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BRIEFING

GOOD GOVERNANCE AFRICA

Local Governance and Service Delivery: The importance of historical context in understanding local government performance in former Homelands

By Owami Tshuma and Nnaemeka Ohamadike

July 2026

Good Governance Africa

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Executive summary

Service delivery is one of the clearest channels through which to assess whether South Africa's municipalities are living up to their constitutional mandates. Yet access to basic services is still uneven, especially in municipalities in former Homeland and Traditional Authority (TA) areas. These municipalities continue to face the legacy of historical spatial exclusion. Many have weak local economies, infrastructure backlogs, and low institutional capacity, which limit service delivery, investment, socioeconomic opportunities and growth. This policy briefing places municipal performance gaps in their historical context and shows how data-driven tools, such as Good Governance Africa's Governance Performance Index (GPI)[1], can identify where service delivery and socio-economic weaknesses are most severe, where progress is being made, and how support can be targeted. The findings show that decades after the formal end of apartheid, former Homeland/TA municipalities remain concentrated in lower service-delivery rank bands and still lag behind in access to safe water, proper sanitation, and reliable waste removal services. These gaps partly mirror the historical and spatial inequalities that continue to shape citizens' opportunities. We argue that the GPI can serve as a practical diagnostic tool for government, the private sector, civil society, and development partners to identify where municipalities are improving, where weaknesses remain, where support is most urgent, and which interventions are likely to have the greatest impact.

1 The GPI uses a range of local datasets to assess and rank the performance of municipal governments in South Africa.

Policy recommendations

- Policymakers should treat the history of former homeland areas as central to understanding current municipal underperformance and service delivery gaps. Forced removals, weak local economies, insecure land tenure, infrastructure backlogs and low revenue bases still shape what many municipalities can realistically deliver.
- All levels of government, particularly the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) and the provincial departments of cooperative governance, along with all other relevant stakeholders, should utilise municipal diagnostic tools to focus assistance on historically disadvantaged municipalities. Independent tools like the GPI can help pinpoint areas where municipalities are making progress over time, where gaps persist, where support is most needed, and where intervention is making, or is likely to make, the greatest difference.
- Target capacity-building where the gaps are largest and most persistent. Support should move away from blanket interventions and respond to the specific constraints facing each municipality. In former Homeland/TA municipalities, this means prioritising water, sanitation, and refuse removal, while also strengthening the practical systems behind delivery, including planning, procurement, maintenance, budgeting and project implementation.
- Many challenges in former Homeland/TA municipalities require better coordination across all spheres of government. The District Development Model should therefore be strengthened by better planning and coordination, clearer goals, transparent reporting, and better use of local data to, for example, track whether interventions improve household access to basic services.

Introduction

Why do municipalities in former homeland areas continue to underperform on service delivery, and how can the GPI help identify historically rooted weaknesses and guide targeted support to ensure stronger service delivery scores for these municipalities? These questions are important because municipal weakness in South Africa is partly geographical: many former homeland municipalities govern places shaped by forced removals, overcrowding, weak local economies, poor infrastructure, insecure land tenure and long histories of public underinvestment. These conditions still affect staffing, planning, revenue collection, infrastructure maintenance, and the cost of delivering basic services, resulting in weaker governance performance, poorer service delivery, reduced investment and economic opportunity, with many of these municipalities dependent on government grants.[2]

This policy briefing contextualises the prevalence of municipal performance gaps. It also highlights the importance of a data-driven approach in identifying areas that have been historically and strategically disadvantaged and excluded, and in supporting interventions. The aim is to show where service delivery weaknesses are most concentrated, where progress is visible, and where support needs to be more carefully directed. History does not absolve current leadership of poor governance, but it can explain why similar interventions often produce different results across municipalities. Some municipalities inherit larger backlogs, weaker revenue bases and more difficult spatial conditions than others. The GPI can thus help government, civil society, donors, and development actors make clearer decisions about where capacity-building, infrastructure investment, interventions and oversight are most needed. It can also inform hypotheses about which interventions are likely to yield the greatest return on investment over time, in which contexts.

2 Masenya, L. (2019). Poverty in South Africa: An Analysis of Former Vs Non-Former Homeland Areas (master's research report, University of the Witwatersrand, 2019), 3-5; Nhlapo, M. S., H. Kasumba, and T. M. Ruhiiga. (2011) "Growth challenges of homeland towns in post-apartheid South Africa." Journal of Social Sciences 29, no. 1, 47-56; Harvey, R. (2026). Deals with the devil still dictate outcomes. Africa in Fact https://africainfact.com/deals-with-the-devil-still-dictate-outcomes/

Historical legacies and the roots of municipal underperformance

The roots of municipal underperformance in former homeland areas begin with land. The 1913 Natives Land Act restricted African land ownership to roughly 7% of South Africa's land[3]. The 1936 Native Trust and Land Act expanded the reserve allocation to about 13%, but this still left the Black majority crowded into a small, fragmented and often agriculturally weak land base. These restrictions laid an early spatial foundation for the later homeland system.

