

**Public Service Delivery in a Democratic,  
Developmental State**

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**Policy: issues & actors**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the notion of service delivery by the public service in a democratic developmental state. The public service in a democratic developmental state essentially focuses not only on the delivery of services, but it is also crucial for economic and social development. It contributes to development by providing the essential services and basic infrastructure necessary to help spur economic development and improve the lives of communities, especially poor communities. This it does primarily by regulating, administering, executing, mediating, investing and delivering the construction, operations, maintenance and servicing of service delivery infrastructure, and ensuring that the state and the public service are operationally and functionally oriented in a way that serves “to reproduce ethical citizens and communities”.<sup>1</sup>

In a developmental state, the public service not only focuses on these outputs [the hard issues] but has to be keenly aware of outcomes [the soft issues], and in doing so has to deliver services in ways that are efficient, effective, and maintains the dignity of citizens [in light of the Batho Pele or people first, principles] and gives effect to their rights. In doing so, it can elicit compliance from citizens. In that sense, the public service (in terms of its delivery mandate) exists at the intersection of contemporary society and its challenges and the legacy of the past; it thus has to orient its mandate and strategic thrust to account simultaneously for both the challenges of the present and those imposed by an apartheid past that denied black people the scale and quality of services afforded to their white counterparts. In addition, its service delivery mandate places it at the junction of the policy-making, implementation, governance, delivery and democracy continuum. As such, the skills and values required in the public service of a democratic developmental state are defined by its development priorities and challenges as well as the specific institutional conditions that exist or may need to be created. This, however, presupposes a number of things, particularly about the democratic developmental state and what it is.

## 2. DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

There has been an emerging discourse attempting to characterise the South African State post 2001, as a developmental state. An extraordinarily varied set of indicators have been posited to give credence to this characterisation. Amongst them is the fact that:

- the State seeks to make interventions in the economy through broad based black economic empowerment, affirmative action, and affirmative procurement policies;
- the bulk of public expenditure is oriented towards the health education and social services sectors; and

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<sup>1</sup> “Development through the production of communities, Chipkin I, Service Delivery Review, Volume 5, Number 2, 2006

- a redistributory impulse animates social policy through indigence and other social welfare transfers;
- the provision of free basic services together with the newly announced subsidies for low wage earners.

There is also an emerging literature on the developmental state in South Africa<sup>2</sup>, which seeks to define it, including its structure, capacity, role and function. Those deliberating on the developmental state seem to propose that it is somehow synonymous with effective delivery. This somewhat crudely caricatures the discourse emerging in the public service - that managerial effectiveness, technocratic efficiency, and streamlined procedures and processes for the delivery of public goods and services alone, will give concrete expression to a developmental state. However, Evans' notion of embeddedness is instructive here. Embeddedness is essentially an iterative social relationship that results in a shared developmental vision between the state and large sectors of society that is fashioned through "institutionalized channels for the continual negotiation and renegotiation of goals and policies".<sup>3</sup> Citizens are an essential component of this societal relationship without whom it will be difficult, given South Africa's undemocratic past and large racially stratified basic services and infrastructure deficits, to implement and achieve development and more importantly, deliver development that is relevant to citizens' needs rather than those of consultants or bureaucrats. In terms of the public service, this means an ability and willingness to negotiate with an increasingly demanding public, including through the vehicle of the new social movements.

There has been a spate of civic protests against the slow or ineffective delivery of services. The consequence of this has seen statements such as: "one of the shifts we have seen in South Africa over the last twelve years is a movement away from community driven development. A move away from citizen involvement in policy making and implementation. A move that is more towards a business model where government behaves like a business in the way it relates to its citizens, not as citizens but as customers".<sup>4</sup>

The Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, has this to say on the debate. "What is a developmental state? Do we all share one understanding of what a developmental state is? Do we all have one view of the developmental mandate of this government? Are we galvanized by a single vision for our country? And, if we have that single vision, is it underpinned by a common set of values?"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Edigheji 2005, Makndawire,

<sup>3</sup> Evans, Peter (1995) *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

<sup>4</sup> *Development through the production of communities*, Chipkin I, Service Delivery Review, Volume 5, Number 2, 2006

<sup>5</sup> "Budgeting challenges in the developmental state"- Speech by the Minister of Finance, at Senior Management Service Conference, Cape Town; 20 September 2004

