

Operational Readiness for e-Governance in Local Government: A Case Study of the City of Mbombela with a Focus on e-Participation

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Abstract: This paper assesses the operational readiness of the City of Mbombela for implementing e-Governance, focusing specifically on e-Participation to improve service delivery. Using a qualitative case study design approach, the research involves document analysis, secondary data, and key informant interviews to evaluate four readiness areas: digital infrastructure, institutional capacity, legal frameworks, and stakeholder engagement. Findings reveal that while Mbombela demonstrates policy alignment and partial ICT adoption, challenges persist in bridging the digital divide, strengthening interdepartmental coordination, and promoting inclusive citizen participation. Comparative insights from global examples like Seoul, Nairobi, Reykjavik, Cape Town, and Estonia suggest adaptable strategies such as mobile-first platforms, community access points, participatory budgeting, and open data dashboards. Building on these lessons, the paper proposes a phased roadmap for Mbombela, including broadband expansion, pilot digital engagement programs, digital literacy initiatives, and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The study contributes to e-Governance scholarship by contextualising operational readiness within the realities of South African municipalities, offering both a conceptual framework and practical strategies for institutionalising inclusive e-Participation. The paper concludes that sustainable e-Governance in Mbombela requires bridging technical, social, and institutional gaps while embedding citizen engagement into governance structures.

Keywords: E-governance, E-participation, Operational readiness, Service delivery

Introduction

The rapid growth of information and communication technologies (ICT) has reshaped how organisations provide services and information, especially in service delivery. The emergence of e-government has enabled governments to distribute services and information more efficiently, simplifying workflows, improving public service delivery, and managing data, information, human resources, and financial resources (Kumar, 2024). Since the 1960s, the South African government has invested in ICT to automate government services and enhance accessibility (Mofokeng et al., 2025). In the evolving landscape of public administration, e-Governance has emerged as a transformative tool for enhancing transparency, accountability, and efficiency in service delivery. In South Africa, municipalities are increasingly adopting digital platforms to streamline operations and improve citizen engagement (Shibambu, 2024). However, the slow adoption of digital transformation, influenced by financial constraints, skills gaps, and political will, has limited the ability of local governments to align with international governance standards (Mofokeng et al., 2025).

The city of Mbombela is a local municipality in South Africa, governed by the Municipal Structures Act and Municipal Systems Act (Thusi et al., 2023). It comprises a Municipal Council, Executive Mayor, Municipal Manager, and various departments that handle service delivery such as water, sanitation, electricity, roads, housing, and community services. The city of Mbombela has established a Public Participation Strategy, which facilitates community involvement through a Ward Committee System. This system is managed by the Public Participation Unit situated in the Office of the Speaker and the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) Representative Forum (The City of Mbombela, 2020). Mbombela local municipality is a key urban center tasked with delivering essential services such as water, sanitation, electricity, and waste management to a diverse population. Despite its strategic importance, Mbombela faces persistent challenges in service delivery, including infrastructure deficits, administrative inefficiencies, and limited responsiveness to citizen grievances (Chakwizira, 2024). There is still heavy reliance on the traditional methods of public participation in policy development and service delivery between the municipality and its citizens. Public participation in the municipality takes place through community meetings, zonal meetings, mayoral Imbizo(s), speaker's outreach programs, business and commercial stakeholders' engagements and traditional leaders' engagements. Pre-and-post-COVID 19 pandemic, the municipality had to introduce other mechanisms of public engagement, such as virtual meetings, drop-in boxes, central email, radio stations and social media platforms (Meta, Instagram, WhatsApp) (The City of Mbombela, 2020).

Integrating e-Governance tools, such as online grievance platforms and monitoring dashboards, could significantly enhance these processes, addressing common issues faced by South African municipalities (Juta & Mello, 2023). e-Participation can empower citizens to engage in policy processes without the constraints of time and location, significantly enhancing governmental transparency. On a national scale, there is a substantial effort from both the public and private sectors to foster the development of a capable developmental state, and eParticipation directly contributes to this goal. Not only will e-Participation assist municipalities in delivering services more effectively, but it also has the potential to promote "enabled digital citizenship." Therefore, the paper aims to investigate the role of operational readiness for e-Governance in the city of Mbombela and explore how e-Participation can enhance service delivery with the focus on digital infrastructure, citizen engagement, institutional capacity, and policy frameworks.

