

RESEARCH PROJECT RWI–ICLD

Human Rights Perceptions and Practices at The Local Level: Cases from Southern Africa And Sweden

FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a comparative research project examining how local governments understand, value and apply human rights in their everyday work and how they perceive their own role in the local implementation of human rights. The research was conducted through four case studies in municipalities participating in or connected to the ICLD Partnerships for Human Rights network: Livingstone City in Zambia, Mogale City in South Africa, Mutare City in Zimbabwe and Falun Municipality in Sweden.

Local governments occupy a particularly important position in the implementation of human rights. Many areas falling within municipal mandates—including access to water and sanitation, education, accessibility, participation and other public services—are closely connected to the enjoyment of internationally recognised human rights. Yet local authorities may not necessarily understand these responsibilities through a human rights framework or perceive themselves as human rights duty bearers. The project explored this apparent gap by examining four interrelated dimensions: knowledge and understanding of human rights; the value and relevance attributed to human rights; their incorporation into municipal practices and service delivery; and the institutional self-perception of local authorities as human rights actors. It also examined factors that facilitate or hinder the incorporation of human rights-based approaches (HRBAs) into local governance.

The research adopted a qualitative, participatory and co-creative methodology. The research questions and methodological approach were developed collaboratively by the research team and contextualised for each municipality. The case studies combined desk-based analysis with semi-structured interviews and, where appropriate, focus group discussions, observation and interviews with qualified informants. This approach made it possible to examine both formal municipal frameworks and the perceptions and practices of political leaders, civil servants, civil society organisations (CSOs) and other relevant local actors.

The four case studies reveal considerable variation in levels of human rights knowledge and understanding. Overall, however, most stakeholders demonstrated incomplete knowledge of human rights and of their relationship to municipal mandates. This knowledge gap was particularly visible among some groups of municipal civil servants. Political leaders and CSOs were, in several cases, comparatively more knowledgeable, although this pattern was not uniform across the four municipalities.

A central comparative finding is that human rights knowledge, perceived relevance and municipal practice do not necessarily correspond. Greater knowledge of human rights does not automatically lead to their institutionalisation or practical implementation. Mogale provides the clearest example: despite comparatively strong general knowledge of human rights and recognition of their relevance to the municipal mandate, human rights had not been systematically translated into municipal programming, policy and service delivery. Conversely, the absence of explicit human rights language or knowledge did not necessarily mean that human rights principles were absent from municipal practice.

This latter finding is particularly visible in Livingstone and Mutare. Neither municipality had explicitly adopted an HRBA, but practices identified in both cases reflected important human rights principles. In Livingstone, examples included prioritising communities with limited access to water and participatory budgeting processes. In Mutare, pro-poor policies targeting vulnerable groups, accessibility measures and cooperation with CSOs demonstrated elements compatible with a human rights-based approach. In both cases, therefore, aspects of municipal practice approximated human rights principles even where they were not explicitly conceptualised as human rights implementation.

The Falun case provides a further variation. The study focused specifically on the co-location of schools and inclusive education for children with disabilities. Human rights conventions were not actively applied to the merger process, and participants had generally not conceptualised the process as a human rights issue. Nevertheless, participants recognised the potential value of applying international human rights conventions when directly asked about them, while considerations relating to inclusion, equality and education were present in aspects of the process. The case therefore illustrates the difference between practices or objectives compatible with human rights and the explicit and systematic application of a human rights framework.

Across all four cases, none of the municipalities examined made explicit and systematic use of an HRBA in the areas studied. The research therefore identifies an important translation and institutionalisation challenge: even where human rights are known or considered relevant, they are not necessarily translated into municipal policies, institutional structures, procedures and service-delivery practices.

The comparative analysis also identified factors that may facilitate or hinder this process. Among the most consistently observed facilitating factors was the involvement of human rights-focused CSOs, organisations or individuals external to local government. Mogale and Mutare combined relatively active civil society engagement with comparatively higher levels of human rights knowledge and perceived relevance. In Livingstone, the participant demonstrating the clearest understanding of the municipality's human rights role had received training from a non-governmental actor. These findings do not establish a causal relationship, but they indicate that interaction with informed external actors may increase the visibility and relevance of human rights within local government.

Other facilitating factors identified in individual cases included the incorporation of international human rights standards into national law and litigation concerning municipal responsibilities. More broadly, the findings suggest that external actors, institutions and processes can contribute to making human rights more salient as a normative and legal framework for local governance.

The lack of human rights knowledge and practical understanding emerged as the most consistently identified hindering factor. This was visible directly in Livingstone, Mutare and Falun and indirectly in Mogale, where different stakeholder groups questioned the human rights knowledge of other municipal actors. The findings nevertheless demonstrate that improving knowledge alone is unlikely to be sufficient. Human rights capacity building needs

to connect legal and conceptual knowledge with the concrete mandates, institutional processes and everyday practices of municipalities.

A second cross-case barrier concerned the relationship between formal decentralisation and effective municipal autonomy. Livingstone and Mutare illustrate how central government intervention or incomplete implementation of decentralisation and devolution can constrain local authorities' capacity to determine and implement their own policies. Other barriers identified in particular cases included the absence of municipal human rights policies and institutional structures, insufficient participation, and the politicisation of human rights.

The findings point to the importance of capacity building combined with institutionalisation and sustained cooperation between local authorities and civil society. Training should not be limited to abstract knowledge of international human rights standards but should help political leaders and civil servants understand how human rights principles and obligations relate to their specific mandates and how they can be translated into policies, procedures and service delivery. Joint capacity-building activities involving municipal actors and CSOs may also provide opportunities to develop collaborative initiatives addressing concrete local challenges. The research therefore suggests that strengthening human rights implementation at the local level requires attention to three interconnected dimensions: knowledge, institutionalisation and collaboration. Municipal actors need sufficient knowledge to recognise the human rights dimensions of their mandates; institutional mechanisms are needed to translate that understanding into policies and practices; and interaction with CSOs and other relevant actors can provide expertise, participation and external perspectives that support this process.

Given the qualitative nature and limited number of case studies, these findings should not be understood as representative of local government generally in Sweden or Southern Africa. Rather, the cases provide exploratory comparative insights that may inform further research. They demonstrate that the relationship between human rights and local governance is more complex than a simple distinction between municipalities that “know” and “do not know” human rights. Human rights principles may already be present in local practices without being recognised as such, while comparatively strong human rights knowledge may coexist with weak institutionalisation.

The central challenge is therefore not only to increase awareness of human rights, but also to enable local governments to recognise, translate and operationalise human rights within their existing mandates, institutional processes and everyday service delivery. This requires context-sensitive capacity building, stronger institutional mechanisms and sustained forms of cooperation between local authorities, civil society and other actors involved in the local realisation of human rights.

Building on the research framework and findings, the project also developed a prototype self-assessment tool for local governments, included in Annex A, designed to support the exploration of human rights knowledge, perceptions and practices within municipal contexts.

1. Introduction

The “Human Rights Perceptions and Practices at the Local Level: Cases from Southern Africa and Sweden” project is a collaborative research project coordinated by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (RWI) in cooperation with the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) in Sweden.

The purpose of this project is to conduct a collaborative study on how local governments understand, refer to, and implement human rights in four selected cities in Southern Africa and Sweden. The study aims to generate knowledge on how local government officials and administrators in each of the four cities studied relate human rights to municipal functions, focusing on how they understand and apply human rights norms and principles in their daily work. Thus, the study analyses common challenges and opportunities that local governments experience in applying human rights. This allows the study to identify, in each case, hindering and facilitating factors and to produce recommendations on how to strengthen human rights work at the local level, as well as a prototype self-assessment tool for local governments based on the research framework and findings (see Annex A).

This project gives particular relevance to the role of local governments as a potential missing link in the human rights system and as a necessary transmission belt between States Parties to human rights treaties and rights holders.¹ Given their contextual knowledge and proximity to citizens in their everyday lives, local governments are in a unique position to use human rights-based approaches in delivering public services and in their dialogue and engagement with the population. Therefore, this project pays particular attention to the institutional structures and working methods implemented by the four selected cities in connection with the domestication of international and regional human rights standards, including partnership strategies with civil society.

The four selected cities are part of a human rights network of local governments in Sweden and Southern Africa. They comprise one city in Sweden (Falun) and one in each of three countries in Southern Africa: Zimbabwe (Mutare), South Africa (Mogale) and Zambia (Livingstone). All four have committed to conducting human rights projects under the ICLD Network.

Four local researchers were appointed to the research team through an open call. Dr Elizabeth Rutsate was appointed for the case of Mutare; Dr Khulekani Moyo for Mogale; Dr Landilani Banda for Livingstone; and Dr Anna Bruce for Falun. The research project was coordinated by Dr Alejandro Fuentes, with the scientific support and assistance of Russell Garner. In addition to the research team, Helena Olsson provided administrative support, including overall budget responsibility, and contributed to the initial design of the project.

¹ On the importance of local governments in the implementation and fulfilment of human rights at local levels, see, among others, M. F. Davis *et al.* (eds.), *Human Rights Cities and Regions: Swedish and International Perspectives* (Raoul Wallenberg Institute, Lund, 2017), <rwi.lu.se/publications/human-rights-cities-regions/>.

Finally, it is important to mention that the project originally included an additional case study from Southern Africa, the city of Francistown in Botswana. The appointed researcher, Dr Bonolo Dinokopila, collaborated with the research team during the initial stages of developing the research plan and strategy. Unfortunately, due to personal reasons, Dr Dinokopila was unable to continue the research and, therefore, the Francistown case study was excluded from this report.

1.1. Research Problem

The main research problem that this project addresses is whether human rights principles, values, norms and approaches are perceived as relevant by local authorities to the realisation of their own mandate. Local authorities, particularly municipalities, are at the front line of service provision.

