

“The Smoke That Calls”: A Review of Service Delivery Protests in South Africa 2005 - 2014

B.C. Chikulo

*Department of Development Studies, North - West University, Mafikeng Campus, Mmabatho,
PB X2046, Mmabatho 2735 South Africa
Telephone: + 27 18 389 2249, Fax: + 27 18 392, E-mail: Bornwell.Chikulo@nwu.ac.za*

KEYWORDS Developmental Local Government. Service Delivery. Protests. Poverty. Inequality and Unemployment

ABSTRACT With the advent of the new democratic dispensation in 1994, the South African government committed itself to delivering free basic social services to the black population who were previously excluded through apartheid policies. Local government which is constitutionally mandated to deliver basic services, has made substantial in-roads in the delivery of basic services, particularly in the previously disadvantaged black communities. However, despite significant achievements in the delivery of service to these communities, backlogs still remain. As a result, there has been an explosion of protests against poor service delivery around the country. These protests often turn violent and increasingly result in xenophobic attacks on foreign African nationals and foreign – owned small businesses in the townships and informal settlements. The paper reviews the nature and causes of the protests and concludes that the violent protests are emblematic of a crisis of representation at the local government level. The study recommends that in order to overcome the crisis in local government and stem the violent protests against poor service delivery, the government will need to improve the capacity of local authorities to effectively deliver basic services and improve the citizen’s participation in the planning and delivery of basic services.