The Effect of Sustainable Service Delivery and the Resilience of Collaborative Public Service Sector in South Africa

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Abstract

The paper investigates the effect of sustainable service delivery and the resilience of collaborative public service in South Africa. The study noted that by taking into consideration community goals and the trade-offs between the services that are desired and the available resources, effective resource management techniques enable sustainable service delivery. Adopting management modalities to deliver sustainable services has, however, frequently proven challenging due to a variety of reasons, including policy, financing, legislation, accountability systems, and monitoring. Sustainable service delivery ensures that the requirements of the community today are not compromised by how those services are given by doing so in a way that is socially, economically, and environmentally responsible. The qualitative study primarily employed a conceptual approach and used secondary data that was available in various databases for data collection as research techniques. The study concluded that sustainable service delivery is a critical aspect of development in any developing nation. This is because it involves providing essential services to the population in a manner that is socially inclusive, environmentally responsible, and economically viable.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Service Delivery, Public service, Accountability

Introduction

Local service delivery is a unique area of public policy that involves the provision of public services. Local service delivery faces various difficulties, such as expertise issues, steering issues, and the presence of economies of scale (Lamothe, Meeyoung & Richard, 2008). Local governments can be more representative of local needs and interests and a major source of innovation in government processes, but at the same time, they must cope with these issues (Voorn, Van Genugten & Van Thiel, 2017; Tavares & Pedro, 2007). After the decentralization and corporatization that took place under New Public Management and after local austerity measures taken in the wake of the 2008 Financial crisis, local service delivery has been a hot issue of debate for academics and practitioners (Pérez-López, Diego & Zafra-Gómez, 2015).

Effective resource management procedures enable sustainable service delivery by considering community goals and considering the trade-offs between the services that are wanted and the resources that are available. However, many different factors, including policy, financing, legislation, accountability procedures, and monitoring, have frequently made it difficult to adopt management modalities to provide sustainable services. By providing services in a way

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that is socially, economically, and environmentally responsible, sustainable service delivery makes sure that the needs of the community today are not jeopardized by how those services are provided (Enaifoghe, 2022). To deliver services, communities construct and maintain infrastructure, with the help of these services, we may improve our quality of life, safeguard our health and safety, and advance our social, economic, and environmental well-being (Durokifa & Enaifoghe, 2022).

The failure to maintain the infrastructure, manage the natural resources and safeguard the advantages nature offers runs the risk of deteriorating or possibly losing the services that communities rely on and that future generations may be able to rely on (Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2022). Although there has been noticeable progress in some areas, the problem of corruption continues to be at the forefront of development and calls for greater effort to eradicate it to raise the standard of living. The issues of workload with democratic accountability as well as the delivery of essential services include issues with housing, water, and sanitation; relationships with communities damaged by poor communication and transparency; issues with the democratic interface; and challenges of intra- and inter-party politics.

The Objective of the Study

The objective of the study explored the effect of sustainable service delivery and the flexibility of the public service sector in South Africa. The study considered community goals and the trade-offs between the services that are desired and the available resources, while adopting effective resource management techniques enable sustainable service delivery.

Research Methodology

This conceptual study is desktop research with original contributions to the existing body of knowledge to ascertain the connection involving management, good governance, and sustainable service delivery. A descriptive case study was performed (Babbie 2002), due to the complexity of the questions and concerns under examination. An extensive literature review was conducted by the authors while investigating the factors affecting sustainable service delivery in the South African public service sectors, the study primarily used secondary sources through qualitative research techniques. An advanced search of baseline literature was employed to gather qualitative data since it gave the researcher a great opportunity to connect with the existing knowledge and allowed them to gain insight into the thoughts and experiences of other scholars regarding the problems influencing service delivery in the public sector. The qualitative research gave the researcher a thorough insight into the function of governance and leadership in service delivery.

