants imply that, to a greater extent, they understand the role of decentralisation in rural development and of other implications.

Figure 4.4: Distribution of the participants based on employment status in Elundini Local Municipality



Source: Field notes

The figure above shows that most of the respondents were unemployed. When the employment status of the community members was compared to their educational qualifications, the study found that the majority of those who were unemployed had matric level and below as their highest level of qualification. The employed community members were mainly those who had diplomas and degrees.

4.3 DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF THE KEY INFORMANTS

This section provides information on the demographics of the key informants. It specifically presents information on their position and tenure in their organisation or position.

Table 4.1: Position and tenure of participants in the organisation/position

Position	Tenure
Municipal Manager	12 years
LED Manager	10 years
LED Practitioner	9 years
Ward Councillor	6 years
Ward Councillor	5 years

Source: own

The researcher interviewed key informants, including the municipal manager, LED manager, LED practitioner, and two ward councillors. The municipal manager had worked at Elundini Local Municipality for 12 years, the LED manager for 10 years, and the LED practitioner for 9 years. The first ward councillor had served as a ward councillor for 6 years, while the other councillor had served as a ward councillor for 5 years. These findings represent high levels of experience of the key informants, implying that the results obtained from the key informants are rich, reliable, and valid because they are from people with vast experience.

4.4 IMPROVEMENT BROUGHT BY DECENTRALISATION IN RURAL AREAS OF ELUNDINI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Research Question 1: Has decentralisation improved service delivery in rural areas?

Community members and key informants were asked several questions to determine whether decentralisation improved service delivery in rural areas. The community members' and key informants' responses are discussed in the following sections. The prefix 'CM' refers to community members, while 'KI' refers to key informants. For example, CM1 represents Participant 1 from the community members. From the results attained, the general themes among community members and key informants are as:

- Construction of access roads
- Provision of water and sanitation
- Provision of electricity
- Improved community centres

4.4.1 Construction of access roads

One of the themes deduced from the findings is that decentralisation led to the construction of access roads in the Elundini Local Municipality. Presented below are the verbatim excerpts from community members and key informants on the construction of access roads because of decentralisation in the municipality. One of the community members, CM2, noted that decentralisation in Elundini Local Municipality led to the construction of access roads in the area. Participant CM2 had the following to say:

.... Rural development involves things that change the livelihood of community members, such as the improvement of roads. Decentralisation has led to the construction of access roads in this municipality, which has improved the transport systems.

This view was also reiterated by CM5, who indicated that decentralisation in Elundini Local Municipality had facilitated the improvement of road systems in the rural areas. The following direct quotation is from participant CM5:

.... due to decentralisation, we have better roads in this community because we could tell our local authority our needs and they were improved.

Another community member noted that due to decentralisation of rural development in Elundini Local Municipality, people can easily move from one place to another, owing to the construction of access roads and improved road networks. This is indicated in the excerpt below:

... As a farmer who depends on selling my produce in the town, I am glad that there are better roads, and I can easily transport my goods to the markets.
(CM10.)

Additionally, a key informant mentioned that decentralisation in Elundini Local Municipality had facilitated the building of access roads and the rehabilitation of old roads in the area. This is indicated below:

.... The process of decentralisation has facilitated the construction of better roads while improving the already existing roads, and this has been one of the key issues in how rural roads are administered and improved in this municipality. (KI1.)

Based on the findings above, one can conclude that the decentralisation of rural development has facilitated the construction of access in the community under Elundini Local Municipality. These results align with those of academics and government representatives who have connected rural development decentralization to improved service delivery in rural areas. Cameron (2018), for example, conducted a study and discovered that decentralisation of rural development improves service delivery in rural areas, such as road infrastructure, clinics, and schools. Cameron (2018) investigated non-metropolitan local government decentralisation in South Africa and discovered numerous benefits of decentralisation on service delivery in rural communities. It was discovered that many rural areas in South Africa are decentralising road network administration to improve the delivery of rural transport infrastructure services.

Furthermore, as rural development has become more decentralised, Winchester and King (2018) note that the benefits of investment Policymakers recognize the importance of rural roads in promoting economic growth and reducing poverty, as do the communities who depend on them for better access to social and economic amenities. However, when it comes to long-term use and efficient management, rural roads pose difficulties (du Plessis, 2020). Therefore, tight coordination between the many parties involved in the construction of rural roads, from the federal government to the communities that will benefit, is necessary (Winchester & King, 2018).

4.4.2 Provision of water and sanitation

To determine whether decentralisation improved service delivery in rural areas, the researcher discovered that decentralisation resulted in water and sanitation supply.

This is indicated by the excerpt below:

.... Decentralisation of rural development in this local municipality has led to improved water sources for the local people. As you can see, there is running tap water and people do not have to walk far to fetch water for domestic use, like cooking, drinking, and bathing. (CM11.)

This view was reiterated by participant CM14, who noted that due to decentralisation in rural development, they can easily access clean water. CM14 said:

.... We do not have a problem with clean water for household use because our municipality authorities provide all the basic needs we are asking for. I have a tap just around the corner, and it has made life easier for me and my family. (CM14.)

Key informants stated that it was the municipality's mandate to provide better water and sanitation to the people by prioritising the needs of the citizens. Participant KI3 noted that:

Local governments have a significant role in protecting surface water, groundwater, drinking water, and wetlands. This will enable local municipalities always to provide better water and sanitation to their people.

