



COMPACT National Research Conference 2025

1-2 December 2025 | Southern Sun O.R. Tambo, Kempton Park

Reimagining Developmental
Local Government:
New Approaches to Legacy Challenges

PROGRAMME

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INTRODUCTION

SALGA's Research, Knowledge Management & Innovation Unit and COMPACT, in collaboration with its research and academic partners, is convening a conference that will bring together municipalities, researchers and IGR stakeholders to reflect on the theme, *"Reimagining Developmental Local Government: New Approaches to Legacy Challenges"* on 1- 2 December 2025 in Johannesburg. This platform will offer an opportunity to engage with the findings and recommendations from the COMPACT project and other research that critically examines themes of accountability, citizen participation and development planning in local government grounded in contemporary practice.

The Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), and Integrity Action (IA), an international civil society organisation (CSO), have been jointly implementing the COMPACT project co-funded by the European Union to enhance accountability through enhanced public participation protocols at the South African Local Government level since April 2022. The project is ending in January 2026 with several lessons, recommendations and tools developed and informed by action research in 12 municipalities. COMPACT has made significant inroads with its partner municipalities and now seeks to influence decision-makers and other municipalities with actionable insights and recommendations.

This year is quite significant for South African local government. Firstly, the 1998 White Paper on Local Government is currently under review with implications for further amendments to local government legislation. Secondly, the sector commemorates the 30th anniversary of the first democratic local government elections. This signals a moment of reflection for the gains of the past, and anticipation of renewed promises for the future of local government. Against this backdrop, scholars and practitioners of local government have developed a plethora of responses to the realities of municipalities which warrant an interest from various stakeholders.

While the challenges and discontents of local government have been well-documented, the tone of this conference shifts towards advocating for specific changes from an informed basis. It rides the wave of contemporary sentiments of change, renewal and progress to harness valuable insights that can be incorporated tangibly into the forthcoming administration of local government and the imminent legislative amendments that will need to align with the 2026 White Paper on Local Government.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The background and rationale of the conference theme is grounded in key literature about the trajectory of developmental local governance and praxis around participatory and accountable municipal systems. In keeping with the positioning of the conference to bring together diverse researchers, scholars, practitioners and policymakers it draws from various avenues of knowledge production within the local government knowledge economy.

Foundations of Democratic, Development and Participatory Local Government

Koma(2012) charts the emergence of democratic local government in South Africa through the policy reforms of 1993-2000. This policy reform process laid the foundation of legitimizing the involvement of all citizens of the country in shaping local government and entrenching the participatory principles that characterize local government in South Africa. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 asserts the far-reaching implications of developmental local government for the organisation and operation of municipalities throughout the country (Koma, 2012:109).

The White Paper on Local Government (1998:17)(WPLG98) defines developmental local government as local government committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs, and eventually improve their quality of life. This core-concept of democratic local government in South Africa is currently under review, as articulated in the Discussion Document on the Review of the White Paper on Local Government (COGTA, 2025), and local government is considering the prospects of a post-developmental state that is informed by the experiences of citizens to achieve the aspirations set out in the WPLG since 1998.

A New Developmental Approach for Responsive Local Government

The Discussion Document on the Review of the White Paper on Local Government notes that WPLG98's developmental local government ideals have been undermined by a shift to a bureaucratic and hierarchical culture. This has led to municipalities prioritising internal and upward accountability over responsiveness to citizens and communities, especially in poorer areas, creating a disconnect between local government and the people it serves (COGTA, 2025:29). Literature demonstrates that the interface between the government and civil society, and the relationship between democracy and development are critical factors for the developmental state (De Wee, 2017; Tsatsire et al., 2009, Ramodula & Govender, 2021).

In practice, the reality is quite different, and the risk is that self-interest will dominate a system that was designed to pursue the interests of the collective. This is already seen in the cases of maladministration, weak governance and impunity within municipalities. Some critiques of developmentalism argue that the failures are inherent to the system of developmental governance, and that the promise of development will not be realised for large parts of the population where there have been no significant changes to their standard of living. Others argue that a new model for developmental approaches is needed – one that is driven by the people in a way that reclaims commons, politics, the economy and knowledge.