Under apartheid, this spatial order was deepened through laws such as the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 and the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970. These laws separated people by race and tried to shift Black South Africans' political claims, citizenship rights and social needs away from "White South Africa" and into ethnically defined territories with weak economies and low institutional capacity.[4]

Ten homelands were created under apartheid: Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Venda, Gazankulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele, KwaZulu, Lebowa and QwaQwa. Figure 1 shows the spatial location of these former homelands across South Africa, while Table 1 provides the dates on which each homeland obtained self-governing status and, where applicable, nominal "independence" under apartheid.

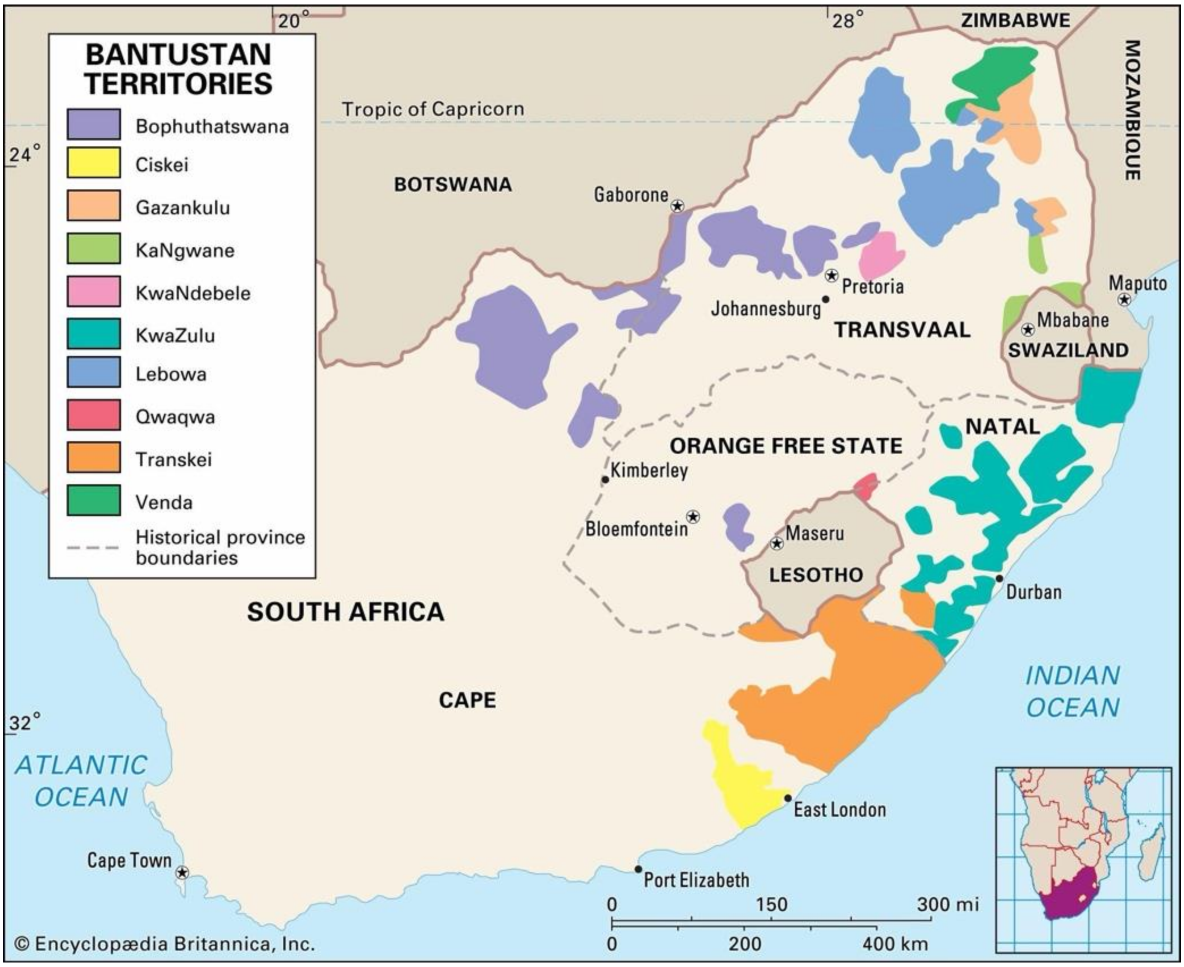


FIGURE 1: Map of former Homeland territories.[5]

3 South African Government. (2025). "1913 Natives Land Act Centenary | South African Government," www.gov.za, 2025, https://www.gov.za/news/events/commemorative-events/1913-natives-land-act-centenary.

4 South African History Online. (2011). The Homelands. South African History Online. https://sahistory.org.za/article/homelands; Pienaar, L., & Von Fintel, D. I. E. T. E. R. (2013). Hunger in the former apartheid homelands: Determinants of converging food security 100 years after the 1913 Land Act. Agrekon, 54(4).; Masenya (2019).