KI6 added that:

...our duty as ward councillors is to ensure that our people have all the basic needs in their communities, such as water, sanitation, and roads. The municipality has previously improved water access by adding centralised water distribution systems within each community.

Given the responses presented thus far, it is not surprising that many participants believe that decentralisation of rural development promotes the supply of better services such as water and sanitation in Elundini Local Municipality. This is consistent with the Water Services Act of 1997 (Act 108 of 1997), which directs municipalities acting as water service authorities to supply water and maintain sanitation under national guidelines. Furthermore, these findings are consistent with scholars who advocate decentralizing rural development and improving services such as water and sanitation. Mwihaki (2018), for example, conducted a study and discovered that decentralizing rural development to local municipalities has improved water and sanitation provision in rural areas. Mwihaki (2018) investigated the functions of decentralisation in the provision of sanitary facilities and water in two sub-counties: Kiambu and Kitui. According to the findings of Mwihaki's study, rural development decentralisation has enhanced accountability, a willingness to embrace diverse trends, and the provision of services efficiently and effectively—for instance, by revising water policies, enforcing them, and encouraging rural water users to take the initiative. Susilo, Vidyattama, and Wishanti (2020) Moreover, emphasize that improved water and sanitation service delivery, which can aid in long-term water management, depends on the decentralization of rural development.

4.4.3 Provision of electricity

The study also revealed that decentralisation of rural development has resulted in the provision of electricity to many households at Elundini Municipality, in addition to the construction of access roads and the provision of water and sanitation. Participant CM15 mentioned that most houses in the Elundini Local Municipality have electricity, which was made possible by rural development decentralisation. This is indicated in the excerpt below:

Most households in this municipality are connected to electricity, and this rural electrification has led to increased agricultural employment, rural farm population, and rural property values. (CM15.)

Similarly, participant CM17 indicated that decentralisation of rural development has enhanced rural residents' quality of life through the electrification of their households. The participant said:

Rural electrification in this municipality greatly improved the quality of life for many people. For example, lighting alone brings benefits such as increased study time and improved study environment for school children. (CM17.)

Two key informants also mentioned the importance of rural development decentralisation in improving service delivery in rural areas. This is shown by the responses provided by key informants 4 and 5 below:

.... Rural development decentralisation has improved service delivery through electrification, which positively impacts labour supply for both men and women. Household per capita income has increased by nearly 38.6% due to electrification (mostly due to an increase in nonfarm income). (KI4.)

.... The electricity in this municipality has seen an improvement in individual quality of life for many local people, facilitates community services such as health and education (consumption use), and has enabled business entities to carry out professional activities (productive use) for rural populations. (KI5.)

The findings above are consistent with the national government's responsibility for ensuring electricity generation and transmission throughout the country (Boamah, 2020). According to Boamah (2020), positioning energy production facilities closer to the location of energy consumption characterizes a decentralized energy system. It is crucial to remember that a decentralized energy system maximizes the use of combined heat and power and renewable energy sources while lowering the consumption of fossil fuels and increasing eco-efficiency. (Lawrence, 2020). According to Baruah and Enweremadu (2019), providing electricity through decentralizing rural development has many benefits, including increased income from new job opportunities, particularly in non-farm activities. Furthermore, lighting and TV/radio provide leisure and domestic benefits and time savings from household chores that can be used for leisure and productive activities (Lawrence, 2020). Other scholars, such as Lee and Callaway (2018), note that access to electricity is often a disadvantage for rural areas in developing nations. This is because rural electricity schemes are usually more expensive to implement than urban schemes due to the high cost of providing this service in sparsely populated, remote areas with rugged terrain and low consumption. (Mazzone, 2019). As a result, to enhance people's economic and social well-being, rural electrification is at the core of service delivery under the decentralization of rural development. (Lawrence, 2019).

4.4.4 Improvement of Community Centres

Furthermore, the community members with whom I conducted interviews and key informants revealed that the decentralisation of rural development had improved community centres in Elundini Local Municipality. Most interviewees pointed out that they had seen the refurbishment of the libraries and community halls.

4.4.4.1 Refurbishment of Libraries

The researcher provides verbatim quotations from the study below to shed light on the refurbishment of libraries. One said:

...Libraries are increasingly important for rural communities, and the local authorities have tried to improve the state of the current libraries in our municipality. These libraries have books that help our children improve their education and avoid drugs. (CM8.)

Similarly, participant CM10 also indicated the improvement of libraries in the municipality because of the decentralisation of rural development. This is indicated in the excerpt below:

.... The municipality has improved libraries for the local people, and libraries play a fundamental role in our societies. The resources and services offered in our libraries create learning opportunities and support literacy and education for rural people. We also see an improvement in our community halls in the past years, which is good for our leadership. (CM19.)

In addition, one of the key informant participants highlighted how libraries are essential at the Elundini Local Municipality. Key informant 1 had the following to say:

.... We have initiated the refurbishment of our local libraries in the past years because these resources help shape the new ideas and perspectives central to a creative and innovative society. (K11.)

Another key informant had the following to say:

One of our rural development mandates is to improve all the libraries in this municipality, as public libraries fundamentally promote educational development in our societies. Furthermore, public libraries provide information for community development activities such as planning, education, politics, research, economic activities, and enlightenment, which are unavoidable and indispensable. (K14.)