Access to housing, sanitation, transportation and mobility, education, health care, recreation, and access to culture and cultural events, among others, falls in many cases within the mandates of local authorities. They are the main service providers in many parts of the world. In that sense, they are directly involved in the creation of the necessary conditions for developing a dignified life, that is, a life that allows the individual to pursue his or her project of life.²

However, there is also a widespread perception that local authorities are not necessarily connected to—or even responsible for—the concrete realisation of human rights. International human rights standards, including those adopted by regional organisations (e.g. the Council of Europe or the African Union), are created and developed by States. Hence, it would be for the national government to fulfil the rights and obligations arising from those international instruments. In other words, the responsibility for the realisation of human rights would be allocated to the national government as the duty bearer.

This research project deals precisely with this apparent contradiction at the local level, where local authorities are responsible for providing access to several fundamental rights but potentially do not perceive themselves as duty bearers. In addition, it approaches this research problem from the perspective of the local authorities themselves, enquiring into the role that human rights narratives and understandings play in their daily work.

1.2. Research Questions

The main research question that addresses the above-mentioned research problem is the following:

- How do municipalities, as institutions, and their decision-makers and civil servants understand, value and apply human rights at the local level?

² In connection with how the project of life could be understood in a broad sense, *see, among others*, A. Fuentes and M. Vannelli, 'Expanding the Protection of Children's Rights towards a Dignified Life: The Emerging Jurisprudential Developments in the Americas', 10:4 *Laws* (2021) Article 84, <www.mdpi.com/2075-471X/10/4/84/htm>.

This research question highlights four different aspects related to the importance of human rights at the local level: the understanding, value and institutional practice of human rights by local authorities, and their institutional self-perception, which could reflect the importance they attach to human rights.

During the first methodology workshop that took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 7–9 March 2022, the research team further disaggregated the main research question into six additional sub-research questions designed to capture the different aspects of the research problem.

Understanding:

- What is the level of understanding of municipal authorities regarding the content, scope and extent of international human rights standards related to their municipal mandate?

Value:

- How relevant are human rights in the daily work of the municipality? Do municipal public servants consider human rights principles, values and norms relevant or important in connection with the realisation and implementation of their own mandate? In other words, how are human rights referred to or considered in their daily work?

Institutional practice:

- How are human rights standards practised in the daily work of the municipality? To what extent are human rights reflected in the internal work and processes of the municipality?

Institutional self-perception:

- What is the positionality of the city council regarding human rights? Do they position themselves as human rights actors? Do they recognise and understand their role as duty bearers? In other words, what is their institutional self-perception?

Barriers, enablers and facilitators:

- What are the systemic or institutional barriers and hindering factors that could affect or prevent the incorporation of HRBAs and international human rights conventions at the local level? And, on the contrary, what are the enablers or facilitators that support the incorporation of HRBAs and international human rights conventions at the local level? This dual question focuses on the systemic factors, structural circumstances, and contextual realities of each of the actors involved that could prevent or facilitate this process (e.g. normative framework, policies and municipal structure, municipal working culture, understanding of the municipal mandate by the political leadership and/or by civil servants, institutional dynamics between the municipality and the national authorities, etc.).

Human rights obligations as duty bearers:

- What level of knowledge do local authorities have of the scope and content of human rights standards relevant to the municipal mandate, and of their interconnected human rights obligations in implementing those standards?
- As a complementary question: What is their municipal understanding of human rights? Do municipalities, their political leadership and/or their civil servants have a different understanding of human rights and the role that municipalities should play in their implementation or realisation?

Regarding the latter sub-question, it is relevant to highlight that determining the level of understanding that local authorities have of their human rights obligations facilitates the identification of gaps, challenges and opportunities, together with the circumstances that could enable or hinder their implementation and incorporation into internal municipal processes and practices.

Finally, from a methodological point of view, it is important to mention that all these sub-research questions were co-developed by the members of the research team through a collaborative and co-creative process, capable of incorporating the different contextual realities of local governance that the case studies bring to the project.

1.3. Case studies: comparative added value

The research project has at its core a multiple-case study of four cities, one in each of the four selected countries included in the ICLD Partnerships for Human Rights network: Sweden, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia. In addition, two of the selected cities are already part of the partnership programme (i.e. Mogale and Falun), which means that the findings and deliverables of this research could be relevant to the ICLD partnership programme.

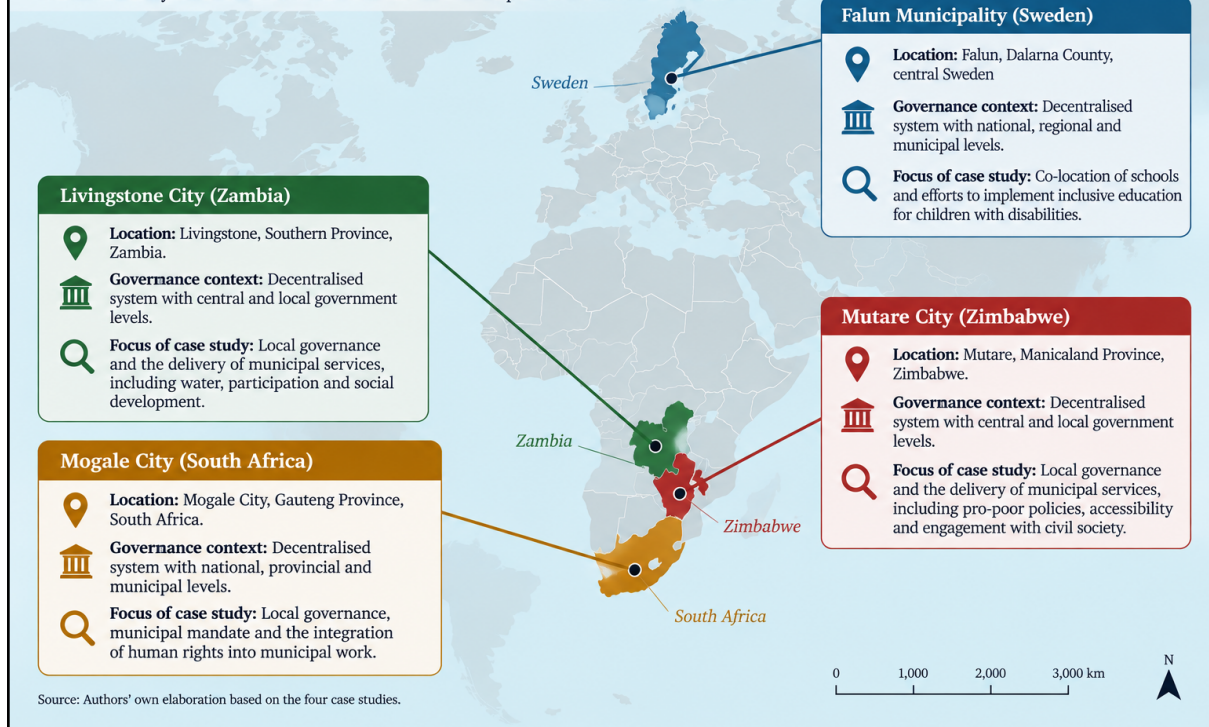
There are several benefits to conducting the study with partnership cities. The first is that city governments have already, by applying to join the ICLD human rights network, identified a need and confirmed their interest in taking human rights implementation forward in their cities. The research process is also expected to help local government officials gain new insights into the situation and priorities in their cities.

Moreover, by including two additional selected cities (Mutare and Livingstone), it is possible to develop a broader comparative picture of local government perceptions across the selected Southern African contexts. In addition, this comparative approach makes it possible to identify common patterns and lessons learned among the selected case studies, which could in turn provide a basis for recommendations that might have broader regional relevance.

Finally, it is important to note that Falun is the only selected Swedish city. It cannot be concluded that the study is representative of the knowledge, valuation and application of international human rights conventions by Swedish local authorities in general. However, the findings of this study may provide guidance to other cities as they initiate network projects and cooperation within the framework of the partnership cities initiative, both in Sweden and Southern Africa.

Figure 1. The Four Case Studies

Location and key contextual information for the four municipalities included in the research.



2. Research Methodology

As mentioned above, the purpose of this research project is to form an international research team to conduct a study on how local governments understand, refer to, and implement human rights in four selected cities in Southern Africa and Sweden that are part of the ICLD Human Rights Network. In addition, this research project intends to identify, from the findings of the four case studies and supplementary secondary sources, common challenges and opportunities that local governments experience in applying human rights, including hindering and/or facilitating factors.

In order to generate coherent and comprehensive data from all four case studies, the research project has identified key research questions that intend to cover all relevant aspects of the research problem highlighted above. It is important to highlight that all research questions were identified together with the four researchers responsible for conducting each case study. This co-creation methodology was chosen not only because it increases ownership of the common research process and outputs but also because it contributes to contextualising the research, taking into consideration the local realities of each case study.

The co-creation methodology was also applied during the collection of data, which was approached by all researchers as a collaborative process between them and the stakeholders involved in the research. This participatory research process enabled the co-creation of new knowledge regarding the perception of human rights in the daily work of the studied municipalities. In addition, researchers progressively adapted their questionnaires, following the answers and indications provided by their interviewees through the use of the snowball

sampling method. This approach allowed the incorporation of the interviewees' perceptions not only as part of the qualitative data gathered and analysed but also as an element of the co-construction of the questionnaires that influenced the direction of the research.

In order to address the sub-research questions highlighted above, different research methods were used. First, all case studies resorted to a desk-based analysis in order to determine the scope of the human rights mandate of the municipality under the national legal system. The desk-based analysis provided concrete information regarding whether and how the by-laws and policies adopted at the local level reflect the human rights mandate and competences of the municipality, including its institutional structures and division of competences. In addition, the desk-based analysis enquired whether the municipal authorities had incorporated human rights-based approaches (HRBAs) and international human rights conventions into the development of local by-laws and policies.³

In order to determine the level of understanding of human rights, as a conceptual framework and as a set of normative standards relevant to local authorities, researchers applied qualitative methods, in particular semi-structured interviews, which included questions focused on gathering information on potentially different levels of understanding of human rights among public servants. The same method was used to determine the level of value that local public authorities attribute to human rights in their daily work.