He posited that that the Developmental State was initially most closely associated with Chalmers Johnson and his seminal analysis of Japan's rapid, highly successful post-war reconstruction and re-industrialization. Johnson's central contention was that Japan's historically unparalleled industrial renaissance was not inevitable, but was a consequence of the efforts of a developmental state. A developmental state was one that was determined to influence the direction and pace of economic development by directly intervening in the development process, rather than relying on the uncoordinated influence of market forces to allocate resources. "The developmental state took upon itself the task of establishing substantive social and economic goals with which to guide the process of development and social mobilisation. The most important of these goals, in Japan's case, was the reconstruction of its industrial capacity, a process made easier by widespread consensus about the importance of industrial development. The concept of the developmental state has since evolved in light of criticism that the Japanese [and other east Asian] developmental states displayed authoritarian and undemocratic tendencies. Patrick Heller, defines the developmental state as one that has been able to manage the delicate balance between economic growth and social development. Amartya Sen, in 'Development as Freedom' says, Development can be seen... as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states. In defining our concept of a developmental state, Sen's concept of removing poverty and tyranny is key, expanding economic opportunities and fighting social deprivation is critical and providing public facilities and services to the poor is paramount. Fundamentally, in a developmental state, civil servants are servants of the people, champions of the poor and down-trodden."<sup>6</sup>

"In terms of **ideology**, a developmental state is essentially one whose ideological underpinning is 'developmentalist' in that it conceives its 'mission' as that of ensuring economic development.... The **state-structure** side of the definition of the developmental state emphasizes capacity to implement economic policies sagaciously and effectively. Such capacity is determined by various factors -institutional, technical, administrative and political. Undergirding all these is the **autonomy** of the state from social forces so that it can use these capacities to devise long-term economic policies unencumbered by claims of myopic private interests. It is usually assumed that such a state should be a 'strong state' in contrast to ... [a] 'soft state' that had neither the administrative capacity nor the political wherewithal to push through its developmental agenda. And finally, the state must have some **social anchoring** that prevents it from using its autonomy in a predatory manner and enables it to gain adhesion of key social actors"<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> "Budgeting challenges in the developmental state"- Speech by the Minister of Finance, at Senior Management Service Conference, Cape Town; 20 September 2004

<sup>7</sup> Mkandawire as quoted in Edigheji. (O Edigheji, *The Emerging South African Democratic Developmental State and the People's Contract*, forthcoming CPS publication)

### 3. CHALLENGES

In carrying out its delivery mandate, the public service has to deal with manifold complex and interrelated challenges. These include:

- internal staffing and capacity including supervision and management;
- streamlining processes for effective, efficient, and equitable delivery;
- interacting and coordinating with other institutions, including state institutions;
- interfacing with a variegated, complex and demanding citizenry; and
- responding to the complex contemporary challenges that have been shaped by the apartheid past.

The public service has to be responsive to development challenges while cognisant of the context and environment that it functions in. It has to account for both relations of inter-dependence and intra-dependence in the form of co-operative and integrated governance respectively. Without co-operation and integration, strategic planning and delivery interventions tend to be constructed in isolation from broader development plans and could lead to duplication and wastage. In addition, a lack of co-operation and integration between public service departments could well see the delivery of services that do not meet citizen needs or nationally defined norms and standards. Many examples abound from the early years of the transition where for example, primary health care clinics were built in areas where no public transport was available, or schools and houses were built in areas with no running water and electricity. Co-operation and integration also help to better target the kinds and quality of services required in different geographic and socio-economic areas and make strategic use of scarce resources for maximum yield.

At its core, however, the role, function and mandate of the public service is broadly defined by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, 108 of 1996. In essence, the Constitution states “there is a public service for the Republic which must function and be structured, in terms of national legislation and which must loyally execute the lawful policies of the government of the day.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, the public administration of the public service must be governed by the following basic values:<sup>9</sup>

- A high standard of professional ethics;
- Efficient, economic and effective use of resources;
- Public administration must be development oriented;
- Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias;

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<sup>8</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108, 1996, S 197 (1)

<sup>9</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108, 1996 S 195 (1)



- People's needs must be responded to and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making;
- Public administration must be accountable;
- Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information;
- Good human resource management and career-development practices to maximise human potential; and
- Public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people with employment and personnel management practices based on ability, objectivity, fairness, and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation.

#### 4. CONTEXT

At inception, the democratic state in 1994 inherited 18 different administrations with disparate systems, processes, regulations, cultures, and no deliberate focus on providing equitable, quality services to all South Africans. Accordingly, since 1994 the public service has, in line with the Constitutional imperative outlined above, witnessed an unprecedented process of transformation, rationalisation, amalgamation and restructuring both in terms of its core mandate and delivery function as well as its own internal institutional and organisational dynamics.