4.4.4.2 Improvement of community centres

The researcher also established an improvement in community halls in Elundini Local Municipality because of rural development decentralisation. Community members and key informants revealed that community halls were equipped with resources needed by the local people, particularly when holding meetings and receiving grants. Their responses are quoted below:

.... The municipality has upgraded our community halls in many ways, such as painting and installing new windows. (CM11.)

...our halls are equipped with chairs, tables, and electricity, making it easy for the community to have their meetings. These resources have been provided as per the request of community members. (CM19.)

In addition, one key informant confirmed the improvement of community halls around Elundini Local Municipality. The participant said:

.... We have facilitated renovating and upgrading our community halls because this is where community members gather for group activities, social support, public information, grant payments, and other purposes. Therefore, having halls that are up to standard for our people is important. (KI2.)

Based on the responses above, it is possible to conclude that community infrastructure, such as libraries and community halls, is being improved and refurbished. The community library is an inestimable organisation supported by public funds to benefit society (Le Roux & Hendriks, 2021).

Public libraries are available to all community members and are not restricted to any group of people. (Chisita and Chizoma, 2021). According to Netshakhuma (2021), libraries serve as community gathering places. Libraries not only connect people to information but also to people. In addition, libraries serve as safe havens for children when school is not in session, providing after-school homework assistance, games, and book clubs (Williams, 2021).

The significance of libraries as social change agents cannot be overstated. They address a functional issue brought about by the requirement for sufficient knowledge of the empirical world's biological, physical, and social components, of which the rural community is a part. (Hlongwane, Slotow, and Munyai, 2020).

In South Africa, rural communities are underprivileged areas or villages that lack access to economic and social amenities like roads, hospitals, banks, industries, rural telephony, and electricity. Poverty, high unemployment rates, a subsistence economy, and illiteracy also characterize them. (Hlongwane et al., 2020). Consequently, the decentralisation of rural development in recent years has facilitated the improvement

of various services in rural communities, resulting in a change in the rural people's economic and social well-being (Williams, 2021).

4.5 CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY ELUNDINI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY IN IMPLEMENTING DECENTRALISATION.

This section's goal is to address the study's second research question, which is stated below:

- What challenges are encountered by the Elundini Local Municipality in implementing decentralisation?

Several questions were posed to community members and key informants to determine the challenges the Elundini Local Municipality encountered in implementing decentralisation. The answers obtained from the interviews with community members and key informants are covered in the following sections. According to the findings, the following are the common themes:

- Limited financial resources
- Weak Institutional Capacity
- Poor accounting and auditing systems
- Lack of public participation
- Lack of adequate information to community members

These are used to present and analyse the data below.

4.5.1 Limited financial resources

One of the difficulties Elundini Local Municipality encountered in implementing decentralization, as revealed by the study, was a lack of resources, such as finance, based on interviews conducted by the researcher. The following responses were obtained from primary data to highlight how limited resources, such as finance, challenge the implementation of decentralisation in Elundini Local Municipality. One of the community members indicated that:

... One of the challenges that local government in South Africa faces is the lack of financial power to decentralise and finance the services given to them.
(CM3.)

This view was matched by another community member who mentioned that:

.... There are always limited local revenues for the realisation of decentralisation to ensure service delivery for the rural people. More money is needed to properly decentralise rural development activities. (CM7.)

One of the key informers had the following to say concerning the lack of financial resources:

.... rural areas generate less revenue than large urban areas, so local governments in rural areas struggle to decentralise and provide quality services to their residents. When a municipality has enough money for various processes and activities, it can deliver effective service. (KI2)

Based on the findings, it is possible to conclude that one of the challenges faced by Elundini in implementing decentralisation is the lack of financial resources. To successfully decentralise rural development activities, the local government must

have adequate revenue. According to Medvid, Pylypenko, Pylypenko, Ustik, Volchenko, and Vashchenko (2019), Most nations have restricted local taxation authority to pay for the services assigned to them. Service levels consequently fare poorly compared to expectations. (Berka and Dreyfus, 2021). Berka and Dreyfus (2021) add that a few visible (and therefore unpopular) taxes that are costly and difficult to collect, have an unfair effect, and skew the economy typically constitute the entirety of local revenue sources. Rural areas might not have much to tax, whereas large metropolitan areas might be able to make a sizable amount of money from business and property levies. Collecting impoverished people through coercion is often necessary to mobilize more local revenue. (Williams, 2021). Because of this, many local governments rely a lot on transfers from the federal government, which are usually distributed unfairly and confusingly. Both the decentralization of rural development initiatives and local governments' accountability to local taxpayers and voters are weakened by this reliance on the federal government (and, in certain situations, on donors).

4.5.2 Weak Institutional Capacity

While trying to investigate the difficulties the Elundini Local Municipality faced in implementing decentralisation, the researcher established weak institutional capacity as one of the difficulties. Many of the participants believed that decision-making processes in Elundini Local Municipality were unsystematic in the sense that mechanisms of accountability between officials and elected representatives were insufficient. Below are the quoted responses from participants on weak institutional capacity:

... One of the challenges in this municipality's decentralisation of rural development is that some decision-making processes are unsystematic, which is attributed to a lack of officials with good managerial and financial skills. (KI1.)

.... Poor decision-making occurs during the decentralization process, which is caused by inadequate accountability mechanisms implemented by certain municipal officials. As a result, there is always poor service delivery, which has an impact on the local people. (KI3.)