Regarding the determination of the extent to which human rights are reflected in the internal work or practices of the four different municipalities, researchers applied not only qualitative interviews (semi-structured) but also focus group discussions and observation. The latter, in particular, was relevant for the construction of an external perception of municipal practices, enabling researchers to assess the self-perception that local authorities have of their own institutional practices and daily work.

Moreover, the determination of factors that could enable or hinder the incorporation of human rights-based knowledge, understandings, practices and approaches (HRBAs) and international human rights conventions at the local level was done through focus group discussions and interviews with qualified informants.

Finally, based on the co-developed and co-constructed methodology, the research team has developed a prototype self-assessment tool for municipalities (see Annex A). The tool builds

³ In general terms, a human rights-based approach (HRBA) to local governance refers to a framework that seeks to integrate human rights principles, values, and standards into all aspects of local governance. It aims to ensure that local authorities respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of all individuals in their jurisdiction. Key HRBA principles include participation, transparency, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, and the rule of law. An HRBA requires local authorities to ensure that their policies, programmes and services respect and promote human rights, and that they are accountable to their citizens for their actions. Overall, an HRBA to local governance aims to create more inclusive, democratic, and sustainable communities in which the human rights of all individuals are respected and protected. See Human Rights Council (HRC), 'Role of Local Government in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights: Final Report of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee', A/HRC/30/49, 7 August 2015, <www.ohchr.org/en/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session30/Documents/A_HRC_30_49_ENG.docx>. See also 'Gwangju Declaration on Human Rights City', <[www.uclg-cisd.org/sites/default/files/Gwangju Declaration on HR City final edited version 110524.pdf](http://www.uclg-cisd.org/sites/default/files/Gwangju%20Declaration%20on%20HR%20City%20final%20edited%20version%20110524.pdf)>.

on the common research questions and methodological approach developed and applied across the case studies and is intended to support municipalities in examining their knowledge and understanding of human rights, the relevance attributed to human rights in municipal work, their incorporation into institutional processes and practices, and factors that may facilitate or hinder their implementation. It includes guiding questions addressed to local political leaders, civil servants, members of local CSOs, community leaders and other relevant local stakeholders.

The self-assessment tool presented in Annex A should be understood as a prototype emerging from the research process rather than as a finalised assessment instrument. Its further development, testing and validation would require additional research, including its application in different municipal contexts and the incorporation of explanatory guidance to support its practical use. The prototype nevertheless provides a basis for such further development and illustrates how the research framework developed in this project could be translated into a practical instrument for local authorities.

Finally, the findings of this study must be interpreted in light of its qualitative and comparative design. The four case studies were selected to explore different local contexts and were not intended to constitute a statistically representative sample of municipalities in the countries or regions concerned. Differences in the scope of the individual case studies, access to participants and methods of data collection also limit direct comparisons between cases. The cross-case patterns identified in the report should therefore be understood as exploratory comparative findings that may inform further investigation rather than as generalisable conclusions about the implementation of human rights by local governments.

3. Data - Case Studies

In all four case studies, the researchers completed the data collection and critical analysis based on their individual interpretations of the above-mentioned research questions. The main findings and recommendations provided in each of the case studies are summarised below.

3.1. Livingstone City (Zambia)

Our local researcher, Dr Banda, completed a thorough desk-based analysis of the content and context of human rights obligations for local governments in Zambia. Zambian local government is composed of locally elected officials called councillors and no more than three traditional leaders from the area being represented. Interviewing these councillors, traditional leaders, or the street-level bureaucracy responsible for delivering municipal services proved exceptionally problematic. The field was, in many ways, nearly inaccessible, even with the support of RWI and local members of the ICLD network, namely Danny Chibinda.

3.1.1. Findings

This inaccessibility is one of the major findings. Though the Zambian Constitution enumerates a great deal of autonomy for local governments and freedom in the fulfilment of their mandate, in practice this decentralisation has yet to materialise. In fact,

“[i]nstead of decentralising, the national government has centralised many of the local government functions. For instance, the national government has, through some legislative amendments, institutional frameworks and other mechanisms, centralised the recruitment, transfers and disciplining of council staff. As a result, local authorities now have to rely on higher levels to implement local policies, thereby making it difficult for local governments to adapt their internal administrative procedures to the local environments.”⁴

This oversight, control, and disciplinary power exercised by the central government over the councillors made officials at the Livingstone City Council (LvCC) unwilling or unable to “provide consent for interviews to be carried with administrative staff until they received approval from the central government at the Ministry of Local Government in Lusaka.”⁵ Despite mobilising personal connections with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government in Lusaka, access remained difficult and the fieldwork had to be conducted within a greatly reduced timeframe.

Despite these difficulties, access was eventually granted to Dr Banda once he had secured permission from the Permanent Secretary.

Knowledge/Understanding of HR

Dr Banda found that “there is very little knowledge, awareness or understanding of human rights at the LvCC”⁶, which could be expected given that “[a]part from one participant who had received some form of training, all the participants revealed that they had not received or undertaken any form of training in human rights.”⁷

Though there was little general knowledge of human rights at the LvCC, on some issues, notably gender and HIV, there was at least some understanding of the relevance of human rights to the mandate of local governance. Zambia’s national development plan mandates policies to mainstream gender and HIV/AIDS, with the aim of “reduce stigma and discrimination based on gender particularly against women and on HIV status within the workplace”.⁸ This mainstreaming “is supplemented by the National Gender Policy which [...] mandates local authorities to have a focal person”,⁹ which the LvCC follows. This focal person, in “collaboration with different partner organisations [...] received some form of training in human rights in the context of Gender and HIV/AIDS”¹⁰ and was able to describe the linkages between these policies, human rights, and the LvCC’s role as a human rights actor, even if “staff and councilors of the LvCC [...] do not perceive gender and HIV issues as human rights related matters.”¹¹

Another finding that explains many of Dr Banda’s early difficulties is that participants expressed that “they perceive human rights to be a political contestation by civil society organisations and politically inclined individuals [...] they perceive human rights to be a politically sensitive subject which cannot be discussed freely by officials”¹² and that, in the

⁴ L. Banda, *Human Rights Perceptions and Practices at Local Government Level in Zambia: Case Study of Livingstone City Council* (2023), pp. 12–13.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

Zambian context, “human rights have often been discussed in a political narrative.”¹³ An example of how human rights were used in political contestation was the referendum on the Bill of Rights. According to one interviewee,

*“then opposition political party and now current ruling party vigorously campaign[ing] against the referendum with other political parties following sort. The narrative was that a yes vote for the referendum was also a vote for the ruling party. As such, opposition party members and electorate decided to vote against the amendment of the Bill of Rights despite its progressive provisions.”*¹⁴

Relevance of HR to daily work

Dr Banda points out that the lack of knowledge regarding human rights affects perceptions of their relevance, with “limited valuation of human rights norms and standards at the LvCC from a technical sense due to the limited knowledge.”¹⁵ The LvCC’s policy documents reflect this low appreciation of the relevance of human rights, as “[t]he documents do not refer to any of the [human rights] norms and standards as informing the executions of the functions of the LvCC.”¹⁶

However, though participants do not use rights language to describe the norms that they value, there was a significant normative appreciation of human rights, with participants expressing a “value on human rights principles such as human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, effective community participation, and accessibility.”¹⁷

This tension between human rights norms and the norms participants located in “their upbringing and normal human socialisation”¹⁸ affected their perception of human rights more broadly, with “some participants [that] felt that human rights was against these values as it watered down important cultural norms”¹⁹

HR in Practice (service delivery)

The LvCC has not adopted an expressly human rights-based approach to service delivery. However, in the execution of its mandate, certain practices closely resemble a human rights-based approach to service delivery. Services such as access to water, typified by “the sinking of water holes, takes into account the communities that have least access to water.”²⁰ Additionally, the budgeting process is strongly participatory, being “conducted in consultation with communities”²¹ where “input from the Ward [development committees] is then consolidated into a draft budget [...] [t]he draft budget is then subjected another level of participation where community-based organisations and members of the public are allowed to provide comments on the draft budget”.²² Although this draft budget is ultimately decided upon by the LvCC, the process itself is very participatory.

The lack of an express human rights-based approach to service delivery is not surprising, given participants’ perceptions of the politicised nature of human rights in Zambia and their

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

lack of knowledge or training regarding human rights. However, human rights principles, located by the participants in their upbringing and cultural heritage, seem to guide the LvCC's approach to service delivery in at least some areas.

3.1.2. Recommendations

Dr Banda recommends that the LvCC should provide human rights training to its staff and councillors. The LvCC should also provide the general public and traditional leaders with training in constitutional literacy and human rights, in collaboration with human rights organisations.

Dr Banda also recommends that, instead of having a gender and HIV focal person, local authorities should have a human rights focal person, with the responsibility of helping the LvCC to include and apply human rights norms and standards in its work and service delivery. This focal person should also monitor the LvCC's progress.

Dr Banda further recommends that the LvCC should situate its policies within human rights frameworks and work closely with human rights institutions such as the Zambian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Public Protector.

Finally, Dr Banda recommends that Zambia should, as a matter of urgency, implement the decentralisation policy and give local authorities functional independence.

3.2. Mogale City (South Africa)

The South African governmental model entails a significant degree of decentralisation, with powers and responsibilities divided between national, provincial, and local governments. Within local government, there is a further categorisation between metropolitan, district and local municipalities. Mogale City Local Municipality is located within the third and smallest tier: the 'local municipality'.