5 Britannica Editors. (2025). "Bantustan | Historical Territory, South Africa." In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bantustan

Homeland	Date of Establishment	Date of Self-Governance	Date of "Nominal Independence"
Transkei	1959	1963	1976
Bophuthatswana	1961	1972	1977
Venda	1962	1973	1979
Ciskei	1961	1972	1981
Lebowa	1962	1972	Territory Never Took Nominal Independence
Gazankulu	1962	1973	Territory Never Took Nominal Independence
QwaQwa	1969	1974	Territory Never Took Nominal Independence
KwaZulu	1970	1977	Territory Never Took Nominal Independence
KwaNdebele	1977	1981	Territory Never Took Nominal Independence
KaNgwane	1976	1984	Territory Never Took Nominal Independence

TABLE 1: Dates of self-government and nominal independence of South Africa's former Homelands.[6]

Between the 1960s and early 1980s, more than two million people were forcibly moved into these areas, which produced severe overcrowding. Black South Africans made up more than 70% of the population, yet the ten homelands occupied only about 13% of the country's land.[7]

This also formed part of a wider strategy to remove Black South Africans from the national political community while keeping their labour available to mines, farms and urban industries.[8] Many residents had to leave daily or seasonally to work in mines, on white-owned farms and in urban industries.[9] The homelands themselves remained poverty-stricken, and their economic base was deliberately weak and underdeveloped, with farming limited by poor land, soil erosion and overgrazing.[10] Many rural chiefs were also instruments of apartheid rule, using traditional authority as part of a wider divide-and-rule strategy in the Bantustans.[11]

This history has consequences for municipalities today. Former homeland municipalities often serve dispersed settlements with large infrastructure backlogs, weak local economies and lower revenue-earning potential. Many inherited places where poverty, unemployment and poor access to amenities had accumulated over decades. Masenya's analysis of 2011 Census data, consistent with the analysis in this brief, found poverty rates of 74.9% in former homeland areas, compared with 48% in non-former homeland areas, and that unemployment was also higher in former homeland areas.[12] The remaining effect of former homeland status, after accounting for observable differences, was small but statistically significant, suggesting that part of the disadvantage is structural and slow to fade.[13]

Former homeland towns also struggled after reincorporation into democratic South Africa in 1994. Several had been created as administrative centres for homeland governments or sustained by industrial "border" incentive schemes (on the borders between 'white' areas and the homelands). When these functions and incentives declined, many experienced factory closures, capital flight, loss of middle-class residents, and rising unemployment. Nhlapo and colleagues show that these towns continued to grow in population even as services, infrastructure, and economic activity declined, resulting in a transfer of rural poverty into towns already marked by distorted land markets, weak planning, and conflicts over land access.[14]

6 South African History Online. (2011). "The Homelands". https://sahistory.org.za/article/homelands.
7 Bastos, P., & Bottan, N. (2014). Overcoming the tyranny of history: Evidence from post-apartheid South Africa. World Bank. http://beta.udep.edu.pe/empresas/files/2014/07/3E_1_BastosBOTTAN_2.pdf; Hopkins, K. (2001). Assessing the world's response to apartheid: A historical account of international law and its part in the South African transformation. Miami International and Comparative Law Review, 10, 241; Leibbrandt, M., Woolard, C., & Woolard, I. (2000). The contribution of income components to income inequality in the rural former homelands of South Africa: A decomposable Gini analysis. Journal of African Economies, 9(1), 79–99; Terreblanche, S. J. (2002). A history of inequality in South Africa, 1652–2002. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
8 South African History Online (2011); Halbach, A. J. (1988). The South African homeland policy and its consequences: An evaluation of separate development. Development Southern Africa, 5(4), 508-526.
9 South African History Online (2011)
10 South African History Online (2011); Halbach (1988)
11 Van Kessel, I., & Oomen, B. (1997). 'One chief, one vote': The revival of traditional authorities in post-apartheid South Africa. African Affairs, 96(385), 561-585.
12 L. Masenya, "Poverty in South Africa."; Good Governance Africa, "Governance Performance Index – South Africa 2024 | Good Governance Africa," 2024, https://gga.org/governance-performance-index-south-africa-2024/.
13 L. Masenya, "Poverty in South Africa."
14 M. S. Nhlapo, H. Kasumba, and T. M. Ruhiiga, "Growth Challenges of Homeland Towns in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Social Sciences* 29, no. 1 (October 2011): 47–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2011.11892954.