One community member had the following to say about weak institutional capacity:

Workers in these rural municipalities are paid low wages, and they will not provide good services to the people because they are preoccupied with finding additional income. These low wages jeopardise many functions and processes, which harm service delivery. (CM5.)

It is possible to draw the conclusion from the data that one of the difficulties in implementing decentralization at Elundini Local Municipality is the lack of institutional capacity. These findings are consistent with academics who link poor service delivery to a lack of institutional capacity in rural municipalities. For example, Khambule and Mtapuri (2018) conducted a study and established that decision-making processes in local government are hampered in different ways owing to a shortage of institutional capacity. Khambule and Mtapuri (2018) examined the institutional ability of the local government in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa to assist local economic development agencies (LEDAs) and found that, because local governments are plagued by institutional inefficiencies, they do not have the institutional support that LEDAs require. Because there are insufficient qualified LED officials in local municipalities and because LED is not prioritized by municipalities, they do not have

the operational capacity to support LEDAs. Municipalities are barely surviving because they are not bringing in enough money to support LEDAs, so they do not have the funds.

According to Rogerson (2020), a common issue facing local governments is a lack of institutional capacity. Furthermore, Ziervogel (2019) states that Ad hoc decision-making procedures are used, ineffective accountability systems exist between elected representatives and officials, and insufficient officials have the requisite technical, managerial, and financial expertise. Often, this is due to a lack of funding to draw in and keep talented workers. (Khambule and Mtapuri, 2018) In Africa, especially in South Africa, local government salaries are often far less than individuals could make working in the private sector. Hommann and Lall, 2019). Further, employees are preoccupied with obtaining other forms of income, whether illegal or simply dysfunctional, owing to extremely low wages.

Decentralisation is still relatively new in many countries, and institutional capacity takes time to develop. Turok and Visagie (2018) determine how long decentralization reforms have been implemented as one of the variables impacting system performance. This means that the centres' consistent support, which is frequently lacking, is necessary for developing institutional capacity at the local level. Consequently, by designating a provincial unit to purposefully and proactively support decentralization institutionally, provincial governments should prioritize institutional support to rural municipalities.

4.5.3 Poor accounting and auditing systems

The researcher also established that poor accounting and auditing systems are included as difficulties encountered by the Elundini local municipality in implementing

decentralisation. Below is an excerpt from a participant regarding poor accounting and auditing systems:

.....There are numerous factors and challenges affecting the implementation of decentralisation in this municipality, such as mismanagement and unsatisfactory accounting standards that hinder decentralisation and the provision of high-quality service delivery. (KI3.)

Another key informant shared the same opinion about poor accounting and auditing systems. The following response was obtained from (KI4):

.... the municipality's finance officials cannot collect outstanding debts from individuals and businesses. This means that there will be insufficient funds to implement decentralisation, which will aid in the improvement of services in rural communities.

In addition to the responses from the key informants, community members also indicated poor accounting and auditing systems as a challenge affecting the application of decentralisation in developing rural areas. The responses below were obtained from the community members:

...This decentralisation process necessitates effective accounting and auditing systems, but some municipal officials lack these skills, posing a significant challenge when attempting to decentralise rural development. (CM11.)

.... I believe this municipality has weak accounting and auditing systems, which affect the execution of certain activities. With such weak systems, stealing money intended for local people's empowerment and service delivery is very easy.

Based on the responses provided, it is possible to conclude that poor accounting and auditing systems harm the application of decentralisation within Elundini Local Municipality. According to Enwereji and Uwizeyimana (2019), Effective accounting and auditing systems that promote trust in the information about how resources have been allocated are necessary for decentralization to be implemented with efficiency. This applies to elected local governments and officials' accountability to elected representatives and citizens. Rarely are elected officials, much less common people, in a position to closely examine the details of resource use. (Sibanda, Zindi, and Maramura, 2020). Nevertheless, local government accounting systems are usually inadequate and subject to numerous disagreements. (Hommann and Lall, 2019). Yearly accounts are generally completed many months (or sometimes even at all) after the fiscal year has ended. Decentralization of rural development suffers greatly when central governments cannot conduct thorough external audits of every local government. (Sibanda et al., 2020). Therefore, the main suggestion is that all South African local municipalities' financial departments require and support training. (Rogerson, 2020). The primary intervention will promote sound financial management and teach municipal employees how to manage the city's finances. (Khambule and Mtapuri, 2018). It is advised that municipal human resource departments act swiftly, equitably, impartially, and harshly whenever misappropriation is demonstrated, in addition to the primary recommendation. (Rogerson, 2020). Only erudite talents should be employed to handle municipal financial matters because of the combined effect of the suggested interventions (Sibanda et al., 2020).

4.5.4 Lack of public participation

Some contestants also mentioned a lack of public participation as a challenge in applying decentralisation in the Elundini Local Municipality. The information quoted below was obtained from the interviewees:

Community members are under-represented in consultations about key municipal processes such as integrated development planning and decentralisation. (KI1.)

Many municipal activities, such as implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and planning, require the participation of local community members to be successful; however, in some cases, local people do not participate. (KI2.)

One community member also highlighted the lack of public involvement as a challenge to the implementation of decentralisation. The participant said:

Many people are not involved in the implementation of municipal programs and activities, which is important because it allows the population to participate and contribute to better planning solutions. (CM3.)