Literature Consideration on Public Service Delivery in Developing Countries

Given that the local government is a level of government that is closer to the community, the public sector is viewed as the one that should make the immediate necessary engagement in terms of service provision at the municipal level (Enaifoghe, 2022). This study argued that weak local governance, which leads to the politicization of administrative elements in municipalities, is to blame for poor service delivery at the local government level. Government issues and backlogs are among the persistent service delivery issues that have been noted in South African municipalities over time (Department of Cooperative Governance and

Traditional Affairs, 2009; Koma, 2010; Chitiga-Mabugu & Monkam, 2013). This study confirms that the idea of service delivery is more widely accepted at a fundamental level when local government is required to provide essential public or community services that will boost citizens' quality of life and means of subsistence.

Financial irregularities, corruption, and poor administration are frequent problems in South African service delivery. High levels of local government incompetence and inefficiency lead to violent service delivery demonstrations (Kroukamp & Cloete, 2018). In all three domains of government, corruption has reportedly been alleged to occur often in South Africa. Tools for detecting misconduct, misuse of power, and enforcing responsibility are available, but they are not effectively used (Napier, 2018). To provide citizens with the necessary goods and services in a way that complies with standards, service delivery, according to Kim (2012), entails a series of highly localized actions performed by representatives of governmental agencies or private businesses. To provide fundamental services to communities, including water reticulation, town roads, housing, solid waste disposal, power, and environmental legislation to the citizens within their authority areas, local authorities must undertake mandatory tasks and functions.

According to Murimoga and Musingafi (2014), high public service standards promote local economies, while subpar service delivery degrades the area's quality of life, slows economic expansion, and erodes public confidence in local authorities. Hernandez (2006) emphasizes the importance of effective service delivery in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have taken the place of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the fight against poverty (United Nations Summit 2015). The research shows that in most developing countries public service delivery is inefficient, expensive, red-taped, burdensome, overly procedural, and opaque (Tamrakar 2010). In most local governments, governance and poor service delivery continue to be major problems. According to Majekodunmi (2012), poor service delivery in Nigeria is a result of institutional capacity restrictions due to a shortage of essential employees and skills, as well as official corruption inclinations.

There is an absence of transparency, poorly functioning ward committees, a lack of council officials' oversight, a lack of public input on governance issues, a failure to follow local and other laws, a failure to give community needs a priority, a lack of alignment in budgeting practices, and conflicts between the political and administrative spheres of the municipalities. Maropo (2018) identified national guidelines that have an impact on local authorities as external factors. These guidelines include laws, governance structures, and capacity-building strategies. According to Tamrakar (2010), rather than acting as servants to the populace, governmental employees have historically acted more like masters, lacking any sense of transparency or accountability. Most of the time, the local authority staff is uninformed about local governance and unable to provide service to the public.

On the other hand, residents are now aware of their fundamental rights to participate in the local government's provision of services; as a result, communities will express their unhappiness through open protests. According to Barasa (2010), local authorities in Kenya have been unable to provide even the most basic services due to a long-term erosion in their capability. As a result, the local authorities' incapacity to plan for an increase in the number of people living in cities and their existing weak infrastructure were to blame for the poor level of service delivery. Insufficient resource bases, poor management, the limited organizational and technological capacity to expand service coverage, and a lack of planning are some of the internal issues and challenges Barasa (2010) found in Kenya's service delivery. These issues can all lead to subpar service delivery.

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Decentralisation of Public Service Delivery

The decentralization of service delivery functions, which many developing nations have implemented based on good governance principles, is the most popular service delivery model of local governance in the world. The approach is crucial for local leadership and the community because it gives locals the authority to pick their leaders and gives them a voice in decisions that have an impact on their lives. According to Ahmad and Koech (2019), local institutions are best

positioned to adapt the supply of a service to the needs of the public because they are close to the public, convert citizens into service recipient consumers, and provide greater transparency for citizens regarding the quality of the services they receive. Scholars like Enaifoghe and Adetiba (2018); Muriisa (2008), noted that the issues of decentralization in Africa is the origin of the World Bank's proposals to decentralize political and administrative decision-making authority and sub-national roles to facilitate the delivery of services.