Methodology

A qualitative case study approach is a research method that focuses on a specific case within its real-world context over a sustained period using multiple data sources like interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine the e-Governance structure and service delivery challenges in the city of Mbombela. The methodology integrates document analysis, secondary data review, and, where applicable, key informant interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the municipality's administrative dynamics. Primary sources included the integrated development plans (IDPs), annual performance reports, audit reports from the Auditor-General of South Africa, and legislative frameworks such as the Municipal Structures Act and Municipal Systems Act. These documents provided insight into the formal governance structure, strategic priorities and institutional performance. The secondary data review involved the analysis of reports from Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements, and Traditional Affairs (CoGSTHA), South African Local Government Association (SALGA), Municipal IQ and academic literature on

local governance and service delivery in South Africa. The exercise assisted in contextualising the city of Mbombela's challenges within broader national trends. Furthermore, key informant semi-structured interviews with municipal officials offered lived experiences, perception of governance and service delivery realities. Observations at the ward councillors' meeting provided insights into the challenges faced by ward councillors when engaging with communities, and interaction with community leaders reflected shared experiences and realities of service delivery in engagement with local municipalities. The study used thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and issues in e-Governance and service delivery. A comparative lens was applied to benchmark the city of Mbombela against other municipalities, and triangulation ensured the reliability of findings by cross-verifying data from multiple sources. Ethical considerations were employed. The research got ethical approval from the CSIR ethics committee for the study. Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained at all times, and only publicly available data was used for document analysis. Limitations included limited access to internal municipal data, potential bias in secondary sources and challenges in securing interviews with key stakeholders due to availability or political sensitivity.

Literature Review

This section provides a detailed overview of e-Governance, e-Participation tools of global case studies and operational readiness for e-Governance to enable e-Participation in the city of Mbombela.

e-Governance

e-Governance broadly refers to the strategic use of ICTs, particularly the internet and digital platforms, to enhance government service delivery, strengthen administrative efficiency, promote transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in public affairs (Grigalashvili, 2022). Within the South African context, legislative frameworks such as the Municipal Systems Act (2000) explicitly encourage municipalities to adopt innovative approaches to service delivery, including the deployment of digital platforms that align with principles of accessibility and responsiveness (Thusi et al., 2023). The effectiveness of e-Governance, however, is not determined by technology alone. As Myeong and Bokhari (2023) emphasise, its success depends on institutional readiness, robust technological infrastructure, and meaningful stakeholder engagement. When these elements are in place, e-Governance transforms the interaction between government and society, enabling not only efficient internal processes but also deeper forms of accountability and inclusivity. Crucially, e-Governance extends beyond administrative modernisation. Its true value emerges when digital tools are leveraged to strengthen democratic practices by opening new avenues for citizen involvement in decision-making. This is where e-Participation, a critical dimension of e-Governance, becomes essential. By enabling citizens to engage directly with local government processes, e-Participation bridges the gap between digital service provision and active democratic engagement. The following section, therefore, explores e-Participation in greater depth, examining its role in fostering participatory governance and its specific relevance for the City of Mbombela.

e-Participation: Tools, Benefits, and Challenges.

In South Africa, e-Participation is increasingly recognised as a mechanism to strengthen citizen engagement and improve evidence-based policymaking, both of which are central to responsive and accountable local governance. By creating digital spaces through online surveys, mobile applications, social media platforms, and interactive

portals, municipalities can gather citizen input on policies, service delivery, and development priorities, thereby deepening participatory democracy. The value of e-Participation lies in its ability to enhance transparency, inclusivity, efficiency, accountability, and empowerment. It builds trust by making government processes more visible, ensures marginalised and rural communities have a voice, aligns resource allocation with actual community needs, and empowers residents to actively shape the development of their municipality. Global best practices illustrate how e-Participation can effectively complement e-Governance by addressing challenges of trust, access, and inclusivity. For instance, Seoul's mVoting platform enabled residents to vote on local issues using mobile technology, directly linking citizens to decision-making processes and strengthening transparency. Seoul's mVoting platform has seen significant user engagement, with over 280,000 downloads as of June 2016; Over 1.1 million citizens have participated in votes, with 4,404 proposals submitted and of which 88.3% were from citizens; and 181 proposals have been officially accepted and implemented by the Seoul Metropolitan Government (Holzer & Kang, 2017).