From the responses above, it is safe to conclude that less public participation is one of the challenges faced in implementing decentralisation in Elundini Local Municipality. According to Rogerson and Rogerson (2020), the community can contribute to better planning solutions in municipal processes and activities when there is public participation. In other words, preserving common values and fundamental living standards in a sustainable society demonstrates the population's active involvement in planning and decision-making processes. (Mamokhere, 2019). It is also worth noting that encouraging public participation in municipal processes and projects that

have an impact on society promotes fair, equitable, and long-term outcomes (Masiya, Davids, and Mangai, 2019). Any organization, government, or person leading projects that impact the community must use this crucial decision-making process. (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2020).

Mamokhere (2019) conducted a study investigating the reasons behind protests regarding service delivery in Bolobedu South, Greater Tzaneen Municipality, South Africa. The analysis determined that the leading causes were political instability, nepotism, corruption, unemployment, poverty, and a lack of information access. According to this study, one of the main reasons that impede municipal processes or service delivery is a scarcity of public participation, and it is critical to encourage the population to participate in such initiatives to have a successful implementation of municipal processes.

4.5.5 Inadequate information to community members

One of the challenges identified by the study was the insufficiency of information for community members. Literature also shows that the success of municipal processes is dependent on citizens having access to information that allows them to effectively engage with local government on a variety of issues (Masiya et al., 2019). The researcher captured the following responses on inadequate information to community members:

Transparency and information are lacking in this community, which creates problems because people are unaware of their responsibilities to provide good services to them.
(CM11.)

I feel that our councillors do not provide much-needed information to the community so that they can collaborate with municipal officials to improve service delivery.

The results indicate that one of the difficulties encountered in implementing decentralisation is the lack of information about decentralisation among community members. According to the literature, among other things, poor service delivery and the implementation of decentralization are caused by councillors' political manipulation and meddling, corruption and a lack of accountability and transparency, poor information sharing with the public, low levels of citizen participation, poor human resource policies, inability to handle change, and a lack of employee capacity. (Munzhedzi, 2021). For these reasons, service delivery success will suffer if the community people are not given vital information regarding rural development decentralization. Consequently, it is imperative to enhance community members' access to information. Decentralisation and other municipal activities build trust, foster community ownership, and encourage feedback and participation (Fashoro & Barnard, 2021). Making individuals and communities aware of the various municipal processes and activities can also help them support such initiatives as they plan their lives (Munzhedzi, 2021).

4.6 ALTERNATIVE INTERVENTIONS THAT CAN BE IMPLEMENTED TO ENHANCE RURAL DEVELOPMENT AT ELUNDINI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.

This section aims to present and analyse data related to the study's second research question, detailed below:

- What interventions can enhance rural development at Elundini Local Municipality?

Following the challenges countered by the Elundini local municipality in implementing decentralisation, the sections below present alternative interventions that can be

implemented to improve rural development. The following themes emerged from the researcher's interviews with community members and key informants regarding this subject:

- Creating ward-based plans
- Developing an infrastructure development plan
- Education, training, and development

4.6.1 Creating ward-based development plans.

Participants indicated the need for developing ward-based plans that meet the needs of different wards to better understand alternative interventions that can be implemented to improve rural development. The participants emphasised the importance of developing ward-based plans so that the municipality is aware of the various services required by different wards or communities. The following are the excerpts from the data:

...They must create plans for different wards because we face different challenges, for example, some wards do not have clean water, and others are very far from the clinic, so we face different challenges that need different solutions. (CM5.)

Another community member also highlighted the need for ward-based development plans, thus:

There is a need for a ward-based development plan for every ward to capture what is needed by the community and help to speed up the implementation of the IDP. (CM7.)

Two key informants had the following to say regarding creating ward-based development plans:

Once we have plans for each ward, it is easy to improve service delivery because we will be highly aware of what our people need. Also, this provides a means to strengthen the participation aspects of IDP. (KI2.)

We need to promote ward-level plans and community action to improve service delivery and rural development at large. (KI3.)

The answers above suggest that ward-based development plans are required in the Elundini Local Municipality to enhance rural development. This is critical because it will capture the various needs of various communities. Ward-based development plans, according to Munzhedzi (2020), support the entire municipality's social and economic growth through the IDP. Therefore, the IDP is the overarching framework for environmental preservation, infrastructural development, and land use management. (Molale, 2019). To guarantee that projects and programs are carried out effectively, it is crucial to remember that the IDP has procedures for breaking deadlocks. (Munzhedzi, 2020). In other words, an IDP assists in the development of realistic project proposals based on resource availability (Fashoro and Barnard, 2021). As a result, Elundini Local Municipality must have ward-based development plans that inform the municipality's IDP to improve service delivery in the area.

4.6.2 Education, Training, and Development

Participants also mentioned the necessity of education, training, and development to improve rural development at Elundini Local Municipality. The participants clearly stated that there is a need for education, training, and development programs for ward

councillors and many other municipal officials to enhance their skills in providing better services to the people of Elundini Local Municipality. A key informant said:

There is a need for ward councillors to be equipped with various accredited skills programs to have knowledge and skills to contribute positively to their municipality and community. (KI1.)

Another key informant stated that:

New councillors should have a National Certificate in Local Government Councillor Practices. This qualification provides key competencies to councillors to fulfill their mandate in improving the lives of all people in their municipalities. (KI3.)