The mismatch between policies and practice within a democratic state is not uncommon and can be attributed to many reasons. This is observed in other developmental states within Asia, Latin America and Africa (Ramodula & Govender, 2021; De Wee, 2017). In some cases, legitimate public participation processes may have been compromised; or the implementation of policies may be limited by weak institutional capacity (Ramodula & Govender, 2021). In other cases, the context is deeply political, characterized by diverse interests and conflict over the distribution of resources between actors (Naseemullah & Arnold, 2014).

Another consideration for a new developmental approach to LG, is the role of traditional leadership. Under the review of the WPLG98, this role needs to be clarified to ensure their inclusion within the broader framework of local government reforms, particularly regarding development and economic growth. While legislation enjoins municipal councils to consult traditional councils during the development of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), the manner and form of such consultations need to be determined in more detail (CoGTA, 2025). South Africa's balance between customary law and common law creates a unique system, which requires further harmonization to fulfil developmental aspirations at the local governance level.

Moreover, the COMPACT research findings suggest that while there are significant challenges to promoting greater public participation, there are also numerous opportunities to enhance citizen engagement and improve the quality of decision-making (COMPACT, 2024). By addressing the barriers to participation and implementing effective strategies to encourage engagement, municipalities through their political office-bearers and senior management can build more inclusive and responsive governance systems that better serve the needs and interests of their communities (COMPACT, 2024).

The project responds to these findings by offering tools and support for municipalities to enhance their responsiveness and accountability. This calls for transformative change that improves the administration of municipalities to enable municipal officials and councillors to respond better to developmental issues.

Transformative Change

The recommendations emerging from the COMPACT research findings suggest that municipalities need to undergo transformative change to enhance accountability at all levels – community, administrative, political. Similarly, we can expect that municipalities need to ready themselves for the various legislative and political changes that will be ushered in post-2026. The framework of transformative change may be helpful in locating an understanding of what is needed in the municipal environment.

Transformative change involves interconnected changes across views, structures and practices (Bennett et al, 2025:28). Schlüter et al. (2020) suggest that during periods of significant transformation, institutions function as coordination mechanisms among various actors. These mechanisms encompass both informal, unwritten guidelines and more elaborate formal systems such as laws and policies, serving as the “rules and tools of the game.”

Pursuing transformative change entails choices and a recognition that many of these choices will result in some who benefit and some who pay the cost (and may resist change) (Bennett et al, 2025:29). In South Africa, the Constitution safeguards respect, equal treatment under the law, freedom and safety, and the availability of vital services like housing, health care, education, food water, and social welfare (Sithenkhosi & Nzwei, 2023). Central to the vision of a democratic local

government was the desire to ensure that previously disadvantaged groups are brought to the forefront of development, towards building a more equitable society.

Therefore, it is important that the actions and choices that are made during a period of change are guided by principles enshrined in the Constitution. As Bennett et al. (2025:29) posit, “principles of equity and justice; pluralism and inclusion; respectful and reciprocal human-nature relationships; and adaptive learning and action are more likely to contribute to just and sustainable outcomes”. This guides which choices should be made over and above the others.

Collaborative and Adaptive Governance

The COMPACT research findings reveal the structural and operational challenges in public participation and planning at the municipal level (COMPACT, 2024). The report proposes that “[m]unicipalities should view collaborative engagement, co-production and accountability as empowering tools for communities” in the IDP public participation process (COMPACT, 2024:138). The recommendations emerging from the COMPACT action research, particularly around the IDP public participation process, have underpinnings of “collaborative governance” principles.

Collaborative governance can be defined as “the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private, and civic spheres to carry out a public purpose that could otherwise not be accomplished.” (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). It involves non-state actors as decision-makers who hold a degree of power within a process. The COMPACT project shows that in context of local government, this power is expressed beyond the ballot vote and can be localized in cases of development planning and citizen-based monitoring.

Another concept useful for understanding the current context of local government and the ongoing changes through COMPACT’s advocacy, the review of the WPLG98 and broader digital transformations is “adaptive governance.” Adaptive governance is about changing governance systems to be able to respond to new knowledge and changes in the socio-ecological system (Korhonen-Kurki et al, 2025:3). It attempts to address uncertainty through continuous learning, involvement of multiple actors in decision making processes and self-organisation of the governance system (Rijke et al., 2013 cited in Korhonen-Kurki et al, 2025).