3.2.1. Findings

Knowledge/Understanding of HR

Dr Moyo found that in Mogale City "there was a general knowledge by the municipality's political office bearers, officials/administrators and civil society organisations of human rights related to the municipal mandate."²³ This general knowledge is perhaps unsurprising, given that

"South African courts have delivered an increasing number of judgments interpreting and enforcing various socio-economic rights including healthcare rights, housing rights, social assistance rights, water rights, electricity rights, sanitation rights, and education. In almost all the cases, state organs or municipalities were on the receiving end of the court decisions".²⁴

²³ K. Moyo, *Study on Human Rights Perceptions and Practices at the Local Level: The Case of Mogale City Local Municipality* (2023), p. 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Despite this conceptual understanding of human rights as part of the municipal mandate and the legal consequences of a failure to implement them, “there was no clear knowledge on the nature of obligations that these human rights norms impose on the Mogale City.”²⁵ Perhaps because of this lack of knowledge of the obligations that these human rights norms impose on local municipalities, “South Africa is engulfed every year by service delivery protests with protesters mostly targeting municipalities for lack of services such as water, electricity, poor sanitation and housing.”²⁶

One factor that complicates the understanding of human rights and the municipal mandate is the conflation of labour rights and human rights, illustrated by some respondents’ association of “labour and employment-related rights with the right to equality.”²⁷

Another particularly interesting finding is that different actors within Mogale City local government perceive that there is a lack of knowledge among their peers in different areas of the organisation. For example,

*“political office bearers thought the municipality’s officers/administrators’ knowledge of human rights was limited. In the same vein, the municipality’s administrators/officials also largely thought the political office-bearers’ knowledge of human rights and the municipality’s human rights mandate was limited.”*²⁸

Relevance of HR to daily work

In addition to the general understanding of human rights as part of the municipal mandate of Mogale City, Dr Moyo found that there appears to be an “appreciation of the relevance and value of human rights in the municipality’s daily work.” However, though there is an appreciation of the relevance of human rights to the municipal mandate, respondents underlined that “it does not necessarily follow that such human rights ethos are valued and implemented by the municipality.”²⁹

*“The key finding from the above observation is that knowledge of human rights is not being translated and integrated into the municipality’s programming where human rights norms and principles permeate the city’s planning, policy making and service delivery.”*³⁰

One of the stumbling blocks to the institutionalisation of human rights in the municipality’s work seems to be the “lack of deployment of human rights language when it comes to the municipality’s service delivery mandate and this has implications of how such norms are valued in the municipality’s daily work.”³¹

HR in Practice (service delivery)

In line with the insights of the previous section regarding the gap between the understanding and relevance of human rights and their application within the municipal mandate, there is

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

also a “general sense that the municipality does not consider human rights standards in the implementation of the Municipality’s service delivery mandate.”³²

“The general theme was that there is a gap between the normative framework, on one hand, and implementing such norms into tangible goods for the communities under the municipality’s jurisdiction.”³³

These issues are compounded by the fact that the “[m]unicipality does not currently have a human rights policy” to guide its work and that there is “no structures with the mandate to promote human rights within Mogale City municipality.”³⁴ Despite this absence of dedicated human rights structures,

“Mogale City has created the position of a Chapter 9 Coordinator which is supposed to be a focal point for engaging with those institutions for supporting constitutional democracy provided in Chapter 9 of the South African Constitution, such as the South African Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Public Protector, the Commission for Gender Equality, among other institutions.”³⁵

In theory, this position is intended to promote human rights issues within the municipality. As one participant described, “what they do is to coordinate human rights because all the things which that person will be dealing with are all about human rights issues”.³⁶ However, in practice it only acts as “a forum for engaging with those institutions supporting constitutional democracy provided for in Chapter 9 of the Constitution”.³⁷

There is also a formal policy on public participation, with ward committees, but “the policy is poorly implemented, and the communities are not given adequate opportunity to decide the municipality’s developmental priorities”.³⁸ A participant added, “very blunt[ly] that the policy is simply there on paper but its prescripts are not being adhered to.”³⁹

Other impediments to service delivery were identified by participants as corruption and a legislative framework that empowers local politicians at the expense of officials and administrators, increasing the influence and potentially the dysfunction associated with local party politics.

One participant said of this framework that “the Structures Act, including the Systems Act also give both the administrative and executive powers to the councillors, so they see themselves as the employers and the employees at the same time or as people in charge of the municipality[,] [t]hey cannot differentiate between the executive and administrative powers.”⁴⁰ This, in turn, “impedes the municipality from effectively delivering on its service delivery mandate, including its human rights mandate due to intense political jockeying by councillors.”⁴¹

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

On corruption, a participant explained that elected officials embezzled “funds earmarked for potable water provision [...] for their private use [...] tak[ing] away available resources which could be used to improve water provision in a community.”⁴² The participant further observed that “the elected officials may not even know that they are impeding on the realisation of human rights through corrupt acts.”⁴³

3.2.2. Recommendations

Dr Moyo recommends human rights education for municipal workers, officials and politicians on the Bill of Rights and its applicability to the municipality, and on the nature and content of international and national human rights norms applicable to the municipality’s service delivery mandate.

Dr Moyo also recommends the adoption of a human rights policy that explicitly commits the city to be bound by human rights (civil, political, economic and social rights) in the execution of its service delivery mandate, and the creation of structures with a clear mandate to promote human rights within Mogale City and to provide for accountability measures in the event that local communities experience human rights violations.

Further, Dr Moyo recommends that Mogale City engage a human rights specialist to carry out a human rights audit of all the municipality’s current by-laws and policies to ensure that all international and national human rights norms are appropriately integrated into the city’s by-laws and policies. To this end, the Systems Act and the Structures Act must be amended to provide a clear demarcation between the duties and responsibilities of elected officials, on the one hand, and municipal officials and administrators, as led by the Municipal Manager, on the other, and to enable municipal officials and administrators to be granted more powers in operational matters, with elected officials’ roles limited to political oversight.

Finally, Dr Moyo recommends that Mogale City ensure the participation of local communities in its IDP (integrated development plan), budgeting and other municipal decision-making processes.

3.3. Mutare City (Zimbabwe)

In Zimbabwe, the 2013 Constitution provides for a three-tiered form of decentralised government. As seen in both Sweden and South Africa, the Zimbabwean governmental model entails a three-tiered system with divisions between national government, provincial/metropolitan councils, and local authorities. Mutare City is a local authority.

However, while less centralised than the Zambian case, Zimbabwe’s envisioned decentralisation “has not been felt on the ground 9 years after the Constitution was ushered in” with “many provisions on decentralisation and devolution [...] hav[ing] not been implemented”,⁴⁴ thereby creating challenges for local-level governance.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ E. Rutsate, *Human Rights Perceptions and Practices at the Local Level: Cases from Southern Africa and Sweden – RWI-ICLD Research Project* (2023), pp. 45–47.

3.3.1. Findings

Knowledge/Understanding of HR

Dr Rutsate found that knowledge and understanding of human rights and their relation to local governance varied, with most actors in the Mutare City Council (MCC) being “generally aware of the 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution as well as National Statutes and policies such as the Urban Councils Act” but “generally not aware in detail of the regional and international human rights framework.”⁴⁵ This variation can be broken down further between junior and senior staff, with senior staff “aware of most of the relevant human rights principles.”⁴⁶

Participants from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) felt that the MCC, especially its senior staff, were “generally knowledgeable on the requirements of human rights”,⁴⁷ though they felt “doubtful of the capacity of junior council staff vis-à-vis their conceptual knowledge on human rights particularly their indivisibility and interrelatedness”,⁴⁸ mirroring the council’s own evaluation of its knowledge of human rights.

However, there was an openness to human rights frameworks, as “the majority of MCC staff and councillors were not aware of the emerging discourse on human rights cities, they were excited to hear of the possibility of Mutare being taken on board as a city to be declared a human rights city in future.”⁴⁹

Relevance of HR to daily work

The variation in knowledge and understanding of human rights was accompanied by a similar variation in perceptions of their relevance to daily work, with “top managers at the MCC generally view[ing] themselves as human rights actors” and those closer to the service delivery finding it “difficult to classify themselves as such [human rights actors] since they feel it is those individuals working for CSOs such as human rights organisations [...] who are human rights actors”.⁵⁰ This was particularly pronounced among those civil servants “employed within the accounting, engineering and human resources departments”.⁵¹

NGO and CSO participants pointed to the MCC’s pro-poor policies, which aim to

*“promote the rights of persons from vulnerable groups such as the youths, the elderly, women small-scale traders, persons with disabilities and children through respecting their rights to life, health, education, clean water, adequate standard of living [as] clear evidence that they really valued the human rights of Mutare residents”.*⁵²

They also mentioned their collaboration with the “MCC on training and dialogues on human rights and democracy as well as devolution issues which was said to be an indication of how they valued human rights”.⁵³

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

While the picture is complex and varied, certain parts of the MCC seem to value human rights and consider them relevant, with a clear difference between junior and senior members of the MCC.

HR in Practice (service delivery)

Despite the fact that the civil servants engaged in service delivery did not consider themselves human rights actors and had limited knowledge or understanding of human rights broadly or of human rights-based approaches to service delivery specifically, certain policies undertaken by the Mutare City Council nevertheless contribute to the realisation of human rights.

The previously mentioned “pro-poor policies at Mutare City Council [...] that focuses on vulnerable groups such as women, OVCs [Orphans and other vulnerable children], child-headed households, persons with disability, the elderly and terminally ill”⁵⁴ could be considered an approximation of the incorporation of HRBAs into service delivery in Mutare. Additional examples can be found in the Mutare City Council’s “Engineering Dept. [which] is currently renovating the entrances to the Civic Centre to ensure accessibility by all without discrimination on the prohibited grounds”,⁵⁵ showing an effort to prioritise the rights of those furthest from the fulfilment of their rights.

With regard to service delivery, NGO and CSO participants were “generally impressed by the work the MCC was doing”.⁵⁶ However, nearly all participants felt that “the MCC had to improve and do better, particularly with regards to human rights implementation.”⁵⁷ The participants also pointed out that the fault did not lie with the MCC alone and “blamed the Minister of Local Government for interfering in the day to day running of council business”,⁵⁸ hampering the ability of the MCC to chart its own course.

3.3.2. Recommendations

Dr Rutsate recommends education and capacity building for civil servants and councillors on human rights, devolution and decentralisation.