An additional key informant expounded on the significance of education, training, and development in the training of ward committees. The researcher documented the following direct words:

Municipalities must ensure that ward committees are properly skilled and supported to perform their duties. In these trainings, they can learn things such as facilitating community development projects and promoting Batho Pele Principles through Ward Committees. (KI4.)

According to the responses above, municipal officials need education, training, and development programs, particularly ward councillors. According to Kamal, Begum, and Al-Hossienie (2018), ward councillors should obtain education, training, and development to learn about local government processes and how to carry out their duties.

According to Mbandlwa (2020), a councillor's primary duty is to represent their ward or division and its residents. Council members act as liaisons between the council and the community, so they must receive adequate training and development to understand the council's mandate and carry out their responsibilities effectively (Kamal et al., 2018). Remembering that a municipality needs well-trained staff in various departments to serve its residents effectively is critical. (Majola, 2022). According to Haricharan, Stuttford, and London (2021), all municipal personnel may do their everyday tasks more effectively and efficiently if they receive regular and appropriate training. Results from training programs showed a strong correlation between organizational climate, training efficacy, and motivation/job satisfaction. (Kamal et al., 2018). In summary, local government's practical education, training, and development programs are required to improve rural development in Elundini Local Municipality and throughout South Africa.

4.6.3 Developing an infrastructure development plan.

The interviews also revealed the importance of creating an infrastructure development plan to boost rural development in the Elundini Local Municipality. According to Cillier (2019), infrastructure development is building fundamental services to boost economic growth and enhance people's quality of life. Most developed economies have seen periods of rapid infrastructure development, which has improved regional competitiveness and efficiency. (Kamal et al., 2018). For the local population to achieve their fundamental needs and lead a socially and economically productive existence, rural areas need infrastructure assets such as schools, health centers, marketplaces, irrigation systems, roads, railroads, bridges, and water supplies (Cillier, 2019). The responses below indicate the importance of having an infrastructure development plan in the Elundini Local Municipality. One said:

We need more infrastructure in this municipality, and this can be possible if we have our own development plan that aims to fulfill the infrastructure needs of this municipality. (CM10.)

Another community member added the following regarding the need for an infrastructural development plan:

.... People want to see more schools and clinics in these areas, and this should be part of the plan of the municipality for the infrastructure that the people mostly need. If this is prioritised, there can be better service delivery. (C15.)

One key informant had the following to say regarding the need to develop an infrastructural development plan:

Our mandate is to construct schools, clinics, roads, and other critical infrastructure for our people to live better. To accomplish this, the municipality should have a solid plan to address its service delivery challenges. (KI2.)

5. CONCLUSION

The data was analysed, and the findings were given in this chapter. Thirty interviews provided the data, yielding a 100% response rate. The chapter presented demographic information about the participants, followed by improvements brought about by decentralisation in service delivery. This was followed by challenges encountered in implementing decentralisation, and the discussion was concluded with interventions that can be implemented to improve rural development at Elundini Local Municipality. In conclusion, the study found that decentralization has led to advancements like building access roads, supplying water and sanitation, supplying electricity, and enhancing community centers. In rural development's decentralization,

challenges such as limited financial resources, lack of adequate information for community members, weak institutional capacity, poor accounting and auditing systems, and a lack of public participation are encountered. Finally, the study established the need for ward-based plans, an infrastructure development plan, and education, training, and development programs to improve rural development in Elundini Local Municipality. The findings concerning the theoretical framework are discussed in the following chapter, including conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter, which wraps up the study, focuses on drawing conclusions from the research findings. It summarizes and presents the facts, conclusions, and recommendations.

The findings summary is displayed under the following points:

- Improvement brought by decentralisation in rural areas of the Elundini Local Municipality.
- Challenges encountered by the Elundini Local Municipality in implementing decentralisation, and
- Alternative interventions that can be implemented to enhance rural development at Elundini Local Municipality.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

A summary of the results is given in the parts that follow.

5.2.1 Improvement brought by decentralisation in rural areas of Elundini Local Municipality.

This section offers an overview of the research results gathered in response to the study's initial research question, which is described below.:

- Has decentralisation brought improvement in service delivery in rural areas?

Firstly, the study concludes that the decentralisation of rural development in Elundini Local Municipality resulted in constructing access roads in the surrounding communities. In other words, decentralisation has improved Elundini Local

Municipality's transportation network systems. The study also established that rural development decentralisation improved the water and sanitation supply in Elundini Local Municipality's disadvantaged communities. Therefore, water sources in Elundini Local Municipality's rural areas, such as tap water and water tanks, have been improved.

Furthermore, the study established that rural development decentralisation in Elundini Local Municipality has provided electricity to many households in the area. The availability of electricity has increased agricultural employment, increased study time, improved the environment for students, and led to a general increase in living quality.

Lastly, the interviews revealed that the decentralisation of rural development in Elundini Local Municipality has improved community centres. Most interviewees indicated they have witnessed the refurbishment of libraries and community halls. Libraries help children improve their education and avoid drugs.

5.2.2 Challenges encountered by the Elundini Local Municipality in implementing decentralisation.

The research findings gathered in addressing the second SRO of this study are summarized in this section and are listed below:

- What challenges are encountered by the Elundini local municipality in implementing decentralisation?