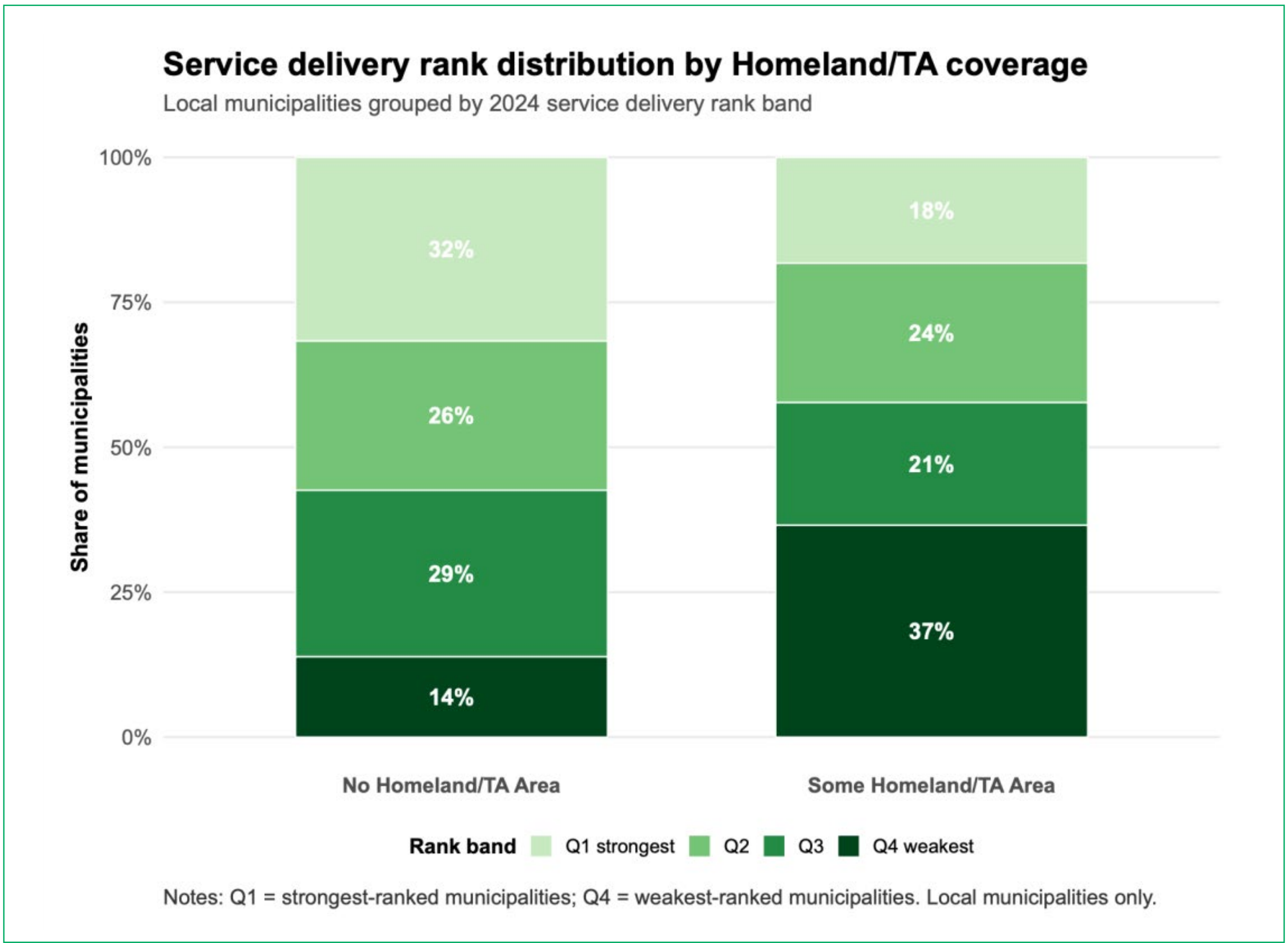


FIGURE 2: Service delivery rank distribution by Homeland/TA coverage, 2024.

Recent estimates suggest that between 18 and 20 million South Africans still live in former homeland areas, roughly a third of the country's total population.[15]

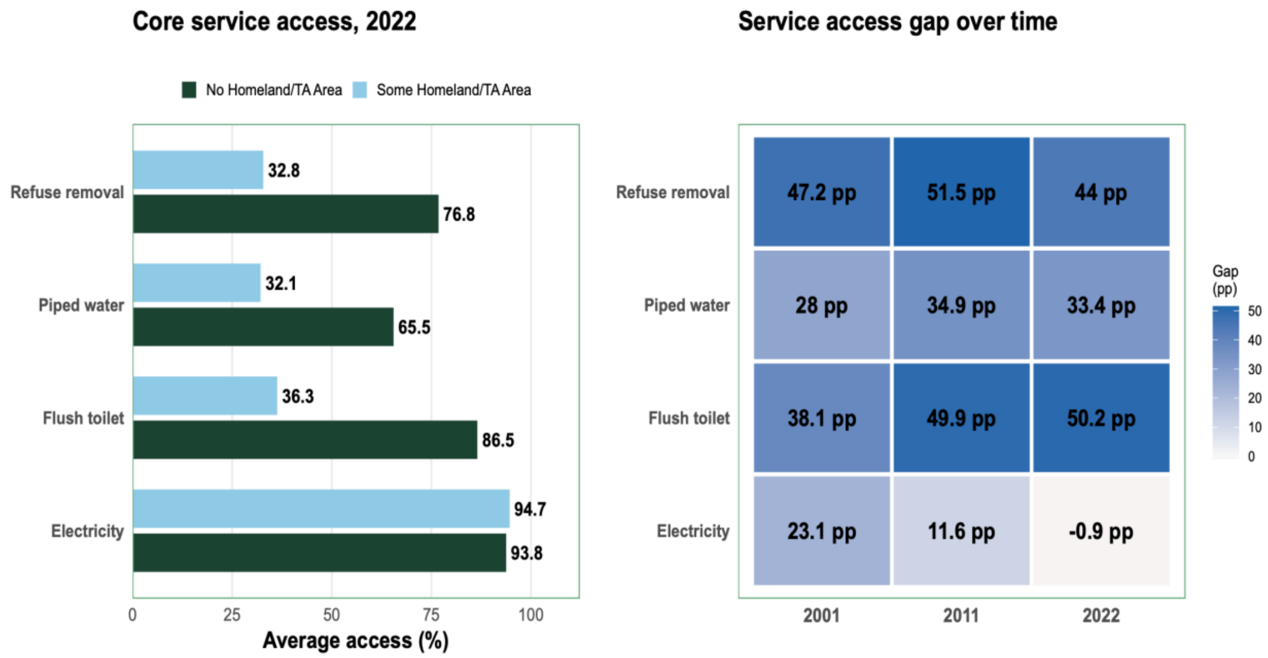
The formal abolition of the homelands in 1994, therefore, did not erase their effects; in many respects, their underlying spatial, social, infrastructural and institutional legacies have generated a path dependence that is challenging to dismantle. Their territories were reincorporated into the new democratic provinces, but the spatial economy remained uneven. Municipalities in these areas inherited communities with high needs and weak fiscal foundations, and their service delivery problems largely reflect present governance failures alongside older patterns of land dispossession, labour extraction, peripheral settlement and institutional neglect.