Dr Rutsate also recommends building on the strong base of the pro-poor policies already in place to further develop human rights-based approaches and continuing the inclusive and participatory network of cooperation between NGOs and the public sector.

Finally, Dr Rutsate urges the Mutare City Council to consider joining a network of human rights cities.

3.4. Falun Municipality (Sweden)

Similar to the South African model, the Swedish governmental model includes a significant degree of decentralisation, with three primary levels of governance: national, regional and municipal.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Dr Bruce's case study adopts an even more micro-level lens than the three previous studies, focusing specifically on the co-location of schools in Falun Municipality and efforts to implement inclusive education for children with disabilities.

3.4.1. Findings

Knowledge/Understanding of HR

Neither local politicians, civil servants nor school professionals had considered the merger of schools to be a human rights question or considered how the municipality's mandate, in relation to the merger, interacted with international human rights obligations. All categories of participants were aware of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which is incorporated into Swedish law. Despite this fact, the "CRC was not actively applied in the merger, a project clearly implicating both children as well as the area of education, a sector of municipal work where the CRC is comparably well known...This indicates a general absence of international human rights conventions, including the CRC, from municipal work."⁵⁹

However, when asked directly, all categories of participants indicated that the municipality was obligated to live up to the rights and obligations incumbent in Sweden following Sweden's ratification of certain conventions. Some participants from the political and administrative sectors indicated that "since municipal activity, including the merger, was guided by Swedish law this ensured that such activity was in line with international human rights conventions"⁶⁰ even without direct knowledge of, or engagement with, the conventions in question.

Relevance of HR to daily work

Although no interviewees had made any connections between the merger and human rights, when asked, "all interviewees, when asked directly, could see a potential value in the active application of international human rights conventions to the school merger."⁶¹

The value placed on using human rights in the merger varied across sectors.

"All participants from the school sector felt that working actively with international human rights conventions would give them a focus on the actual operation and the people involved, rather than, as one participant put it, on "money and square metres."⁶²

Participants from the administrative and political sectors "saw value in the active application of international human rights conventions as a means to find common ground, particularly when opinions and interests differ."⁶³

Further, despite the lack of focus on human rights, all participants knew that there was an obligation to adhere to international human rights conventions, but "this was not tantamount to knowing the obligation to actively apply these conventions."⁶⁴

⁵⁹ A. Bruce, *Familiarity, Application, Valuation and Added Value of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Local Governance: A Case Study of a School Merger in Falu Municipality* (2023), p. 61.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

HR in Practice (service delivery)

No international human rights convention, including the CRC or CRPD, was actively applied to the school merger. Still, there are a number of ways in which, while not directly using rights language, the municipality approximated human rights norms. Participants in the political and administrative sectors connected the merger to “the right to inclusion and the right to equality”,⁶⁵ while participants from the school sector connected the merger to “the right to education.”⁶⁶

Though the approximation of human rights norms indicates some basis for the practice of human rights in the merger, participants also indicated that there were obstacles to a human rights-based process, such as the universally noted “lack of time” and, among participants from the school sector, “concerns about a lack of transparency, communication, structure, predictability and participation in the process [of the merger].”⁶⁷ Participants from the political and administrative sectors also noted a lack of knowledge, specifically “knowledge about hands-on applications of international human rights conventions in one’s work.”⁶⁸

Thus, while human rights norms are evident in some aspects of how the municipality views the merger, their explicit and systematic application remains largely absent from the work and processes surrounding the merger.

3.4.2. Recommendations

Dr Bruce recommends three broad measures, with their specific features detailed in her report.

First, Dr Bruce recommends training on the CRPD and CRC for staff in both schools and relevant actors in the political and administrative sectors. This recommendation is particularly important, as throughout the interviews participants across sectors identified a lack of knowledge as a major hindrance.

Secondly, Dr Bruce recommends a review, based on the CRPD and CRC, of the management of the school merger process, as the process has been difficult and may obstruct the creation of an inclusive learning environment.

Finally, Dr Bruce recommends creating “a structure for innovating inclusive educational practices”,⁶⁹ given the current lack of identified best practices, an area in which Falun Municipality could contribute to future municipal projects and other municipalities.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

4. Analysis

After critically analysing the findings and recommendations, it is possible to identify a number of cross-case patterns that have emerged from all four case studies, both in terms of the explicit research questions and the factors that hinder or facilitate local governments' application of human rights.

4.1. Answering the Research Questions

Knowledge/Understanding of Human Rights

The level of knowledge and understanding of human rights varied considerably among stakeholders (i.e. local politicians, civil servants and NGOs) and across the four case studies. According to the case studies, most stakeholders had poor or incomplete knowledge of human rights and their connection to municipal mandates.

For instance, in Livingstone, the knowledge of human rights and their applicability to the mandate of local governments was low and politically mediated. The highly politicised atmosphere around human rights in Zambia appeared to have created an antagonistic relationship between local politicians, civil servants and human rights, as the latter were interpreted as a form of political contestation by CSOs and politically motivated individuals. Despite this, in some areas, notably gender and HIV/AIDS, human rights were interpreted as part of the LvCC's mandate, an understanding supported by Zambia's national development plan.

Falun politicians, civil servants and school personnel had not considered the relevance of international human rights conventions to the project. The main human rights convention known by the participants and considered to have potential bearing on the project was the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been incorporated into Swedish law. Some participants held that compliance with Swedish national law ensured compliance with Sweden's human rights obligations.

Similarly, in Mutare, knowledge of human rights and of the local government's role in fulfilling human rights obligations was not well understood by most civil servants. However, the highest levels of the Mutare City Council (i.e. mayor, chamber secretary and legal officer), as well as members of the CSO community, were considerably better informed about human rights and the duty of the municipality to fulfil human rights obligations.

Mogale diverges most clearly from the other three case studies. The findings show that local politicians, civil servants and CSOs had a general knowledge of human rights and their relation to the municipal mandate. Yet in Mogale there were several interesting complicating factors, such as the conflation of labour rights with other rights and contrasting perceptions between different stakeholder groups regarding the human rights knowledge of other groups.

Overall, the findings suggest that local political leaders and CSOs are somewhat more knowledgeable about human rights and their connection to municipal mandates than civil servants, but this pattern is far from absolute. More generally, the case studies indicate a significant knowledge deficit regarding human rights and their connection to municipal mandates.

Value/Relevance of Human Rights

As with knowledge and understanding of human rights, the value assigned to human rights as a framework for action within these municipalities was not uniform.

Interestingly, there is no clear correlation between the level of knowledge and understanding of human rights and the value attached to their use in the work of local governments. Two of the more interesting examples of this phenomenon are Mogale and Falun.

While Mogale City politicians, civil servants and CSOs had a higher level of knowledge of human rights than stakeholders in the other case studies, and the value and relevance of human rights to the municipal mandate were considered high, respondents still expressed, in relation to other stakeholders, that a human rights ethos was not valued or implemented by Mogale City.

In Falun, this situation was reversed, with no local politicians or civil servants claiming in-depth knowledge of international human rights conventions, but multiple respondents indicating that greater use of human rights would have been valuable to their project.

Mutare presents a different pattern, with the stakeholders who knew more about human rights considering them more relevant and valuable to the discharge of the municipal mandate.

Livingstone City Council's lack of knowledge of, and adversarial relationship with, human rights were reflected in the value placed on human rights in municipal work. However, human rights norms were understood by the participants as related to their own cultural norms rather than international instruments and were therefore valued and considered relevant to the work of the municipality.

Practice of Human Rights-Based Approaches to Service Delivery

The use of rights-based approaches also varied significantly, although none of the municipalities in the case studies made explicit use of an HRBA in service delivery. Moreover, the ways in which human rights were understood and valued did not clearly correspond to how human rights principles were reflected in practice, with significant variation across the four cases.

Falun made no use of a rights-based approach in the school merger, and the process was guided by top-down decision-making with limited community participation. While some of the documents regarding the co-location referred to the CRC, human rights were largely absent from this process as a framework or guiding principle for the work.

Mogale had no rights-based approach to service delivery and no human rights policy for municipal work. Similarly, the structures in place to encourage community participation, although relatively well developed, were poorly implemented and resulted in little community engagement.

Mutare had no explicit rights-based approach to service delivery but arguably demonstrated elements of an implicit human rights-based approach through its so-called 'pro-poor policies', which target vulnerable groups (those furthest from the enjoyment of their rights) with support. Further, Mutare City Council's engineering department was renovating public buildings to address accessibility concerns that had been brought to its attention. Finally, Mutare had good communication with a variety of local CSOs, providing an avenue for public participation.

Similar to Mutare, Livingstone had no explicit rights-based approach to service delivery but could arguably be said to have demonstrated elements of an implicit rights-based approach. Examples such as the provision of water to residents, where those with the least access to

water were prioritised, and the participatory local budgeting process demonstrate the practical application of some central principles of an HRBA.

Figure 2. Comparative Overview of the Four Case Studies

Key findings on human rights knowledge, perceived relevance, institutionalisation and practice at the local level.