An analysis was done on various themes concerning the difficulties the local municipality of Elundini has had in implementing decentralization. First, according to the study, one of the difficulties Elundini Local Municipality had implementing decentralization was a lack of resources, such as finance. Furthermore, the researcher found a challenge of weak institutional capacity within the Elundini Local

Municipality. Most participants said that Elundini Local Municipality's decision-making procedures were not systematic because there were not enough accountability systems between elected officials and representation.

The researcher also discovered that poor accounting and auditing systems were some of the key challenges the Elundini Local Municipality encountered in implementing decentralisation. As a result, the municipality was unable to collect outstanding debts from individuals and businesses, which affected the improvement of services in rural communities. Additionally, it was determined that one of the difficulties in implementing decentralization in Elundini Local Municipality was the absence of public participation. To put it another way, many people do not participate in executing local initiatives.

5.2.3 Alternative interventions that can be implemented to enhance rural development.

The third SRO of this study investigated alternative interventions that can be implemented to enhance rural development at Elundini Local Municipality. The specific research question guiding the discussion was:

- *What interventions can enhance rural development at Elundini Local Municipality?*

The study discovered that there is a need for developing ward-based plans that meet the needs of different wards to better understand alternative interventions that can be implemented to improve rural development. The participants emphasised the importance of developing ward-based plans so that the municipality is aware of the various services required by different wards or communities. The study also discovered that creating an infrastructure development plan is important to boost rural development in the Elundini Local Municipality. Plans for infrastructure development

are crucial because they provide a framework for fundamental services that boost economic expansion and enhance living standards.

Furthermore, participants also indicated the need for education, training, and development among councillors to enhance rural development at Elundini Local Municipality. The participants clearly stated that there was a need for education, training, and development programs for ward councillors and many other municipal officials to enhance their skills in providing better services to the people of Elundini Local Municipality.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following suggestions are made considering the study's findings.:

- More education, training, and development are required for ward councillors and municipal officials to enhance their skills in providing better services to the people of Elundini Local Municipality.
- Outsourcing and having a private organization handle education, training, and growth is necessary.
- Residents must be involved in several rural development projects. Stronger interpersonal relationships, better decision-making, representation of a variety of social groups, clarification and stabilization of stakeholder communication, and encouragement of local ownership, commitment, and accountability are all made possible by public engagement.
- There is a need for the human resource management unit of Elundini Local Municipality to employ people with the right skills to implement decentralisation aimed at improving service delivery in the area.

- Infrastructure projects must also be made more appealing to private funding. Mobilising private funding for infrastructure projects is critical for closing the rural infrastructure gap. Improved transparency in the infrastructure project generation process, greater certainty regarding the framework conditions for project execution, and reduced risk for the operation phase are all required.

5.4 AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

This study addresses questions about evaluating the contribution of decentralization to rural development. The study identified numerous alternative initiatives that can be used to improve rural development in the Elundini Local Municipality. Therefore, more research may be done to determine how much the South African government considers the decentralization of rural development. Additionally, more research on various industries can be done to ascertain how they contribute to raising rural residents' standard of living.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were certain drawbacks to this investigation. Only a few chosen wards within Elundini Local Municipality were the subject of the investigation. Consequently, it is challenging to extrapolate the results to the entire municipality, particularly considering its limited scope. Additional research can be conducted on a larger scale to obtain more comprehensive results to circumvent such restrictions.

5.6 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY TO THE ORGANISATION AND BEYOND

Various strategies and recommendations were obtained that can be used to enhance rural development at Elundini Local Municipality. In addition, this study contributes to policymaking in that a clear and well-established rural development policy sets out the

general approach to municipalities on improving services for the local population and generating jobs.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the contribution of decentralization to rural development. Three goals were established for the study, namely, to assess the improvement brought by decentralisation in rural areas of Elundini Local Municipality; to recognise the challenges encountered at Elundini Local Municipality in implementing decentralisation, and to explore alternative interventions that can be implemented to enhance rural development at Elundini Local Municipality. Twenty community members participated in in-depth interviews to obtain responses for the aims. Key informant interviews were also carried out to find solutions to these goals. These key informants comprised two ward councillors, one municipal manager, one LED manager, and one LED practitioner. Thematic analysis was employed to generate responses and accomplish the study's goals. The study concluded that the construction of access roads, the provision of water and sanitation, and the provision of electricity are owed to decentralisation. The study also discovered that Elundini Local Municipality had difficulties implementing decentralization, including inadequate accounting and auditing procedures, a lack of institutional competence, and financial resources. Therefore, training and education are needed, as well as creating ward-based plans and developing an infrastructure development plan to enhance rural development at Elundini Local Municipality.

Figure 8: Elundini Local Municipality Main Building



Source: own

Figure 8: ELM offices of the councillors



Source: own



Source: own

Figure 10: ELM construction vehicles for road maintenance



Source: own

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ANNEXTURES

ANNEXTURE 1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research interview guide

My name is Nothemba Maya; I am a master's student in development studies at the University of Fort Hare. I am conducting a study on the role of decentralisation in rural development at Elundini Local Municipality. I therefore request that you participate by answering questions below, which seek information that might be useful to ELM and its rural community towards rural development. Data collected in this study will be used for academic purposes only.

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. What is your occupation/Position you hold?

3. Age (Not compulsory)

4. How long have you been working for the local municipality?

5. How long have you been employed as a ward councillor?

6. What is your understanding of decentralisation?

7. In your own words, how would you describe the link between decentralisation and rural development?

8. In your own view, are there any developmental gains which have been brought by decentralisation to Elundini rural community? Please explain.