Nairobi's Huduma centers and portal streamlined service delivery and reduced corruption by integrating citizen feedback mechanisms and ensuring accountability through real-time monitoring. Huduma platforms serve over 51 million citizens, with 52 centers operating nationwide, offering 21+ services from 12 ministries and agencies (MyGov, 2023). Huduma has a high level of user awareness and satisfaction, with users using it for passport applications and tax registration (Kemboi & Premanandam, 2025). In their study Kemboi and Premanandam (2025) reveal that 64% of users believe digital platforms have helped reduce corruption, while 69% believe Huduma and e-Gov can support better governance under current reforms. However, digital inclusion, digital literacy, infrastructure gaps, and rural connectivity remain a challenge. 72% of users emphasised the need for more digital literacy programs, while 56% cited poor Internet and rural access as major barriers. Furthermore, only one-third of Kenyans had Internet access, with rural areas significantly underserved (Kemboi & Premanandam, 2025). Despite these challenges, Huduma and e-Gov platforms are seen as valuable tools for improving governance.

Reykjavik's Better Reykjavik platform empowered residents to propose and vote on community projects, demonstrating how citizen input can be systematically integrated into urban governance. Better Reykjavik is an e-Participation platform developed by the Citizens Foundation in collaboration with the City of Reykjavik to crowdsource solutions for urban challenges and improve public service delivery. Launched in May 2010, the platform aims to restore public trust post-2008 financial crisis by enabling citizens to directly influence municipal decision-making (Lackaff, 2015). Its functions include agenda setting, participatory budgeting, policy crowdsourcing, and education policy co-creation. The platform has a user penetration rate of over 58%, with over 70,000 participants out of 120,000 residents (Council of Europe, 2025). Over 10,000 ideas have been submitted, with around 21,000 debate points for and against proposals. The platform has seen significant improvements in all 10 neighbourhoods and improved trust between citizens and the local government (Lackaff, 2015). Innovative features include an open-source platform using "Your Priorities" software, multimedia submissions, an AI-enhanced user experience, a unique debate system for structured dialogue, and a crowd-law model where citizens co-create laws and policies (Council of Europe, 2025).

Cape Town's SmartCape initiative addressed the digital divide by improving access to digital literacy and free internet services, enabling broader participation from marginalised groups. SmartCape is a free public Internet access program offered at 102 public libraries in Cape Town, aiming to bridge the digital divide and enhance e-

participation in public service delivery by providing 500MB of monthly internet access to registered users, enabling them to access government services, educational resources, and job opportunities (City of Cape Town, 2025). Libraries like Harare and Nazeema Isaacs recorded over 1,000 sessions per month, with high usage among ages 11-18 (City of Cape Town, 2025). The most used feature is the Internet, with word processing being used in over 400 sessions at some libraries. The program's impact on service delivery includes access to e-government, education and employment, and community empowerment. The technical and social infrastructure uses open-source software to reduce costs, and each access point includes six Internet-enabled computers. Challenges include digital literacy gaps, gender disparity in usage, and the need for targeted outreach (Zondi & Ndebele, 2024).

Estonia's nationwide digital governance system, which includes e-Residency and e-Voting, institutionalised e-Participation by embedding citizen engagement directly into state functions, overcoming barriers of distance and efficiency. The core infrastructure includes mandatory digital ID cards, a secure data exchange system, and strong data protection laws (Vassil, 2015). The system has a once-only principle, preventing citizens from resubmitting data already held by the government. Key statistics show that 100% of public services are available online and paperless, with over 80 million authentications and 35 million digital transactions in 2014 (Vassil, 2015). Tax filing is done online in 3-5 minutes, and one-third of citizens voted online in recent elections. The system has a high user satisfaction rate, with a satisfaction rate of 83%. Digital signatures save approximately 2% of the gross domestic product (GDP) on staff time annually. Digital cabinet meetings and citizen participation platforms further enhance transparency, accountability, and community participation (Souigat, 2025).