As at 30 September 1996, it comprised 1 176 545 people and within a year, after the inception of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, experienced a reduction of close to 100 000 people or some 8%. Further reductions occurred in the years after that, ostensibly aimed at rationalisation, amalgamation, restructuring and bolstering efficiency. In reality, though, this was also part of a government strategy to curtail expenditure on its salary bill in order to reduce its budget deficit - an explicit policy plank of GEAR.

Public service re-orientation was also aimed at demographic transformation in order to make it more representative of the South African population. "As at July 2005, according to the Minister of Public Service and Administration, the representativeness of the public service was as follows: Black - 74%; White - 13.3%; Coloured - 8.9%; Indian - 3.7%."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Administering National Government, Venter A and Theunissen C, in "Government and Politics in the new South Africa", 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, edited by Landsberg C and Venter A, page 83, Van Schaik, 2006

The gender balance stood at 51% male and 49% female. Despite the success of the demographic transformation process, one of its unintended consequences has been that the offering of voluntary severance packages to employees saw an exodus of skills. This exodus has had short term functional and efficiency consequences for service delivery. This problem is, however, being currently addressed through an intensive training and capacity building programme and an incipient policy initiative between government and its social partners called the Joint Initiative for the Procurement of Priority Skills [JIPSA], which is part of the Accelerated and Shared Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA). As the name suggests, the JIPSA initiative is aimed at both identifying and then procuring priority skills through both training and recruitment.

In short, the re-orientation of the Public Service over the last twelve years faced a myriad of challenges including:

- creating a new culture of service to all South Africans,
- creating a new work ethic;
- engineering and re-engineering of structures, procedures and processes, systems;
- human resource development;
- the creation of a new strategic policy and legislative framework; and
- setting new strategic goals and objectives that meet the mandate of the Constitutional obligation placed on the public service and comply with the fundamental values enshrined in the Bill Rights, including conducting itself and delivering its services in a non racial, non sexist manner consistent with the values of equality and equity.

The key developmental challenge, then, was to create a public service environment where citizens no longer felt humiliated and denigrated. The manner in which the public servants behave in interfacing with the public can have a substantial impact on the way in which citizens view and discharge their obligations to the State. Overall, an efficient, effective, responsive and accountable public service goes a long way in inculcating a civic culture of citizenship and this recognition is expressed in the public service through its adoption of the Batho Pele principles. There is, however, a gap between the intent of these principles and their implementation, with pockets of excellence co-existing with less than mediocre levels of service. Because perceptions of the public service are formed at the coalface of experience by the citizens, negative experiences, no matter how isolated, seem to unfortunately taint the entire public service.

## 5. THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN A DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

Since adopting the identity of a developmental state, South African has attempted to, *inter alia*, grow the economy, modernise productive forces and redefine relations of production and consumption in society. To do so, the state embarked on a more activist and interventionist role in the economy, tried to narrow the inequality gap and substantially reduce poverty by engaging in distributive governance.

In this area of distributory governance, there is at least some record over the last twelve years and some experience, no matter how patchy. A case in point is that National Treasury statistics illustrate that a consistently expansionary budget over the last four years has resulted in government spending of almost “R60 billion or about a fifth of the budget on direct transfers to households. If indirect transfers to households such as free basic water and electricity, bus and train subsidies and land transfers are added, then spending amounts to almost 70% of the budget”.<sup>11</sup> This is a remarkable achievement. Yet, there are questions about why high levels of poverty persist despite these levels of government expenditure, or why there are perceptions of high levels of government inefficiency and such serious dissatisfaction with service delivery, as indicated by the estimated 700 social protests over the last ten years. In fact, all that this statistic conveys is that there are particularly high levels of expenditure by government in terms of its distributory governance agenda, resulting in about 60% of the budget being allocated to the social services sector [health, education, welfare, social services]. This tells us nothing about the effectiveness of the distributory governance agenda. The Minister of Finance has made the following observation: “one Rand spent educating a child in the leafy Johannesburg suburbs does not buy the same amount of quality education as one Rand spent in Alexandra or Mitchells Plain. To put it bluntly, the quality of education, and therefore the economic opportunities that that education buys in the suburbs is far greater than in the townships or in the former homelands. Why is this? While poor and rich kids do not start school with the same level of education, senior civil servants and political principals must admit that the quality of teaching and learning materials in suburban schools is vastly better than in township schools. Sometimes there is also evidence of conflicting policy options - in these cases, the poor almost always lose out. From discussion with a Provincial Premier recently, it emerges that the Province in question realizes that whilst there are only 3 publishers producing learner support materials, they had opted for a BEE strategy which, on reflection buys 20% fewer books for learners. They have now opted to focus on maximizing the quantity of books that they can purchase. There will be a cry as the change of procurement will fly in the face of Governments BEE policy, but the Province is taking a decision which, in my view, favours the poor. Similar stories can be told in health care, refuse removal, policing, court prosecutions or traffic enforcement. In many areas of public service delivery, the quality of services received by the poor are not good