Decentralization within the state is described by Enaifoghe and Adetiba (2019); Sikander (2015) as the transfer of authority to provide a service to the public from an entity or central government agency to another person or agency that is more conveniently located to provide the service. According to to Enaifoghe and Adetiba (2019a); Steiner, Kaiser, Tapscott, and Navarro (2018), decentralization results in improved productivity and quality in the delivery of public services, as well as greater standards of transparency and responsiveness, which is consistent with conventional arguments in favour of such changes. Nzimakwe and Pillay (2014) concluded that there is a claim that decentralization will increase the accountability and transparency of public bodies in policymaking by moving expenditure assignments closer to revenue sources and hence to people.

The scholars add that as subnational governments become more responsive to input from service users and open to changes in local demands, decentralization will likewise raise the quality-of-service delivery. There is a sizable and probable risk in decentralization notwithstanding the benefits of a decentralized strategy for providing services (Enaifoghe & Adetiba, 2019b; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). For instance, the framework may fail due to weaknesses in personnel management and administration as well as insufficient budget, which can lead to subpar service delivery and social unrest (Bouckaert & Kuhlmann 2016). Although decentralization has been embraced in many developing nations to improve service delivery to communities, speed up administrative procedures, avoid unnecessary bureaucratic red tape, and bring services to the grassroots level.

Some scholars have noted that there can be several serious obstacles to service delivery by local authorities if they are not carefully planned and implemented (Abegunde, 2019; Enaifoghe, 2019; Bouckaert & Kuhlmann 2016; Zarenda, 2013;). Without significant community engagement in the decision-making process regarding quantity, quality, and dependence on user fees and local taxes, which can lead to an increase in overall productivity and effectiveness, Brinkerhoff, and Johnson (2009: 45) argue that it is "difficult to achieve one of the key advantages of decentralization programs more oriented to the needs and willingness to pay of residents".

Decentralization moves spending and revenue-raising to local government, but this could make things worse because local administration lacks the administrative skills to prevent corruption, financial mismanagement, and resource waste. Poor service delivery by the Councils is also attributed to a shortage of trained and qualified people (Tshukudu 2014). According to Abegunde (2019), the selection process for local government jobs in Nigeria is based on political favouritism and political pay results in the sacrifice of merit on the altar of politics. According to Enaifoghe and Adetiba (2019c); Ssonko (2013), it is regrettable that the adoption of decentralization in Uganda appears to have focused more on administrative goals to promote popular democracy and less on the delivery of services.

There have been no matching enhancements to the services that would have improved lives and contributed to economic progress. Maduku and Enaifoghe (2018); Pablo (2010) conducted a decentralization analysis and discovered that the volume and effectiveness of service delivery

in the major sectors can be seriously harmed by administrative corruption. Because corruption is ingrained in public administration as well, it encourages service providers to act illegally. There is little evidence that decentralization will lead to better services for the vulnerable, at least in the African setting, despite the claims made by Cabral (2011), that it will increase participation and transparency. For instance, the concept of decentralizing the delivery of public services is broadly accepted by key stakeholders," but little has been done to enforce and implement the policy in many governments in Namibia" (Kalonda & Govender, 2021: 5).

Although in- line with Ministries and other regulatory structures in Namibia do not oversee and evaluate the system, the notion is more frequently misinterpreted and the privileged take advantage of corrupting the system. Insufficient municipal capacity caused by a lack of necessary skills and the absence of basic services like housing, water, and sanitation has also been identified by many academics as ongoing problems (Koma, 2010; Maserumule, 2008; Olum, 2011; Thornhill, 2008). The South African Local Government Association produced a report in 2007 that revealed significant problems with council capability, including the lack of proper legal support and counsel for its decision-making. According to Kanyane and Koma (2014), the effectiveness of local municipalities had been significantly impacted by political considerations in the appointment of senior managers without the necessary qualifications.

Besides, weak leadership in strategic management, including corporate governance, a lack of skills to incorporate and integrate financial management legislative action, a misallocation of skills within the municipalities, and a shortage of skills to implement financial planning legislation has also been significantly impacted. Therefore, it is essential to consider how political favors affect the delivery of services in South African public service sector. Enaifoghe et al. (2019); Maserumule (2007), indicated that the lack of a connection between elected and appointed officials' efforts to give services to the public is what is to blame for the involvement between administration and politics. To administer and manage municipal affairs and ensure that services are provided to all inhabitants, he emphasized that those authorities must establish a point of convergence.