What the GPI reveals about service delivery gaps

South Africa's constitution and legislative frameworks emphasise the importance of local government for providing essential services to households. GGA's GPI comprises five categories and assigns the highest weight to the service delivery category in municipalities' overall assessment.[16] This score evaluates access to piped water (and the quality thereof), sanitation, electricity, and refuse removal in municipalities. Figure 2 shows the 2024 service delivery rankings based on the GPI. By grouping local municipalities into national service delivery rank bands, the visual shows whether former Homeland/TA are more concentrated among weaker-performing municipalities than non-Homeland/TA municipalities.

15 Harvey, R. (2021). Governance matters more than ever for South Africa. Good Governance Africa. https://gga.org/governance-matters-more-than-ever-for-south-africa/; Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies. (2022). Land Conference 2022. University of the Western Cape. https://plaas.org.za/land-conference-2022/

16 Good Governance Africa, "Governance Performance Index – South Africa 2024 | Good Governance Africa," 2024, https://gga.org/governance-performance-index-south-africa-2024/.



Notes: Metros are included and classified as No Homeland/TA Area. Gap = No Homeland/TA average minus Some Homeland/TA average.

FIGURE 3: Core service access and service access gaps by Homeland/TA status, 2001-2022.

In Figure 2, 37% of the 104 former Homeland/TA municipalities fell into the lowest service-delivery category (ranks 154 to 205), compared with only 14% of the 101 non-Homeland/TA municipalities. They are also under-represented in the highest category (ranks 1–51), at 18% versus 32%. Although not all former Homeland/TA municipalities perform poorly, a greater share is found in the lower ranks. The Auditor General's report on municipal audit outcomes helps explain why some municipalities improve, pointing to factors such as stable management, stronger financial controls, credible reporting, monitoring of audit action plans and leadership oversight[17]. These factors are partly replicable; however, structural advantages such as location, economic base and inherited infrastructure are not[18].

Figure 3 presents a more disaggregated picture of service delivery and compares average access to key services, including the proportion of households with access to piped water, sanitation, and electricity. While access to service delivery has generally improved, former Homeland/TA municipalities still lag in several essential services.

In Figure 3, electricity access has improved substantially, and by 2022, the difference between former Homeland/TA and non-Homeland/TA municipalities had largely disappeared. Former Homeland/TA municipalities recorded an average electricity access rate of about 94.7%, compared with 93.8% in non-Homeland/TA municipalities, suggesting that national electrification initiatives reached many previously underserved communities.

The caveat, however, is that this should not be interpreted as complete energy equality. Census-style access indicators usually show whether a household has an electricity connection or identify the primary energy sources used for cooking and lighting[19]. What they do not account for is the reliability, affordability, capacity, or adequacy of the supply for productive use.

17 Auditor-General of South Africa. 2025. "Consolidated General Report on Local Government Audit Outcomes: MFMA 2023–24" https://www.agsa.co.za/Reporting/MFMAReports/MFMA2023-2024.aspx

18 At a more granular level, the GPI is useful here because it identifies better-performing former Homeland/TA municipalities on a comparable national scale and provides evidence of their performance over time. For example, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipality, formerly Mbizana, moved from being the lowest-ranked municipality in the 2016 GPI to 22nd out of 205 local municipalities in the 2024 GPI.