Case study	Human rights knowledge and understanding	Perceived relevance of human rights	Explicit HRBA (adopted policy/framework)	Human rights-compatible practices (in service delivery)	Key observation
 Livingstone (Zambia)	Limited Knowledge of human rights is limited and often mediated by political considerations.	Mixed Human rights are seen as relevant, but linked to local cultural norms and specific municipal issues (e.g. gender, HIV/AIDS).	No No comprehensive human rights policy or explicit HRBA adopted.	Yes Several practices reflect human rights principles (e.g. prioritisation of communities with limited access to water, participatory budgeting processes).	Formal knowledge is limited and politically mediated, but some municipal practices reflect human rights principles.
 Mogale (South Africa)	Comparatively stronger General awareness of human rights, with some misconceptions.	High Human rights are generally valued, especially by political leaders, civil servants and CSOs.	No No comprehensive human rights policy or explicit HRBA adopted.	Limited / uneven Some practices reflect human rights principles (e.g. participation), but overall implementation is limited and uneven.	Knowledge and relevance do not translate systematically into institutional practice.
 Mutare (Zimbabwe)	Uneven Higher levels of knowledge among political leadership and CSOs; lower levels among civil servants.	Generally stronger Human rights are generally valued, particularly by political leadership and CSOs.	No No comprehensive human rights policy or explicit HRBA adopted.	Yes Several practices reflect human rights principles (e.g. pro-poor policies targeting vulnerable groups, accessibility improvements, collaboration with CSOs).	Implicit human rights-compatible practices despite uneven knowledge across municipal staff.
 Falun (Sweden)	Limited explicit HR framing Low level of explicit knowledge of human rights conventions, although awareness exists (e.g. CRC).	Potential value recognised Participants identified the potential value of applying international human rights conventions when asked directly.	No No comprehensive human rights policy or explicit HRBA adopted.	Some Certain objectives and considerations (e.g. inclusion, equality and the right to education) are compatible with human rights principles, even without explicit application of a human rights framework.	Human rights-compatible objectives can exist without explicit human rights framing or application of international conventions.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the four case studies.

4.2. Hindering or Facilitating Factors

While patterns identified across a relatively small number of case studies cannot be considered broadly generalisable, there are still a number of tentative lessons that can be drawn regarding human rights and local governance. In the two sections below, the identified factors are divided into two categories: cross-case factors and case-specific factors. Cross-case factors are those observed in more than one case study and may therefore warrant further comparative investigation. Case-specific factors are those identified in only one case study and require further research to determine their relevance beyond that particular context. Nevertheless, they remain important for understanding the individual cases and the broader research problem.

Facilitators and Enablers

Because of the significantly uneven levels of knowledge, perceptions of relevance, and actual practice of human rights across the case studies, the significance of the identified enabling factors should be assessed cautiously.

Of the facilitating factors observed, the most consistently identified enabling factor for human rights knowledge, perceptions of their relevance, and the incorporation of human rights principles into local government practice was the involvement of human rights-focused organisations or individuals external to local government itself.

In both Mogale and Mutare, CSO participation was relatively high, and while it bears repeating that the relationship is not entirely clear, both knowledge and perceived relevance of human rights in these cases were higher than in the other case studies.⁷⁰

Further, in Livingstone, the only participant who valued and understood the municipal mandate in the realisation of human rights had been trained by a non-governmental actor.

Other facilitating factors identified in individual cases included national legal domestication, which in Falun's case seemed to have some influence on knowledge about human rights and perceptions of their relevance, and litigation against the municipality when it failed to fulfil its human rights obligations, which, according to Dr Moyo, contributed to the greater knowledge of human rights among local politicians and civil servants in Mogale.

A possible hypothesis arising from these findings is that, across the cases, the enablers represent an external actor, institution or process that in some way increases the salience of human rights as a normative, and sometimes legal, framework for local governance. Further, formal mechanisms for enforcing human rights obligations, such as changes in law by national governments or court-ordered remedies for failure to meet human rights obligations, appear in these case studies to have had a less visible influence than the presence and engagement of well-informed CSOs. More research is needed to determine why this might be, and the limited number of cases does not allow a broader conclusion to be drawn. Nevertheless, the finding warrants further investigation.

Hindering Factors and Barriers

While the uneven levels of knowledge, perceptions of relevance, and actual practice of human rights in the four case studies make it difficult to draw broader conclusions about barriers and hindering factors, the cases reveal greater commonality among the identified barriers than among the facilitators and enablers.

The most consistently identified hindering factor affecting human rights knowledge, perceptions of relevance, and the incorporation of human rights principles into local government practice was a lack of knowledge.

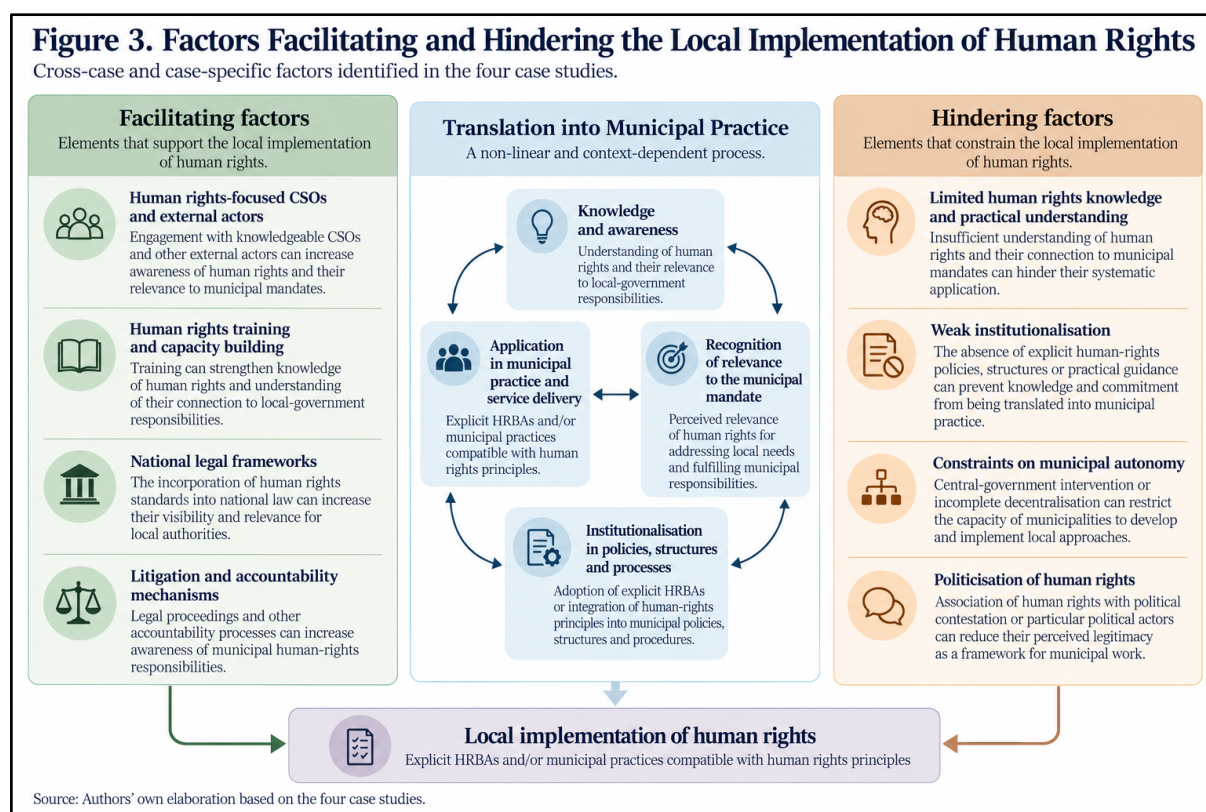
In three of the four case studies, namely Livingstone, Mutare and Falun, there was at least one group that reported insufficient knowledge of human rights law or rights-based service delivery. In the different case of Mogale, different stakeholders claimed that other stakeholders did not have sufficient knowledge of human rights or rights-based service delivery.

Another cross-case hindering factor for human rights in local governance was the gap between formal commitments to devolution and their implementation in practice. Both Livingstone and Mutare faced, or feared, significant interference in their mandates by central authorities, which participants perceived as potentially undermining the work of these local governments.

Case-specific hindering factors or barriers included the lack of human rights policy documents for municipal work and the politicisation of human rights as belonging to a specific political party. Although the latter factor was identified within a particular case, its significance should

⁷⁰ Similar findings have been reported in a comparative study that identified promising initiatives and collaborative frameworks capable of building synergies between CSOs and local authorities in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and human rights at the local level. See A. Fuentes *et al.*, *Localising Sustainable Development Goals and Human Rights: Building Collaborative Initiatives and Synergies Between Local Authorities (LAs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Sweden, Norway, Åland Islands and North-West Russia*, Research & Policy Brief (Raoul Wallenberg Institute, Lund, June 2021), <rwi.lu.se/publications/localisation-process-of-sdgs-and-human-rights-in-sweden/>.

not therefore be considered minor. The perception of human rights as belonging to one political party constituted, in fact, a significant barrier to the implementation of human rights in local government in that case.



5. Conclusions

The four case studies reveal different patterns in the levels of awareness, value and internalisation that human rights have at the local level. In general, most stakeholders had poor or incomplete knowledge of human rights and their connection to municipal mandates. At the same time, the comparative analysis shows that knowledge and understanding of human rights, the value attributed to them, and their incorporation into municipal practices do not necessarily correspond.

Across several of the cases, local authorities were either unaware of or did not fully understand the importance of human rights for their local mandates (i.e. Livingstone, Mutare and Falun). Even in cases where local authorities and civil servants possessed a certain degree of conceptual understanding of human rights, this did not necessarily mean that they understood their importance for the implementation of their own mandate (i.e. Mogale). Similarly, the absence of explicit human rights knowledge or framing did not necessarily mean that human rights principles were entirely absent from municipal practice. In Mutare, Livingstone and, to some extent, Falun, certain practices reflected or approximated human rights principles despite the absence of an explicitly adopted HRBA. None of the municipalities examined had adopted a comprehensive human rights-based approach to its work, although some had

policies or practices reflecting particular human rights principles, such as public participation, non-discrimination, accessibility or attention to vulnerable groups.

Moreover, the cases of Mogale and Mutare indicate that the presence of an active civil society sector with a solid level of human rights understanding may contribute to enhancing the level of awareness of local authorities regarding their human rights obligations. This relationship appears particularly relevant in relation to local political leadership. The case studies also suggest that local political leaders and CSOs were, in several instances, more knowledgeable about human rights and their connection to municipal mandates than civil servants, although this pattern was not uniform across all cases.

As indicated in the case of Mutare, the existing gap in human rights knowledge and understanding at the local level, in particular among civil servants, needs to be addressed through adequate capacity-building programmes. Training regarding the relevance of human rights principles, values, norms and approaches at the local level can contribute to enhancing the understanding and self-perception of local authorities and civil servants as duty bearers. However, the findings also indicate that increasing knowledge alone may not be sufficient to ensure the institutionalisation or practical application of human rights. Capacity building therefore needs to be connected to municipal mandates, institutional processes, policies and concrete service-delivery practices.