Enaifoghe et al. (2020); Enaifoghe A.O (2019); Mafunisa (2003), mentioned that political influence in the administration would undermine opportunities for efficient administration; as a result, policymaking activities and administrative tasks should be kept entirely distinct. In addition, administrators needed clear objectives before they could start to build an effective administrative function. The lack of sustainability of service delivery and the demonstrations of citizens with their grievances have been brought on by the South African government's failure to provide essential services on time and its broken promises in several communities (Enaifoghe, 2023). Furthermore, the meddling of politicians in the work of public administrators is typically what slows down the process of providing services to the public. Political meddling in municipal affairs is found to be a problem that impedes the efficacy and efficiency of service delivery (Enaifoghe, 2022; Zarenda, 2013). This contains occasions where local government representatives have obstructed council operations by using political processes. Political factionalism influences local government's stability and efficiency to some extent.

Sustainable Service Delivery

Sustainable service delivery refers to the provision of essential services to citizens in a consistent, equitable, and environmentally responsible manner (Abegunde, 2019). It also encompasses ensuring the sustainability of various sectors such as healthcare, education, water

and sanitation, transportation, and infrastructure (Barasa, 2010) . Hence, creating a clean balance between sustainable service delivery and the resilience of the public service sector is very crucial in significantly improving the development and overall well-being of a developing country such as South Africa. This is because in South Africa, the interplay between sustainable service delivery and the resilience of the public service sector is vital for achieving inclusive and sustainable development, as well as overcoming various socioeconomic challenges (Kalonda and Govender, 2021; Enaifoghe & Adetiba, 2019).

Thus, by delivering services in a sustainable manner and adapting to changing circumstances, the public service sector can contribute to the country's long-term stability, economic growth, and social progress. This section below provides a discussion on the key effects of ensuring sustainable service delivery in South Africa and how it intertwines with development. The key effects discussed include, improving the quality of life, economic growth and development, environmental stewardship, social cohesion, and trust among other components.

Improved Quality of Life

The National Development Plan (NDP) - Vision 2030 is a long-term plan for South Africa which outlines the country's development goals (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2019). Consequently, the NDP is an important plan of the government because it addresses various aspects of sustainable service delivery and the role of the public service sector in achieving them. Thus, there is no doubt that, sustainable service delivery ensures that essential services such as healthcare, education, water, sanitation, and electricity are provided to all citizens, particularly those in marginalized communities (United Nations Development Programme, 2017). By meeting these basic needs, sustainable service delivery ultimately contributes to an improved quality of life for individuals within communities by fostering social development and reducing inequality (Enaifoghe & Adetiba, 2018). This is especially bearing in mind the 63.0 gini coefficient of South Africa which is ranked the highest among 164 countries in the world (Tshuma and Ncube, 2019).

To close the inequality gap, a sustainable public service should allow for the reallocation of resources, restructuring of departments, and the development of new services to align with evolving societal demands, technological advancements, and policy priorities. This also involves swiftly responding to crises, whether they are natural disasters, health emergencies, or socioeconomic challenges. Thus, to ensure improved quality of life for citizens, the public service sector should prioritize addressing changing needs because societies are constantly evolving, and prompt adaptation is key. By having adaptable structures and processes in place, the sector can mobilize resources, coordinate efforts, and deliver timely and effective services during emergencies.

Economic Growth and Development

Access to reliable and sustainable services is essential for economic growth and development in any country (Olowu and Nabeshima, 2001; National Treasury, 2018). Hence, adequate infrastructure includes components such as transportation networks and energy systems, which are very crucial for attracting domestic and foreign investments, promoting business activities, and ultimately creating job opportunities especially in a country like South Africa whose unemployment rate is currently 32,9% (Quarterly Labor Force Survey, 2023). Thus, sustainable service delivery facilitates economic growth by providing the necessary infrastructure and public services that support productivity and entrepreneurship.