19 Statistics South Africa. 2022. "Census Dissemination". Statistics South Africa. https://census.statssa.gov.za/#/

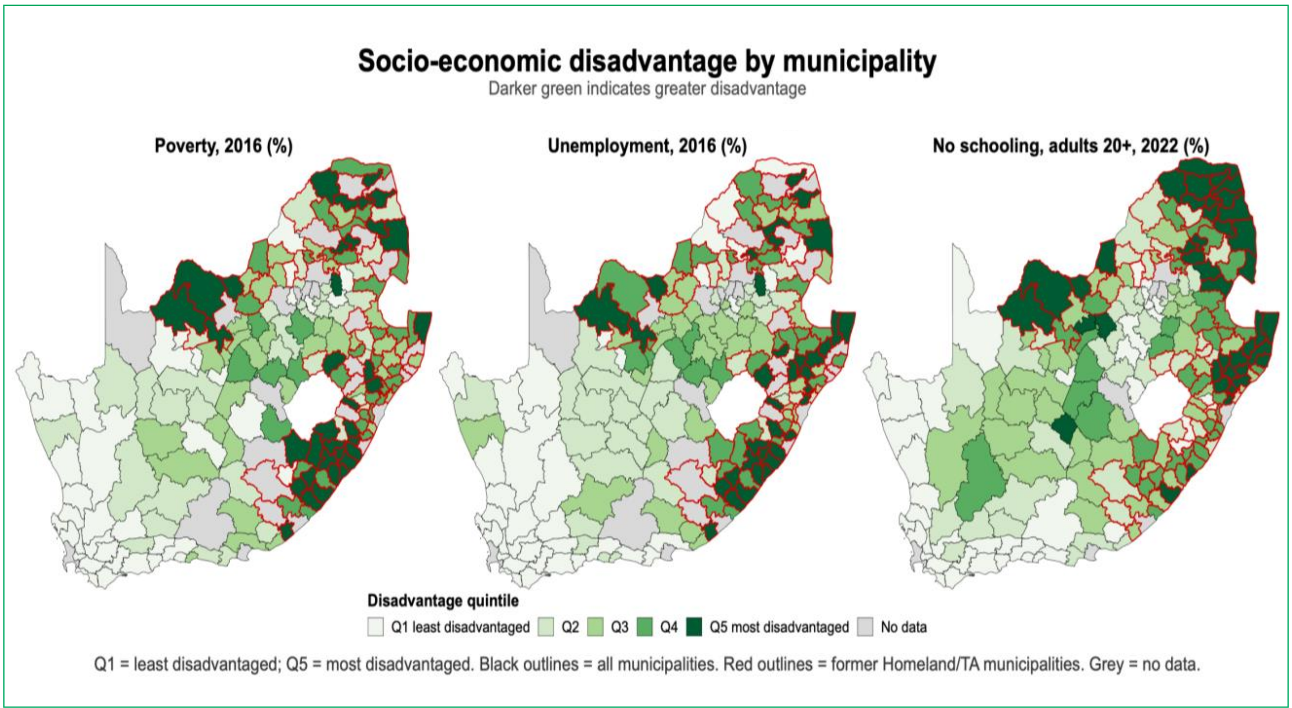


FIGURE 4: Socio-economic disadvantages by Homeland/TA status.

In some rural areas, households may be officially connected yet still experience low-voltage or low-current supply, outages, load shedding, or connection limits that impede the operation of equipment, power tools, irrigation systems, or small businesses[20]. While reducing the access gap represents significant progress in household electrification, it does not necessarily mean equal access to reliable, productive electricity.

By contrast, water, sanitation, and refuse removal remain deeply unequal. In 2022, piped water was available to about 32.1% of residents in former Homeland/TA municipalities, compared with 65.5% elsewhere. Access to flush toilets stood at roughly 36.3% for households in former Homeland municipalities, versus 86.5% in non-Homeland/TA municipalities, and refuse removal services reached around 32.8% of households in former Homeland municipalities, compared with 76.8% elsewhere.

The service access heatmap in Figure 3 shows the percentage-point difference in average service access between former Homeland/TA municipalities and non-former Homeland/TA municipalities from 2001 to 2022. It shows that although access improved over time, the gap has not closed evenly across services. By 2022, former Homeland/TA municipalities still lagged by about 50 percentage points in access to flush toilets, by more than 40 percentage points in refuse removal, and by more than 30 percentage points in access to piped water. These gaps show that the legacy of apartheid spatial planning continues to shackle everyday access to basic services in these municipalities. The socio-economic maps in Figure 4 further illustrate how poverty, unemployment, and educational disadvantage map onto former Homeland/TA geographies. The maps show the share of households living in poverty and experiencing unemployment, and the local municipal-level poverty and unemployment data are taken from the 2016 community census. The data on the percentage of adults aged 20 and older with no schooling are taken from the 2022 National Census.

Each map groups municipalities into quantiles of disadvantage, with darker green indicating higher disadvantage. Red outlines show municipalities with former Homeland/TA coverage, while grey areas indicate missing data. The bar charts in Figure 4 below summarise average values for former Homeland/TA and non-Homeland/TA municipalities on each map.

20 Longe, Omowunmi & Ohonba, Abieyuwa. (2025). "Perceptions of South African Residents on Alternative Energy Sources in Mitigating Load Shedding." https://www.researchgate.net/publication/393904663_Perceptions_of_South_African_Residents_on_Alternative_Energy_Sources_in_Mitigating_Load_Shedding