Based on these findings, it is possible to conclude that local political leadership can play an important role in identifying the need for human rights training at all levels of the institutional structure of municipalities. In addition, when there is an active human rights civil society at the local level, the chances of local authorities becoming aware of their capacity-building gaps may increase. As shown by the cases of Mogale and Mutare, well-informed CSOs were associated with higher levels of human rights awareness and understanding among local public authorities.

In this sense, it would be advisable to further explore the development of collaborative frameworks or platforms through which CSOs and local authorities could collaborate on different matters of common interest on a sustained basis. For instance, a local government and a CSO could work together to promote public awareness of human rights or to address a specific social issue such as poverty or environmental protection. Furthermore, general consultation frameworks could also be further developed, through which public authorities could engage CSOs in connection with policies and programmes that have an impact on the community. These are some examples of the different forms of collaboration in which CSOs and local governments can engage at the local level. The specific type of collaboration will depend on the context, the goals of the organisations involved, and the needs of the community. Therefore, the identification of appropriate collaborative frameworks or platforms for each of these case studies would necessarily require further research.

Moreover, in order to address one of the most consistently identified factors hindering the incorporation of HRBAs into local governance, namely the lack of human rights knowledge and awareness, capacity-building training is needed for both local authorities and CSOs. Higher levels of understanding in both sectors could generate a virtuous circle in which HRBAs are at the centre of their cooperative dynamics and interactions. Furthermore, focusing exclusively on developing capacities within local authorities would deprive them of valuable

external inputs regarding their own self-perception as human rights actors. In this sense, CSOs can provide an external perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of local authorities in relation to their human rights mandate.

For these reasons, it would be advisable for future training programmes to target both local authorities and members of CSOs. To increase the chances of further introducing HRBAs into the everyday work of municipalities, it would be beneficial to train these stakeholders together, including through the co-development of collaborative local partnership projects addressing particular areas of the municipality's mandate.

Based on the findings, the case studies point to the value of greater collaboration between local authorities and CSOs in supporting the realisation of human rights at the local level. By working together, local governments and CSOs may help to address the knowledge gap on human rights and support the development of more effective policies and programmes that benefit their communities. At the same time, the findings demonstrate that greater human rights knowledge must be accompanied by processes capable of translating that knowledge into institutional policies, procedures and service-delivery practices.

Future research should therefore explore how best to develop these collaborative frameworks, how human rights knowledge can be translated into municipal practice, and the areas in which joint projects could be most effective in promoting human rights at the local level. The prototype self-assessment tool developed through this research and presented in Annex A provides one practical basis for supporting this process and for further testing and refinement in different municipal contexts. Such efforts could contribute to strengthening the capacity of municipalities to recognise and operationalise their role in the local implementation of human rights.

ANNEX A

Human Rights Perceptions and Practices at the Local Level: Prototype Self-Assessment Tool for Local Governments⁷¹

Research Focus

To what extent does your municipality integrate human rights into its work, including in relation to its human rights obligations and service delivery?

About the Self-Assessment Tool

This self-assessment tool is designed to support the examination of how local authorities understand, value and apply human rights in their work. It approaches this assessment from the broader perspective of the local authority's human rights obligations and then focuses more specifically on their implementation through municipal functions and service delivery. Where appropriate, the assessment may focus on a particular municipal department or area of service delivery and include consideration of its everyday practices and routines.

Research Tool 1: Research Interview Guide for a Key Informant employed by the local government

Date: _____ Location: _____

Time interview started: _____ Time ended: _____

Participant summary: Name _____ Age: _____ Sex: _____

Duration of employment by **the local government/municipality**: _____

Current position: _____

Duration in current position: _____

Interviewer's Notes

Start by introducing yourself and explaining the nature and purpose of the research and self-assessment process. Seek the participant's informed consent to proceed with the interview and explain how the information provided will be used.

1. Knowledge and Understanding of Human Rights

Common Guiding Question 1

What knowledge do local government political leaders and civil servants have of the content and scope of human rights norms and the corresponding human rights obligations of local governments?

⁷¹ This prototype self-assessment tool was developed as a collective effort by all members of the research team as part of the project *Human Rights Perceptions and Practices at the Local Level*. It was submitted to the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD), the funder of the research project, together with the final research report.

- A. Is the participant familiar with the content and scope of human rights norms, particularly as reflected in the national Constitution and other relevant legal frameworks?
- B. What does the participant know about the corresponding human rights obligations of local governments at the institutional level?
- C. If the answer is yes to any of the above, ask the participant to explain further the extent and nature of their understanding. If the participant is unfamiliar with these concepts, the interviewer may briefly explain them in accessible terms before proceeding.
- D. Does the participant understand which human rights obligations are relevant to the municipality's mandate, particularly in relation to service delivery?
- E. Can the participant identify relevant municipal by-laws and policies and explain whether or how they relate to human rights?
- F. Can the participant briefly describe their duties and responsibilities during an ordinary working day and identify whether any of these functions may have a human rights dimension?
- G. Has the participant heard of, or are they familiar with, the concept of a human rights-based approach (HRBA)? If so, what do they understand an HRBA to involve, and have they applied such an approach in their work? If yes, how?



Interviewer's Notes

If the participant is not familiar with the concept of an HRBA, the interviewer may explain that an HRBA provides a framework for integrating international human rights standards and principles into policies, processes and practices, including the delivery of public services. Particular attention should be given to the following human rights principles: participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and the rule of law. These principles are further explained below through the PANTHER framework.



PANTHER and Human Rights-Based Approaches (HRBAs)

A human rights-based approach (HRBA) should be guided by human rights principles, including universality and indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination, participation and accountability. The PANTHER framework provides a practical way of considering several of these principles in the work of local governments:

→ **Participation** – ensuring that relevant individuals and groups, including those who may be marginalised or underrepresented, have meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them;

→ **Accountability** – ensuring that local authorities and public officials are accountable for their decisions and actions and that appropriate mechanisms exist through which rights-holders can raise concerns and seek remedies;

→ **Non-discrimination and equality** – ensuring equal treatment and opportunities and the inclusion of all relevant groups, with particular attention to persons and groups in situations of vulnerability or marginalisation;

→ **Transparency** – ensuring that decision-making processes are open and that relevant information is accessible and understandable to those affected;

→ **Human dignity** – ensuring that all persons are treated with dignity and respect, including respect for their choices, identities and cultural differences;

→ **Empowerment** – ensuring that people are aware of their rights and have the information, capacities and opportunities necessary to claim and exercise them;

→ **Rule of law** – ensuring that local authorities exercise their powers in accordance with the law and applicable human rights standards, and that rights-holders have access to appropriate mechanisms for accountability and remedy.

2. Understanding, Valuing and Application of Human Rights

Common Guiding Question 2

How do local governments understand and value the relevance of human rights norms and principles in developing local policies, carrying out their functions and delivering services?

- A. Drawing on the participant's description of their everyday work and the HRBA framework outlined above, does the participant consider any of their activities to contribute to the implementation of human rights at the local level? If so, in what ways?

Alternatively, ask: Does the participant think that human rights influence the way in which they carry out their everyday work? Why or why not?

- B. What factors lead the participant to this conclusion? To what extent does the participant connect their everyday responsibilities with the human rights obligations reflected in the national Constitution and other relevant legal frameworks?
- C. In the participant's opinion, what factors inform the municipality's approach to developing by-laws, policies and programmes?

Does the participant consider human rights norms and principles to play a role in the development of municipal policies and programmes? If so, ask them to provide concrete examples.

- D. In the participant's view, to what extent are human rights standards and principles recognised, valued and promoted within the municipality? Ask the participant to provide examples from everyday municipal work, policies, programmes or service delivery.
- E. In their own assessment, does the participant view the local government/municipality as a human rights actor? Why or why not?

3. Structures and Processes that Promote Human Rights Principles

Common Guiding Question 3

What structures and processes does the local government have in place to promote and integrate human rights principles in the work of elected representatives and civil servants, and to inform residents about their rights?

- A. Can the participant give a brief overview of the structures and processes, if any, that the local government has in place to promote awareness and application of human rights standards and principles among elected representatives and civil servants?
- B. In the participant's view, to what extent are these structures and processes effective in practice? What outcomes, if any, have they produced?

- C. What structures and processes does the local government have in place, if any, to provide residents with information about their human rights, particularly in relation to municipal functions and service delivery?
- D. What channels does the local government use to communicate with residents, including digital and social media? To what extent is the information provided accessible to different groups within the community?
- E. Does the local government have a complaints or grievance mechanism through which residents can raise concerns regarding municipal decisions or service delivery? If so, how does it operate and how effective is it considered to be?
- F. Does the local government provide other channels through which residents can submit suggestions, concerns or feedback, such as suggestion boxes, public meetings, digital platforms or other mechanisms? If so, how is this feedback received, considered and followed up?
- G. How does the local government organise its budgeting processes? To what extent are residents consulted or able to participate in decisions concerning municipal priorities and resource allocation? Are considerations of equality and non-discrimination, including gender equality, reflected in the budgeting process?
- H. Is the participant aware of which human rights standards and principles are promoted or protected through the structures and processes identified above?
- I. From the participant's experience, how would they describe the relationship between central and local government, particularly in relation to the municipality's ability to carry out its functions and responsibilities?
- J. To what extent do the existing arrangements for devolution, decentralisation and local autonomy facilitate or constrain the local government's capacity to fulfil its responsibilities, including those relevant to human rights?

Interviewer's Notes

Where relevant, invite the participant to provide concrete examples. Particular attention may be given to whether the structures and processes described reflect the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and the rule of law.

4. Challenges and Windows of Opportunity

Common Guiding Question 4

What institutional and contextual factors hinder or facilitate the local implementation of human rights?