Environmental Stewardship

In line with global sustainability goals of 2030, sustainable service delivery in South Africa should also be aimed at promoting environmentally friendly practices. Environmental stewardship aims to minimize negative environmental impacts, promote renewable energy sources, and adopt sustainable infrastructure solutions (Bouckaert and Kuhlmann, 2016). This approach not only benefits the environment but also contributes to long-term resilience and cost savings for the government. With the sustainable development goals of 2030 and the National Development Plan of 2023, there is no doubt that, sustainable service delivery involves a commitment to environmental sustainability (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2019). This is coupled by how environmental stewardship emphasizes on resource efficiency, waste reduction, and the use of renewable energy sources for sustainable development.

For a country like South Africa to adopt sustainable practices, the public service sector can also mitigate environmental impacts, reduce carbon emissions, and contribute to addressing climate change challenges. This simply implies that, enabling environmental stewardship would also be very critical and applicable in South Africa as the country is currently going through an energy crisis which has severe ripple effect on the economic status of the country, especially with the collapse of the rand on the global market (Durokifa and Enaifoghe, 2022).

Social Cohesion and Trust

When the public service sector consistently delivers quality services, it fosters social cohesion and trust between the government its citizens as well as its foreign allies (Kroukamp and Cloete (2018). This is because, trust in public institutions is very crucial for social stability, effective governance, and citizen participation in decision-making processes (Ahmed and Koech 2019). This is informed by the argument that; sustainable service delivery emphasizes on accountability and transparency in the public sector. It also further encourages open and participatory decision-making processes which ensures that citizens have a voice in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of services. Kroukamp and Cloete (2018) further indicate that transparent governance structures and mechanisms enhance trust, foster citizen engagement, and hold public officials accountable for service delivery outcomes.

Thus, sustainable service delivery has a high chance of promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement, thereby strengthening the social contract between the state and its citizens. It is also beyond doubt that, social cohesion ensures that the public has confidence in the government (Brinkerhoff and Johnson, 2009) and this is a key component especially bearing in mind the July 2021 shutdown and the effects which saw the private sector losing several billions of rands from the civil unrest from the public.

Equity and Social Inclusion

Sustainable service delivery aims to promote social inclusion and address inequality by ensuring that services reach all segments of society, including the marginalized and vulnerable populations (Chitiga‑Mabugu and Monkam, 2013). National Development Plan of 2023 iterates that, this involves overcoming barriers related to income, gender, age, disability, and geographic location, especially considering the racially divided nature of South Africa. Thus, by focusing on inclusivity, sustainable service delivery ultimately contributes to reducing poverty, enhancing social cohesion, and fostering equitable development. In retrospect, sustainable service delivery aims to ensure that services are accessible to all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic status, also

geographic location, or background (Abegunde, 2019). Thus, sustainable service delivery essentially seeks to bridge the gaps between different communities and promote social inclusion by addressing disparities and providing equal opportunities for all.

Consequently, it is key to understand that, when equity and social inclusion is enabled, this promotes efficiency and effectiveness because sustainable service delivery emphasizes on the efficient and effective use of resources, including financial, human, and infrastructure for every citizen's benefit. This is done by focusing on optimizing service delivery processes, minimizing waste, and maximizing the impact of services provided to every citizen within the "rainbow nation". It is also key to note that, this obviously requires robust planning, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms to continuously improve service delivery outcomes in an effective, efficient, and equitable manner.

Innovation and Efficiency

Sustainability in the public service sector involves the ability to embrace innovation models and implement new approaches to service delivery. Sustainability should allow for the exploration of alternative service models, such as public-private partnerships, community-driven initiatives, or digital solutions, that can enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and improving service quality (Onyishi and & Ijeoma, 2016). Furthermore, innovation and efficiency are key with enabling technological advancements in the fourth industrial revolution which can greatly enhance service delivery (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2019). This is because the use of digital technologies, mobile platforms, and data-driven solutions can greatly improve the efficiency, accessibility, and effectiveness of services.

Collaboration and Cooperation

A sustainable public service sector should engage in partnerships and collaborations with other sectors, civil society organizations, and international actors. Any form of collaboration is key in the public service sector because it enhances knowledge sharing, it fosters innovation, and it enables the public service sector to leverage external expertise and resources to address complex challenges more effectively (Tshuma and Ncube, 2019). As a result, sustainable models in the public service sector can also entail fostering collaborations and partnerships with various stakeholders, including civil society, private sector entities, and international organizations. The success of these partnerships can leverage expertise, resources, and innovative ideas to enhance service delivery outcomes and address complex challenges more effectively.