9. Are there any challenges that are uncouncted by the local government in implementing decentralisation? Please elaborate.
10. What is the local government's implementation strategy for decentralisation?
11. How does the municipality address issues of imbalance in resource allocation between townships and rural areas?
12. Would you recommend the national government to continue using decentralisation to develop rural areas? Please support your answer.
13. Which aspects of decentralisation policy would you recommend being revised or removed? Please support your answer
14. Do you think we have not touched on any matters concerning decentralisation and rural development? Please elaborate.

Yes

No

ANNEXTURE 2 INTERVIEW GUIDE IN ISIXHOSA

Research Interview Guide/Umchankcatho wodliwano-ndlebe lophando

Igama lam nguNothemba Maya; ndingumfundi kwikhabathiso le Masters kwizifundo zoPhuhliso kwiDyunivesithi yaseFort Hare. Ndenza uphando ngendima yogunyaziso lophuhliso lwasemaphandleni phantsi koMaspalathi wase-ELundini (ELM). Kungoko ke ndicela uthabathe inxaxheba ngokuthi uphendule imibuzo eza kulandela apha nengafuna inzaliseko nolwazi olufumileyo onlunganceda uMaspalathi lo nabantu basemaphandleni kuphuhliso. Ulwazi oluthe lwafumaneka kolu phando lwakuba lelezifundo zam kuphela

My name is Maya Nothemba; I am a student in development studies at the University of Fort Hare. I am conducting a study on the role of decentralisation in rural development at Elundini Local Municipality. I therefore request that you participate by answering questions below, which seek information that might be useful to ELM and its rural community towards rural development. Data collected in this study will be used for academic purposes only.

15. Isini/Gender

Indoda/ Male

Ukhomokazi/ Female

16. Impangelo/Occupation/Isikhundla sakho/Position you are holding.

17. Ubudala/Age (Not compulsory)

18. Uqonda ntoni ngogunyaziso/ What is your understanding of decentralisation?

19. Ngokunokwakho ungathi yintoni xa uluchaza uqhagmshelwano pahakathi kogunyaziso nophuhliso lwamaphandle? In your own words, how would you describe the link between decentralisation and rural development?

20. Ngokokubona kwakho, ingaba ugunyaziso olu luza nangeniso ni kuluNtu lwamaphandle ase-Elundini? Zathuza / In your view, are there any developmental gains brought by decentralisation to the Elundini rural community? Please explain.

21. Ingaba ikhona imiqobo ejamelene norhulumente xa kudakancwa ugunyaziso olu? Naba/ Are there any challenges that are uncouneted by local government in implementing decentralisation? Please elaborat

22. Leliphi iqhinga lokwenza izinto athi urhulumente wamakhaya alisebenzise xa esolula ugunyaziso?/ What is the local government's strategy for implementing decentralisation?
23. Ingaba uMaspalathi lo uyiphatha njani imiba emalunga nokungalingani malunga nokukhutshwa kwezinto phakathi kwabakhomba ngophakathi nao basemaphandleni? How does the municipality address issues of imbalance in resource allocation between townships and rural areas?
24. Ukungakuqhwabela izandla ukuthi rhoqo kukarhulumente weninzi esebenzisa inkqubo ka gunyazile kuphuhliso lwamaphandle? Xhasa impendulo yakho. Would you recommend the national government to continue use decentralisation to develop rural areas? Please support your answer.
25. Yeyiphi imiba etshisayo yogunyaziso ongathi uyinikele ekubeni iphindwe okanye ilahlwe nofele? Xhasa impendulo yakho/ Which aspects of decentralisation policy would you recommend being revised or removed? Please support your answer
26. Ingaba ikhona imiba emalunga nogunyaziso nophuhliso lwamaphandle ocinga ukuba ibhambathiwe ayichathwa mntu? Naba, are there any matters concerning decentralisation and rural development you think we have not touched? Please elaborate.

Yes/ Ewe

No/ Hayi

ANNEXTURE 3 INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS

Research Interview Guide

My name is Nothemba Maya; I am a master's student in development studies at the University of Fort Hare. I am conducting a study on the role of decentralisation in rural development at Elundini Local Municipality. I therefore request that you participate by answering questions below, which seek information that might be useful to ELM and its rural community towards rural development. Data collected in this study will be used for academic purposes only.

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. Occupation/Position you hold?

3. What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Degree/ B. Tech and above
- ☐ Diploma
- ☐ Certificate
- ☐ Matric
- ☐ Below Matric

4. Age (Not compulsory)

5. What is your understanding of decentralisation?

6. In your own words, how would you describe the link between decentralisation and rural development?

7. In your view, are there any development gains brought by decentralisation? Do you see any changes?
8. Is the local government/municipality doing enough to develop rural areas? Please explain.
9. Have you ever attended a municipal information gathering or event that informed you of your role as a community member?
10. There is clear evidence that rural areas are not the same as urban areas in development. What would be your suggestion to the local government?
11. Would you recommend the national government to continue using decentralisation to develop rural areas? Please support your answer.
12. If you were involved in decision-making in your municipality, how would you change the current state of rural areas?
13. Have we touched on any matters concerning decentralisation and rural development? Please elaborate.

Yes

No

ANNEXTURE 4 ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER



Nothemba Maya's
Renewal Ethics Lette