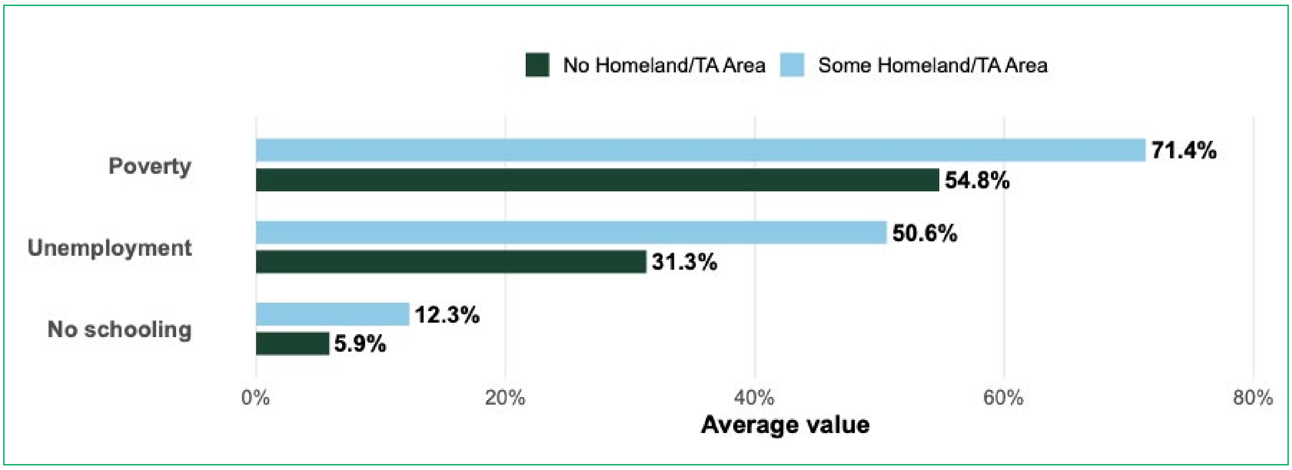


FIGURE 5: Average socio-economic disadvantage by Homeland/TA status.

Figure 4 reveals one of the clearest spatial patterns. The darkest areas are concentrated in the Eastern and Northern parts of the country, particularly in regions historically associated with homeland governance.

In Figure 5, former Homeland/TA municipalities record substantially higher average poverty, 71.4% compared with 54.8% in municipalities without former Homeland/TA coverage. Although the poverty data is from 2016, it remains analytically important as it demonstrates that two decades after the formal end of apartheid, poverty remained heavily concentrated in former homeland spaces. This indicates that the economic effects of the homeland system persisted well beyond the political transition.

The unemployment data (Figure 5) shows that former Homeland/TA municipalities record an average unemployment rate of 50.6%, compared with 31.3% in non-Homeland/TA municipalities. High unemployment weakens household income, reduces residents' ability to pay for services, and erodes municipal revenue, while simultaneously increasing demand for subsidised or indigent support. Furthermore, a 2018 study utilising 2013 SASSA ward-level grant recipient data found that social grant receipt was higher in former homeland areas than in the rest of South Africa[21]. Although the more spatially precise data on grant receipt in former homeland areas used in the study is somewhat outdated, it still demonstrates that even after apartheid, municipalities with the greatest social needs have often struggled with the weakest fiscal bases.

Figure 5 also shows that municipalities in Homeland/TA have an average no-schooling rate of 12.3%, whereas non-Homeland/TA areas have a rate of 5.9%. This indicates that adults in these regions are more likely to lack formal education, affecting their employment opportunities, household incomes, and local skill levels. Poor educational outcomes hinder municipalities' ability to attract and retain skilled professionals, such as engineers, planners, finance officials, and technical experts. This situation worsens household vulnerability and limits institutional capacity.

The three maps in Figure 4 collectively illustrate that former Homeland/TA municipalities experience overlapping disadvantages. The problem extends beyond lower performance on certain service indicators; it also involves inadequate services in areas with higher poverty, unemployment, and poorer educational outcomes. These issues compound each other: low-income households rely more on municipal support, yet these municipalities often have weaker revenue sources, lower service-delivery capacity, and greater infrastructure deficits.

Micro and macro factors simultaneously impede the development of long-term projects and perpetuate cycles of underdevelopment. Consequently, these disadvantages contribute to disparities in socio-economic conditions, as shown in this section. Overall, the data underscores how systemic inequalities continue to shape the socio-economic landscape of these areas, emphasising the urgent need for targeted interventions to bridge these persistent gaps.

21 Herman Geyer, Mawande Ngidi, and Gerbrand Mans. (2018). "Do Social Grants Contribute to the Jobless Population Growth in the Former South African Homelands?" *Town and Regional Planning* 72, no.1, https://doi.org/10.18820/2415-0495/trp72i1.5.

Using data to target long-term support

The evidence above shows that support for former homeland municipalities is urgent and should be context-specific. These municipalities do not all face the same service delivery problems, and their weaknesses do not all stem from one source. In some places, the most urgent gaps are in water and sanitation. In others, the greater constraint may be refuse removal, maintenance, land-use planning, revenue collection, or technical staffing. The GPI helps make these differences visible to policymakers by showing where municipalities are, for example, weakest in service delivery and where progress is occurring (or not) over time.