These examples show that when e-Participation is designed inclusively and backed by strong institutional commitment, it not only enhances citizen-government interaction but also addresses common challenges such as limited access, corruption, inefficiency, and low trust. At the same time, challenges such as the digital divide, low Internet penetration in certain areas, limited digital literacy, and concerns around data security and institutional readiness must still be addressed for e-Participation to succeed in South Africa. These barriers are particularly relevant in local government contexts like the city of Mbombela, where diverse socio-economic conditions shape access to and use of digital platforms. Positioning e-Participation as more than a technical exercise, but rather as a democratic practice, is critical for the city of Mbombela. Its adoption has the potential not only to improve service delivery but also to foster stronger, more inclusive citizen government relations, which is an essential step toward achieving sustainable e-Governance at the local level. However, the successful implementation of e-Participation depends on operational readiness, the extent to which municipalities are institutionally, technologically, and socially prepared to adopt and sustain such systems. This includes the availability of reliable ICT infrastructure, adequate funding, skilled personnel, supportive policies, and citizen digital literacy. Without these conditions, e-Participation risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative. For the city of Mbombela, assessing operational readiness is therefore critical. It provides the foundation for understanding whether e-Participation can be effectively integrated into local governance processes in a way that not only improves service delivery but also fosters stronger, more inclusive democratic engagement.

Operational Readiness: Key Dimensions—Technical Infrastructure, Human Resources, Legal Frameworks, and Stakeholder Engagement.

Operational readiness for e-Governance is a crucial concept that outlines a municipality or government's readiness to implement and sustain digital governance initiatives. This is especially important for projects involving citizen

participation, service delivery, and administrative efficiency enhancement. Key dimensions of operational readiness include reliable connectivity, government ICT resources, security measures, system integration, skilled personnel, dedicated roles, change management strategies, legal and policy frameworks, stakeholder engagement, collaboration with civil society, private sector partnerships, and internal coordination. Technical infrastructure is essential for ensuring citizens can access digital services without interruptions. Government offices should be equipped with the necessary hardware and software to support various digital tasks and services. Security measures should be implemented to safeguard citizen information and build trust in digital services. System integration with existing systems can create streamlined operations and enhance service delivery. Human resources are also crucial for e-Governance initiatives. Staff training in digital tools, data management practices, and citizen engagement is essential. Dedicated roles and change management strategies can help manage citizen engagement in the digital realm. Legal and policy frameworks should ensure adherence to data protection laws, develop supportive policies, and incorporate technology into service delivery through technology-driven procurement. Stakeholder engagement is vital for citizen participation and ensuring diverse voices are heard in the digital space. Collaboration with civil society, private sector partnerships, and internal coordination can leverage expertise and resources to enhance e-Governance initiatives. Without proper operational readiness, e-Governance initiatives may struggle to be sustainable and scalable, undermining the potential benefits of digital transformation for public administration. Operational readiness is paramount; without it, initiatives aimed at improving digital governance may face significant challenges. Ineffective adoption of digital tools could lead to service failures due to technical issues, while a lack of citizen trust may result in low engagement with available platforms. Furthermore, inadequate data management practices can expose sensitive information to security risks. Ultimately, without proper operational readiness, e-Governance initiatives struggle to be sustainable and scalable, undermining the potential benefits of digital transformation for public administration.

Contextualising the City of Mbombela

This section provides insights into the current state of e-Governance in the city of Mbombela to gain a deeper understanding of the progress of e-Governance and challenges encountered when implementing e-Participation.

Current State of e-Governance in Mbombela

The city of Mbombela is making notable strides toward e-Governance, yet it is still grappling with several structural and socio-economic challenges that hinder its operational effectiveness. Improvements in digital infrastructure are evident, particularly with enhanced broadband connectivity in urban areas and the implementation of modern ICT tools such as Microsoft Office 365, aimed at optimising internal operations. Nevertheless, rural regions continue to experience inadequate connectivity and significant disparities in access to smartphones and data among low-income residents, which pose barriers to equitable participation in digital initiatives. The policy landscape also supports these efforts, with frameworks like the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) in alignment with national digital transformation goals. These frameworks focus on promoting transparency, innovation, and active citizen participation. Compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) offers a foundation for data protection; however, challenges persist in terms of enforcement and public awareness. While there is an acknowledgement of the need for digital inclusion strategies, initiatives intended to expand public Wi-Fi access and enhance digital literacy are still in the early stages of development.