Chitiga‑Mabugu and Monkam (2013) confirm how collaboration among African countries, regional organizations, and international partners is also crucial for sharing best practices, lessons learned, and technical expertise. This is evident in the solidarity of the various regional blocs such as the Africa Union (AU), Southern African Customs Union (SACU), Britain, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) among other blocs. These blocs are a clear testament that, collaboration promotes knowledge sharing, strengthens policy frameworks, and supports innovation in service delivery approaches. Thus, platforms for exchanging country experiences, such as regional conferences, networks, and forums, play a vital role in fostering collaboration and collective and cooperative learning.

Responsiveness to Societal Needs

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that the public service sector needs to be agile and responsive to the evolving needs and priorities of society. What this means is that the public service sector should have the ability to identify emerging challenges and be able to proactively

address them through innovative policies, programs, and service delivery approaches (Republic of South Africa, 2018). Thus, sustainability in the public service sector enables the sector to align its services with the changing demands of the population in every sector of the government. Zarenda (2013) confirms that responsiveness to societal needs further enables the public service sector to allocate resources efficiently and effectively based on evolving needs and priorities of the citizens. This includes the ability to reallocate resources across sectors, prioritize critical areas, and adopt innovative approaches to optimize resource utilization while addressing the societal needs.

Consequently, for the public service sector to respond to societal needs promptly and strategically, there is need for adequate and sustainable sources of financing. Thus, African countries need to mobilize domestic resources, explore innovative financing mechanisms, and attract domestic and foreign investments to support service delivery (Chitiga‐ Mabugu and Monkam, 2013). Additionally, international cooperation, development aid, and partnerships also play a crucial role in supporting sustainable service delivery initiatives in Africa (Chitiga‐ Mabugu and Monkam, 2013).

Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening

Efficient and effective service delivery requires strong institutional capacities within the public sector and building the capacity of public institutions, including governments, ministries, and local authorities, is essential for sustainability (Mafunisa, 2003; Maserumule, 2008). This involves improving governance structures, enhancing human resources, promoting transparency and accountability within the government and providing feedback to the citizens. As a result, strengthening institutions ensures the sustainable delivery of services over the long term and for future generations to come. Institutional strengthening also involves the development and implementation of adaptive policy frameworks and regulatory systems. So, these frameworks should be able to accommodate new developments, technologies, and societal changes. Furthermore, regular reviews and updates of policies ensure that they remain relevant, effective, and in line with the evolving needs of citizens for enabling sustainability.

Infrastructure Development

Sustainable service delivery encompasses a wide range of essential services that are fundamental to human development and well-being (United Nations Development Programme, 2017). Hence, infrastructural development includes among other key components constructing and maintaining roads, bridges, schools, healthcare facilities, water supply systems, and energy networks. Furthermore, sustainable infrastructure is resilient, environmentally friendly, and should be designed to meet the evolving needs of communities. Hernandez (2006) argues that, ensuring the availability, accessibility, affordability, and quality of these services is a crucial component for sustainable development in any developing nation. The reason why it is crucial is because infrastructure plays a crucial role in ensuring sustainable service delivery because investments in infrastructure development are necessary to provide access to services, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Ensuring the sustainability of service delivery in Africa is an ongoing challenge, given the continent's diverse contexts, limited resources, and complex development issues. However, by prioritizing social inclusion, strengthening institutions, investing in infrastructure, and

embracing innovation, African countries can make significant strides towards achieving sustainable development goals and improving the quality of life for their populations. In South Africa, sustainable service delivery of the public service sector is crucial for addressing socio-economic disparities, promoting inclusive development, and achieving long-term sustainability. Furthermore, by ensuring equitable access to essential services, optimizing resource utilization, and adapting to changing circumstances, the public service sector can play a vital role in enhancing the well -being and quality of life for all citizens. Hence, sustainable service delivery is a critical aspect of development in Africa. This is because it involves providing essential services to the population in a manner that is socially inclusive, environmentally responsible, and economically viable.

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