Adaptive governance accounts for the rapidly changing environment that requires institutions to adapt and navigate emerging decisions (Janssen & van der Voort, 2016). Janssen & van der Voort (2016) argue that amidst the changing environment, governance needs to remain stable, efficient, and accountable while also maintaining adaptability. Governance mechanisms must ensure that the state delivers essential services to the public and manages public resources responsibly. In navigating this, adaptive governance is driven by leadership and trust among stakeholders at the local level; community empowerment, community knowledge, and shared experiences (Korhonen-Kurki et al, 2025:3).

The conference theme is informed by the above conceptual framing, which draws from various literature sources to unpack the key concepts underpinning the background and rationale of the conference. It will explore sub-themes that concretize these concepts within municipalities and invite discussion and reflections that are both grounded in literature and find expression in practice.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

This conference brings together researchers, policymakers, and local government practitioners to reflect thoughtfully on research findings, located in the context of political and legislative changes in the sector, and deliberate meaningfully on how these could inform the future trajectory of local government.

The objectives of the conference are to:

- Reflect on the COMPACT action research conducted, particularly the recommendations of the COMPACT Consolidated Technical Findings Report.
- Bring together diverse contributions that demonstrate how evidence is being used to solve challenges, improve performance, and inform policy at the local level.
- Encourage peer learning and the sharing of good practices to enhance community participation and accountability in municipalities.
- Create a platform for local government researchers to share research findings around themes of accountability, citizen participation and development planning in local government with municipalities and other stakeholders.
- Advocate and lobby for the institutionalisation of the COMPACT tools within municipalities to ensure their systemic integration into local governance frameworks.

PROGRAMME

Pre-Registration (18:00 – 20:00)

30 NOVEMBER 2025

18h00- 20h00

Arrival & Registration

DAY ONE: 1 DECEMBER 2025

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR: Winnie Dhlamlenze, SALGA

08h00 – 09h00

Arrival & Registration

09h00 – 09h10

Opening and Welcome

Luncedo Njezula: Executive Manager, SALGA

09h10 – 09h20

Setting the Scene

Sithembile Mbete: Executive Director, PARI

09h20 – 09h50

Keynote Address

Shanaaz Majiet, Head of Learning & Development, City of Tshwane

09h50 – 10h05

COMPACT Project Showcase

Girish Daya: COMPACT Programme Lead, PARI

SESSION 1: TOOLS & TECHNIQUES FOR ENHANCED CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Session Chair: Concelia Choma, SALGA

10h05 – 10h20

Reclaiming Developmental Local Government through Democratic Decommmodification and Fiscal Justice from Below

Sibongile Jonas & Mazibuko Jara: Zabalaza Pathways Institute

10h20 – 10h35

Community Action to Advance the Right to Water: An Analysis of Invited and Invented Participation in South Africa

Tinotenda M Muringani: Equality Collective

10h35 – 10h50

Q&A

10h50-11h10

Provocation: Online and Offline, Confrontation and Collaboration: How FixLocal is Building on Community Campaigns for Fixing Local Service Delivery Issues

Mark Heywood: FixLocal/Nelson Mandela School of Governance, UCT

11h10-11h30

Provocation: From Ballots to Belief: Reimagining Local Accountability Between and Beyond Elections