There is an institutional capacity that benefits from ongoing training programs and substantial budget allocations directed towards ICT upgrades. However, deficiencies in advanced ICT skills, ineffective interdepartmental collaboration, and a sluggish response to issues continue to hinder operational efficiency and implementation efforts. Citizen engagement primarily relies on traditional community structures such as ward committees and IDP forums, while the use of digital platforms remains limited. Public trust in government fluctuates, marked by dissatisfaction surrounding slow service delivery and the circulation of outdated information. Additionally, low levels of digital literacy, particularly in rural and low-income areas, restrict meaningful engagement and participation. In summary, while the city of Mbombela shows a strong commitment to digital transformation through various investments and policy alignment, it is not yet fully operationally ready. To build a more inclusive and responsive e-Governance framework, it is crucial to address existing infrastructure gaps, improve institutional coordination, foster citizen trust, and prioritise digital inclusion initiatives.

Results

The results sections draw on lessons learnt from global best practices. The city of Mbombela has a unique opportunity to strengthen e-Participation by adapting proven models to its local context. The table below outlines practical strategies and detailed adaptation approaches from real-world examples.

Table 1: Challenges of digital health literacy and the recommended solutions

Case Study	Key Feature	Benefit/ Outcome	Challenges/ Limitations	Relevance for Mbombela	Author
Seoul (mVoting)	Mobile voting & decision-making app	1.1M+ citizens engaged; proposals implemented; strengthened transparency	Ensuring sustained citizen engagement	High mobile penetration in Mbombela makes mobile-first feasible	(Holzer & Kang, 2017)
Nairobi (Huduma Centers)	One-stop service centers + portal	Reduced corruption, 51M citizens served; improved service delivery	Limited Internet access; rural inclusion gaps	Streamlined service delivery and feedback models can be adapted	(MyGov, 2023); (Kemboi & Premanandam, 2025).
Reykjavik (Better Reykjavik)	Online participatory budgeting & policy crowdsourcing	70,000 users (58% penetration); 10k+ ideas submitted; improved trust	Risk of elite capture; requires political will	Can empower Mbombela residents to co-decide on budgets	(Lackaff, 2015); (Council of Europe, 2025)
Cape Town (SmartCape)	Free Internet access in libraries; digital literacy support	Improved access for marginalised groups; youth engagement	Digital literacy gaps; uneven uptake	Addresses Mbombela's digital divide in rural/low-income areas	(City of Cape Town, 2025); (Zondi & Ndebele, 2024)
Estonia (e-)	Digital ID, e-	100% services	Requires strong	Long-term vision:	(Vassil, 2015);

Case Study	Key Feature	Benefit/ Outcome	Challenges/ Limitations	Relevance for Mbombela	Author
Governance system)	Residency, e-Voting, once-only principle	online; 2% GDP savings; high satisfaction	infrastructure & laws	institutionalise e-Participation into governance	(Souigat, 2025)

The comparative review highlights that successful e-Participation initiatives share three common features: **inclusivity, institutional commitment, and integration with existing governance processes**. While the tools vary from mobile voting in Seoul to digital literacy initiatives in Cape Town, the underlying principle is that technology must be embedded within supportive institutional and social environments. For the **city of Mbombela**, four key lessons emerge:

Mobile-First Engagement (Seoul, Nairobi)

- a. Mobile platforms are effective where mobile phone penetration is high, even in low-income settings.
- b. The city of Mbombela can adopt lightweight mobile and USSD/SMS systems to enable real-time reporting of service issues (e.g., potholes, electricity outages) and citizen feedback.

Bridging the Digital Divide (Cape Town)

- c. Free access points and digital literacy training are crucial for ensuring equity in participation.
- d. Community libraries, schools, and municipal offices can be leveraged as digital hubs to expand inclusion in the city of Mbombela’s rural and underserved communities.

Institutionalising Participation (Reykjavik)

- e. Participatory budgeting and structured feedback platforms strengthen transparency and trust.
- f. For the city of Mbombela, piloting a participatory budgeting portal within the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process would legitimise citizen input in resource allocation.

Embedding Participation in Governance Structures (Estonia)

- g. Sustainable e-Participation requires strong legal, policy, and institutional frameworks.
- h. The city of Mbombela must develop a dedicated e-Participation policy, strengthen POPIA compliance, and establish a Digital Governance Unit to institutionalise citizen engagement.

To implement e-Participation initiatives, the city of Mbombela could start small by piloting them in a single ward or specific service area. Collaborate with community leaders, youth organisations, and NGOs to foster grassroots involvement. Monitor and iterate by collecting user feedback for continuous improvements. Ensure inclusivity by translating content into local languages and adapting resources for low-literacy users, making e-Participation efforts accessible to all community members. By embracing these detailed strategies and focusing on local adaptation, the city of Mbombela can effectively increase citizen engagement and foster a more participatory governance model that reflects the values and needs of its residents.

