

**A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE RELEVANCE AND POTENTIAL OF IDPs
AS A LOCAL GOVERNANCE INSTRUMENT FOR PURSUING SOCIAL JUSTICE
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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SUMMARY

Unlike the situation in the past, when local government's role was limited to service delivery, local government is now constitutionally mandated to play an expanded developmental role. As a "co-responsible" sphere of government, local government is obliged to contribute towards realising the transformative constitutional mandate aimed at social justice. South African scholars and jurists share the view that social justice is primarily concerned with the eradication of poverty and extreme inequalities in access to basic services, and aims to ensure that poor people command sufficient material resources to facilitate their equal participation in socio-political life. In order to enable municipalities to fulfil their broad constitutional mandate, the system of integrated development planning (IDPs) came into effect in South Africa in 2000. Each municipality is obliged to design, adopt and implement an integrated development plan in order to achieve its expanded constitutional mandate. The IDP is considered to be the chief legally prescribed governance instrument for South African municipalities.

The purpose of this article is to explore and critically investigate the relevance and potential of IDPs in contributing towards the achievement of social justice in South Africa. This article argues *inter alia* that the multitude of sectors that converge in an IDP makes it directly relevant and gives it enormous potential to contribute towards

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social justice because, depending on the context, municipalities could include and implement strategies that specifically respond to diverse areas of human need. In this regard, the legal and policy frameworks for IDPs provide a structured scheme that could be used by municipalities to prioritise and meet the basic needs of especially the poor. Despite its potential, it is argued that the ability of IDPs to respond to the basic needs of the poor is largely constrained by a series of implementation challenges partly attributed to the underlying legal and policy framework.

KEYWORDS: Transformative constitutionalism; Social justice; Local government, IDPs.