Sarah Findlay: Open Cities Lab

11h30 – 11h40

Tea break

SESSION 2: POLICY ROUNDTABLE		
Moderator: Michael Chauke: Inclusive Governance & Councillor Welfare Specialist, SALGA		
11h40 - 12h30	Leveraging Local Government Reforms for Transformative Change in Municipalities	PANELISTS: Nonhlanhla Dube: Network Support Coordinator, Activate! Change Drivers Andrew Boraine: White Paper Review Team/COGTA Curtly Stevens: Post-Doctoral Researcher, Dullah Omar Institute Tamzin Hudson: Programme Manager, Planact
12h30 - 12h55	Q&A/Discussion	
13h00- 13h45	Lunch break	
SESSION 3: GENDER & YOUTH INCLUSIVE DECISION-MAKING		
Session Chair: Khanyisile Ngqalela, PARI		
14h00- 14h15	Gender Inclusive, a Conduit to Political Communication and Service Delivery	Ndabezitha Tenza: University of the Witwatersrand
14h15 -14h30	Civic Education for Meaningful Participation	Rendani Manugu: Engage South Africa
14h30-14h45	Surfacing and questioning the contribution of mediation to inclusive citizen participation	Boitumelo Matlala: University of the Witwatersrand & Human Science Research Council
14h45-15h05	Q&A/Discussion	
SESSION 4: CASE STUDIES OF INNOVATIVE PRACTICE IN CITIES & TOWNS		
Session Chair: Hannah Hudson, Integrity Action		
15h05 - 15h20	Fostering Innovative Local Government Through Public Procurement Planning	Tholakele Nyathi: University of Pretoria/University of South Africa
15h20 - 15h35	Enhancing Local Governance through Place-Based Intermediary Infrastructures	Simon Sizwe Mayson: The CoLab Petrus van Niekerk: SALGA
15h35-15h50	Cape Town's Ease of Doing Business Index as a Tool for Developmental Local Government	Kenneth Wynne and Daniël Eloff: City of Cape Town
15h50 - 16h10	Q&A/Discussion	
16h10-16h40	Closing remarks of Day One	Programme Director
NETWORKING EVENT: 17:00 - 19:00		

DAY TWO: 2 DECEMBER 2025

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR: GIRISH DAYA, PARI

08h30 – 08h45

Welcome & Reflections
from Day 1

Programme Directors

SESSION 5: PERFORMANCE MONITORING IN MUNICIPALITIES

Session Chair: Jabu Hlatshwayo, PARI

08h45 – 09h00

Examining the Effectiveness of
Performance Management Systems
Implementation in South African
Municipalities

**Baloyi Michael Maromo and
Tasneem Majam:**
University of Johannesburg

09h00 – 09h15

Leading Performance Monitoring:
Assessing Mayoral Committee
Oversight Capability for Cultivating a
Performance Culture – A Case Study
In Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality

Ntombekaya Baart: South
African Association of Public
Administration and Management
(SAAPAM)

09h15-09h40

Q&A/Discussion

09h40- 10h00

Provocation: The Missing
Infrastructure – Rebuilding Local
Government Through Data and Digital
Systems

Joanne Parker: Open Cities Lab

SESSION 6: THE COMPACT TOOLBOX AND LESSONS ON CO-CREATION

Session Chair: Hlomani Maswanganyi, SALGA

10h00 – 10h15

Anchor Presentation: Unpacking the
COMPACT Toolbox

Kate Tissington: Senior Researcher,
PARI

10h15 – 11h00

Panel Discussion: Strengthening
Participatory Democracy through
Community Assets, Collaboration and
Digital Technology

Perspectives from Municipalities

MODERATOR:

Paul Smith: Local Governance
Head, Kagiso Trust

PANELISTS:

Paul Plantinga: Senior Researcher,
HSRC

Conrad Jardine: Director: Public
Participation, Gauteng COGTA

Nceba Kapayi: Blue Crane Local
Municipality

Phelelani Ntshingila: Newcastle
Local Municipality

Zandile Mahlasela: City of Cape
Town

11h00 – 11h20

Q&A/Discussion

11h20-11h30

COMPACT Certificate Handover to
12 Partner Municipalities

11h30 – 11h45

Tea break

SESSION 7: COMPACT CITIZEN-BASED MONITORING CASE STUDY Session Chair: Rebecca Matsie-Makhathini, SALGA		
11h45 - 12h00	Anchor Presentation: Citizen-Based Monitoring Approach to Accountability	Hannah Hudson: Programmes Lead, Integrity Action
12h00-12h40	Panel Discussion: Experiences & Lessons Learnt from the CBM piloting	MODERATOR: Winnie Dhlamlenze: Project Manager, SALGA PANELISTS: Danielle Schaap: Kouga Local Municipality Dessiderius Claassen: Oudtshoorn Local Municipality Concelia Choma: Researcher, SALGA Jabu Hlatswayo: Researcher, PARI Hannah Hudson: Programmes Lead, Integrity Action
12h40 - 13h00	Q&A/Discussion	
13h00 - 13h30	Closing Remarks & Vote of Thanks	Rebecca Matsie-Makhathini, SALGA
13h30	Lunch & departure	



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