Recommendations for Mbombela’s e-Participation

To establish a sustainable and effective e-Participation framework, the city of Mbombela should embed digital citizen engagement within its Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and create dedicated structures, including a Digital Governance Unit and a Citizen Innovation Lab.

Digital Infrastructure

To strengthen digital participation, the municipality should enhance connectivity by expanding broadband access in underserved rural areas and establishing public Wi-Fi zones in municipal offices, libraries, and schools. Developing mobile-first tools, including lightweight mobile apps and USSD/SMS systems, will enable citizens to report issues, track service delivery, and provide feedback conveniently. Additionally, it is essential to strengthen ICT systems and security, ensuring robust data protection, seamless system integration, and secure digital platforms to maintain citizen trust. Establishing community access points, such as digital kiosks in strategic locations, can further bridge the digital divide and make digital services more accessible to all residents.

Institutional Capacity

Building institutional capacity is critical for effective digital governance. Establishing a dedicated Digital Governance Unit will provide focused staff responsible for managing digital participation initiatives. Municipal officials should undergo regular training programs on digital tools, data management, and participatory engagement to enhance their competence. The municipality should also cultivate a capacity for innovation by piloting e-Participation initiatives in selected wards to test their effectiveness before scaling them across the municipality. Finally, ensuring adequate budget allocation for ICT infrastructure, training, and the maintenance of digital services will provide the necessary resources to sustain these initiatives.

Legal & Policy Frameworks

Updating policies and bylaws to clearly define citizen rights, roles, and responsibilities in digital participation is essential for transparency and clarity. Municipal digital initiatives should align with national strategies, including compliance with POPIA and other national digital governance frameworks. Embedding transparency and accountability in municipal planning, budgeting, and reporting processes will reinforce public trust, while open-data initiatives such as publicly accessible dashboards displaying service performance and citizen feedback can further enhance engagement and oversight.

Stakeholder Engagement

Effective digital participation requires inclusive and multi-channel engagement. Combining traditional methods, such as ward meetings, with digital channels like mobile apps, social media, and online portals ensures broader citizen reach. Establishing citizen feedback loops, where residents are informed of how their input influences decisions, strengthens trust and responsiveness. Collaboration with civil society organisations, universities, technology firms, and NGOs can support innovation, training, and outreach. Finally, implementing digital literacy programs will empower communities with the skills needed to engage effectively in digital governance initiatives.

By adopting these strategies, the city of Mbombela can ensure that e-Participation is institutionalised, inclusive, and sustainable, fostering stronger citizen engagement, improving service delivery, and supporting long-term participatory governance.

Conclusion

This study assessed the operational readiness of the city of Mbombela for e-Governance, with a particular emphasis on e-Participation as a tool for strengthening service delivery. The findings indicate that while the city of Mbombela has begun aligning with national digital policies and has partially adopted ICT systems, significant gaps remain in digital infrastructure, institutional capacity, legal clarity, and citizen inclusivity. Without

addressing these gaps, e-Participation risks being fragmented, elitist, or unsustainable. The paper contributes to e-Governance scholarship in two key ways. First, it develops a four-dimensional operational readiness framework covering infrastructure, capacity, policy, and stakeholder engagement that provides a practical tool for assessing e-Participation readiness in local governments across the Global South. Second, by synthesising lessons from global case studies, it demonstrates how municipalities can adapt proven practices such as mobile-first platforms, participatory budgeting, and digital literacy initiatives to their own socio-political contexts. For the city of Mbombela, the path forward lies in adopting a phased approach: expanding broadband and access points, piloting mobile-based engagement tools, embedding participation within the Integrated Development Plan, and institutionalising a dedicated Digital Governance Unit. More broadly, the South African local government sector can leverage this framework to guide digital transformation in ways that prioritise inclusivity, accountability, and citizen trust. Future research should explore longitudinal studies of pilot initiatives in the city of Mbombela, comparative analysis across municipalities, and the role of emerging technologies (such as AI and blockchain) in expanding e-Participation. Such work would enrich the understanding of how digital governance can be localised to achieve both democratic deepening and improved service delivery

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