- A. What challenges, if any, does the participant identify as affecting the capacity of the local government, its civil servants and elected representatives to integrate human rights into their work and fulfil human rights obligations relevant to the municipal mandate?

Where possible, ask the participant to distinguish between internal challenges (for example, knowledge, capacity, resources, institutional structures or organisational practices) and external challenges (for example, legal, political, economic or institutional factors).

- B. Based on the participant's experience, what opportunities exist for strengthening the integration and implementation of human rights in the work of the local government?

Consider, where relevant, opportunities related to human rights training and capacity development, institutional structures and processes, cooperation with civil society and other external actors, national legal frameworks, accountability mechanisms, and relations between central and local government.

- C. What recommendations would the participant make to strengthen the local government's capacity to respect, protect and fulfil human rights within the scope of its competences?



Interviewer's Notes

Encourage the participant to provide concrete examples of both challenges and opportunities. Where possible, explore not only whether a particular factor exists, but also how it affects the municipality's ability to translate human rights knowledge and principles into policies, institutional processes, everyday practices and service delivery.

Research Tool 2: Interview Guide for a Community Leader or Member of a Relevant Civil Society Organisation

Participant Information

The following questions are intended to provide relevant demographic and socio-economic context for interpreting participants' experiences and perceptions of local government and service delivery. Questions should be adapted to the purpose and context of the assessment. Participants should be informed that they may decline to answer any question.

- Name (optional)
- Sex/gender
- Age
- Highest level of education
- Disability, if any (optional)
- Residential area
- Housing situation (for example, renting or owning) and, where relevant to the assessment, size or conditions of accommodation
- Length of residence in the area
- Marital status (optional)
- Household/family size and living arrangements, where relevant
- Employment status (for example, employed, unemployed or self-employed) and, where applicable, nature of employment
- Approximate monthly individual or household income (optional and where relevant)
- Organisation or community represented
- Length of involvement with the organisation or community
- Position or role within the organisation or community

Interviewer's Notes

Only collect personal information that is relevant to the particular assessment. Where information concerning disability, income, household circumstances or other personal characteristics is collected, explain why it is relevant and ensure that participation and disclosure are voluntary. Personal information should be handled in accordance with applicable ethical and data-protection requirements.

2. Knowledge and Understanding of Human Rights

Common Guiding Question 1

From the perspective of community leaders and civil society actors, what level of knowledge and understanding does the local government have of human rights and of its corresponding human rights obligations?

- A. In the participant's experience, to what extent are elected representatives and civil servants aware of human rights and their relevance to the work of the local government?
- B. Does the participant consider that elected representatives and civil servants understand the human rights obligations relevant to the municipal mandate, particularly in relation to service delivery? Why or why not?
- C. Can the participant provide concrete examples that illustrate the level of human rights knowledge and understanding within the local government?
- D. In the participant's experience, does the local government provide residents with information about their rights in relation to municipal functions and service delivery? If so, how is this information communicated, and how accessible is it to different groups within the community?
- E. Is the participant aware of any human rights training, capacity development or other initiatives aimed at strengthening human rights knowledge among elected representatives and civil servants? If so, what impact, if any, does the participant consider these initiatives to have had?

Interviewer's Notes

Encourage the participant to base their responses, where possible, on concrete experiences of interacting with the local government, including experiences related to municipal decision-making, access to information and service delivery. The purpose is not to determine directly what municipal actors know, but to understand how their knowledge and understanding of human rights are perceived and experienced by community and civil society actors.

3. Application of Human Rights Obligations

- A. In the participant's opinion, to what extent is the way in which the local government carries out its functions and delivers services informed by human rights standards and principles?
- B. Which human rights does the participant consider particularly relevant to the local government's mandate and responsibilities? To what extent does the participant consider that the local government is fulfilling its obligations in relation to these rights?

- C. Depending on the response to the previous question, ask the participant to explain why they have reached this assessment and to provide concrete examples from their experience.
- D. Does the participant consider that human rights norms and principles play a role in the development of municipal policies and programmes? If so, in what ways?
- E. To what extent, if at all, are human rights standards and principles valued and promoted within the municipality, as reflected in the work of elected representatives and civil servants, municipal policies and service delivery?
- F. In their own assessment, does the participant view the local government/municipality as a human rights actor? Why or why not?
- G. Is the participant aware of any municipal policies, programmes or measures designed to improve access to services or provide additional support to persons or groups who may experience vulnerability, disadvantage or discrimination? If so, which groups are targeted and how do these measures operate in practice?



Interviewer's Notes

Encourage the participant to distinguish, where possible, between formal municipal policies and their implementation in practice. Ask for concrete examples of how human rights are reflected—or are not reflected—in municipal decision-making, policies, programmes and service delivery.

Where the participant identifies measures directed towards particular groups, explore whether these measures respond to barriers to equality and access to municipal services and how the groups concerned experience them.



4. Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and Equality, Empowerment, Transparency, Access to Information and Rule of Law

- A. Does the local government involve or consult residents before taking or implementing decisions that may affect them? If so, how does this participation take place?
- B. To what extent does the participant consider these opportunities for participation to be meaningful and inclusive? Are there individuals or groups who experience difficulties in participating? If so, why?
- C. Does the local government regularly provide residents with information about municipal decisions, activities and developments related to service delivery?
- D. If yes, which channels are used to communicate this information, and to what extent does the participant consider the information accessible, timely and understandable? If not, what information does the participant consider should be provided?
- E. Does the local government have complaints or grievance mechanisms through which residents can raise concerns, particularly in relation to municipal decisions, official conduct or service delivery? If so, are these mechanisms accessible and effective in practice?
- F. Does the local government provide other channels through which residents can submit concerns, suggestions or feedback, such as suggestion boxes, public meetings or digital platforms? If so, does the participant know how this feedback is considered and followed up?

- G. What local by-laws and policies is the participant aware of that are relevant to the protection and fulfilment of residents' rights? How, if at all, are these by-laws and policies implemented in practice?
- H. Are there municipal policies or measures that take into account residents' ability or inability to pay for municipal services? If so, how do these measures operate, and who is eligible to benefit from them?
- I. Does the local government have specific measures or arrangements intended to ensure equal access to municipal services for persons or groups who may experience vulnerability, disadvantage or discrimination? If so, how effective and accessible does the participant consider these measures to be?
- J. Overall, to what extent does the participant consider the local government's structures, processes and practices to reflect the human rights principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, transparency, empowerment and the rule of law? Ask the participant to explain their assessment and provide examples where possible.



Interviewer's Notes

The purpose of these questions is to explore how human rights principles are experienced in practice rather than simply whether formal mechanisms exist. Where a participant identifies a particular mechanism, policy or process, explore its accessibility and effectiveness and whether different groups within the community are able to benefit from it on an equal basis. Where relevant, consider whether there is a difference between the formal existence of a municipal mechanism or policy and its implementation in practice.



Research Tool 3: Guidelines for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with Key Municipal and Community Stakeholders

Two focus group discussions are proposed:

1. FGD 1: Municipal civil servants and local political leaders
2. FGD 2: Representatives of civil society organisations, community leaders and other relevant local stakeholders



Research Focus

The extent to which the local government understands, values and applies human rights in its work, including in relation to municipal functions and service delivery.

Location of discussion: _____

Date: _____

Number of participants: _____

Sex/gender distribution: _____

Organisational/stakeholder distribution: _____

Duration: _____

Important Information for Participants

Participants should be informed that participation in the focus group discussion is voluntary and that they may decline to answer a particular question or leave the discussion at any time. Participants should also be informed of the expected duration of the discussion, normally approximately 45–60 minutes, and of how the information generated through the discussion will be used.

Introduction and Purpose of the Focus Group Discussion

- A. The facilitator introduces themselves and invites participants to briefly introduce themselves, where appropriate.
- B. The facilitator explains the purpose of the self-assessment and the focus group discussion and seeks participants' informed consent to proceed.
- C. The facilitator should establish basic ground rules for the discussion, including respectful participation, allowing different perspectives to be expressed, and respecting the confidentiality of information shared by other participants.

Guiding Points for Discussion

The purpose of the focus group discussion is to explore participants' views and experiences concerning how the local government understands, values and applies human rights in its work. The facilitator should encourage discussion around the following questions:

1. Knowledge and understanding

To what extent do participants consider that elected representatives and civil servants understand human rights and the human rights obligations relevant to the local government's mandate?

2. Valuing human rights

To what extent are human rights considered relevant and valued in municipal decision-making, policies, programmes and everyday work?

3. Application in municipal practice

To what extent are human rights standards and principles reflected in municipal practices and service delivery? Can participants identify concrete examples?

4. Human rights-based approach

To what extent does the local government's work reflect the principles associated with a human rights-based approach, including participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and the rule of law?

5. Local government as a human rights actor

Based on the discussion above, to what extent do participants consider the local government to be a human rights actor? Why or why not?

6. Challenges and opportunities

What factors hinder or facilitate the local implementation of human rights? What opportunities exist for strengthening the integration of human rights into municipal policies, processes, practices and service delivery?



Facilitator's Notes

The facilitator should prioritise participants' own views, experiences and examples. The discussion should be grounded, as far as possible, in participants' experiences as residents, civil society or community representatives, municipal civil servants or local political leaders, depending on the composition of the focus group.

The facilitator should encourage different perspectives and avoid seeking consensus where participants have different experiences or assessments. Particular attention should be given to differences between formal municipal policies or structures and their implementation in practice.

Where appropriate, the facilitator may use the PANTHER principles outlined earlier in this tool to prompt further discussion, without suggesting that participants should reach a particular assessment.



Closing the Discussion

At the end of the discussion, the facilitator should invite participants to raise any additional issues that they consider relevant but that have not been covered. The facilitator should then thank participants for their contribution and explain, where applicable, how the findings of the self-assessment will be used or communicated.

Human Rights Perceptions and Practices at the Local Level: Cases from Southern Africa and Sweden

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The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of participating experts and researchers, and do not necessarily reflect the views of RWI

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