GGA's proposed institutional capacity-building project provides one way of turning this evidence into practical support. The project was designed on the foundation of the GPI and aims to improve institutional capacity and governance performance in selected local municipalities. We will begin with site selection of pilot candidates, followed by on-the-ground diagnostic research that benchmarks municipal conditions against GPI findings and other relevant data. The pilot sites are selected on the basis of similar population densities but different inherited histories and contemporary political configurations. In each pilot municipality, we will empower the municipal management teams to utilise a governance instrument, developed in partnership with Baobab Corporate Governance, to assess their performance against the local government requirements set out in the latest King Codes and the relevant legal architecture governing local government. The final phase aims to provide training and capacity-building to implement the recommendations, particularly in asset management and governance practices. This iterative learning approach will help us to ascertain what kinds of interventions are likely to be most successful in which context, and provide a foundation for scalable, systemic and sustainable solutions. It also avoids the temptation to believe in one-size-fits-all blueprints that are too often externally imposed and poorly conceived.[22]

The project's potential and value lie in supporting evidence-based targeting and equipping municipal learning and practical problem-solving. It also shows how data can move beyond reports and into real-world implementation, identifying priority municipalities, diagnosing capacity gaps and supporting concrete improvements in service delivery systems through more appropriate resource allocation that yields the highest social returns. The key takeaway is that the best way to address the gaps is to leverage the strengths of all involved stakeholders, and that data should guide diagnosis, prioritisation and sustained intervention rather than decisions being made before the problem is properly understood.

This is especially important for former homeland municipalities. The analysis in this brief shows that former homeland status often coexists with lower service delivery, higher poverty, unemployment, and lower educational levels. These conditions increase demand for municipal support while weakening the local revenue base; however, the nature and extent of these conditions differ across municipalities. One municipality may need engineering support and capital investment for water and sanitation. Another may need stronger revenue management, improved maintenance systems, or closer cooperation between elected councils and traditional authorities around land use.

The District Development Model (DDM) can support this approach because many of these problems exceed the capacity of individual municipalities. The DDM was introduced to improve joint planning, budgeting and implementation.[23] Many municipal challenges require coordination across local, district, provincial and national governments. The policy is a step in the right direction, but implementation often suffers from capacity and coordination issues. The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) has warned

22 Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson, "Economics versus Politics: Pitfalls of Policy Advice," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27, no. 2 (February 2013): 173–92, https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.27.2.173.

23 Department of Cooperative Governance, "The District Development Model," 2023, https://www.cogta.gov.za/cgta_2016/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/District-Development-Model-DDM-Booklet_230524_110720.pdf.

that the DDM must confront deeper planning, systemic and structural problems, while the National Planning Commission has raised concerns about unclear goals, weak coordination and governance, limited data use, poor transparency and gaps in stakeholder participation.[24]

The policy response should therefore be tailored: First, identify the municipality, identify the key service gaps, understand the institutional constraints, match support to that constraint, and track whether conditions improve. Second, allocate resources towards addressing the gaps that will yield the highest possible social returns over time. The GPI, as a data-driven tool, can help government, donors, civil society, and development partners with such identification, show where to start, and be used in practice as a diagnostic tool to identify strengths, areas for improvement, and where support is most urgently needed. If improvements are observed, the data can reveal the factors driving them and provide valuable lessons for other municipalities. Conversely, if regressions occur, the affected areas can be explored, the reasons for the decline identified, and potential strategies to address these issues developed.

GGA's capacity-building work can then help convert that evidence into practical municipal support. In former homeland municipalities, long-term improvement will require sustained support, better coordination, and regular monitoring to ensure households actually gain access to water, sanitation, electricity, refuse removal and other essential services. Data does not solve municipal failure on its own, but it helps make the problem harder to misread and easier to act on.

Conclusion

The gaps in service delivery performance observed in former homelands and traditional authorities are not merely failures of local municipalities but reflect a broader, historical and spatial pattern shaped by land dispossession, apartheid-era planning, underinvestment, and ongoing socio-economic exclusion. This policy briefing shows that these municipalities continue to experience limited access to water, sanitation, and refuse removal, as well as higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and educational disadvantages. These issues matter because municipalities with the greatest service needs often have weaker local revenue bases and face greater pressure to support their communities' basic needs. This creates a cycle in which poor communities require more public assistance, while municipalities struggle to build the capacity and resources needed to meet these demands.

As basic service pressures absorb attention and funding, longer-term priorities such as local economic development, investment attraction and growth can also be neglected. Existing frameworks, such as the DDM model, provide a platform for coordination but can be further strengthened through better planning and coordination, clearer goals, transparent reporting, and better use of local data. Improving service delivery in former homelands and TAs requires long-term targeted interventions that first acknowledge the role of history in explaining contemporary outcomes. Data-driven tools like the GPI[25] should be used for diagnostics and prioritisation, helping governments, donors, civil society, and development actors identify where support is most urgent and what type of intervention is needed.

24 South African Local Government Association, "District Development Model: Lessons from eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, OR Tambo & Waterberg District Municipalities: One District, One Budget and One Plan," 2021, https://salga-content.s3.af-south-1.amazonaws.com/staging/publications/plans_and_strategies/305885e0-f126-4ef9-aae6-3392aeb195d6.pdf; National Planning Commission, "Draft National Planning Commission Advisory Note on District Development Model," 2024. https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/assets/Documents/District%20Development%20Model%20Advisory%20-%20%202024.pdf.

25 The next iteration of the GPI will be released in early 2027 after incorporating the data from the Green, Blue and No Drop Reports, which we expect will all be complete by late 2026.

Photo: Leon Sadiki/Bloomberg via Getty Images

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