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<sup>11</sup> “Bridging the Gap Between Two Economies”, Fourie R and Ngqungwana T, Service Delivery Review, Vol 3, No.3, 2004, page 6.

enough relative to the money we spend”<sup>12</sup> Despite this broad trend, a recent report focused on poverty reduction on ISRDP and URP nodes finds that “overall, poverty levels have declined - more steeply in urban than in rural areas, but on average poverty has declined across all nodes of the ISRDP and URP. This was driven in part by ongoing provision of infrastructure. Crucially, however, drops in poverty levels have also been driven by widespread access to social grants and these cash injections have made a major impact on poverty. It is a combination of the two - services and income support that is impacting on poverty.”<sup>13</sup>

In considering public service delivery in this context, it should be borne in mind, that “Government’s successes occur more often in areas where it has significant control and its lack of immediate success occurs more often in those areas where it may only have indirect influence”<sup>14</sup>. The dichotomy between power and influence “applies in the sense that in the areas over which government has control/power (the institutions, processes, procedures, budget) there has been significant progress, such as redefining the mandate, structure and functions of public service departments, while the areas where government has less direct influence (such as the inherited historical legacies of Apartheid where certain geographic areas, racial and ethnic communities are relatively better off in terms of infrastructure, community solidarity and cohesion, economic ability, but the dichotomy extends to also to the behaviour of public servants in their inter-action with the public and civil society), have shown much slower progress”.<sup>15</sup>

## 6. INSTITUTIONAL AND OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

Government efforts to enhance the public service are constrained by a range of factors including:

- institutional weaknesses;
- poor human resource management; lack of planning and development;
- widespread gaps in the quality and relevance of training and institutions;
- poor linkages and partnerships between government and training providers;
- an inadequate focus on norms, values, attitudes and orientation of public officials;  
and

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<sup>12</sup> “Budgeting challenges in the developmental state”- Speech by the Minister of Finance, at Senior Management Service Conference, Cape Town; 20 September 2004

<sup>13</sup> David Evertt - cited from e-mail correspondence.

<sup>14</sup> Towards a Ten Year review, Government of South Africa, 2005 p102

<sup>15</sup> “Revitalising Public Service Delivery”, Ngema K, in Service Delivery Review, Vol 3, No.3, 2004.

- a lack of credible data and limited capacity for basic analysis and planning.

Human resource management in the public service is complex. It is often simplified and characterised as being either about personnel administration or about strategy. It encompasses both. Building HR capacity in the public service needs to take a balanced approach in which the administrative and strategic elements are both appreciated and developed, since without the one the other is rendered ineffective. One of the original public service reforms involved the decentralization of the human resources framework. This was seen as a progressive step away from the centralized control of the apartheid state and was intended to empower managers to take the critical decisions that would lead to efficiency and effectiveness by unlocking the rule-bound bureaucratic culture that was inherited and moving towards a more results driven orientation.

The management of service delivery institutions as critical links with citizens is crucial. Virtually all citizen experiences of the public service is through service delivery institutions such as hospitals, schools, and home affairs offices. These service points are “often run down, visibly dirty, have shortages of staff, equipment and vehicles, have no proper signage and seating areas for citizens, have no rest areas or other facilities for staff, struggle to provide clean reliable water and other basic services, and are poorly managed and unsupported by other senior echelons in the management hierarchy. [It is also most frequently the point at which citizens experience corrupt or inept officials, or public servants who simply don’t what they’re supposed to]. It is quite clear that the public service has not fully internalised the critical role that service points play in the service delivery value chain, and as the ‘moments of truth’ as far as citizens are concerned serves to undermine and render irrelevant everything that may be otherwise soundly managed and executed”.<sup>16</sup>

To citizens, everything done by government, departmental head offices, premiers’ offices or the Department of Public Service and Administration, is irrelevant unless they experience service points differently from the way described. A major problem in the public service is that there tends to be no clear standard for the quality of service that is rendered, and where there are standards, there are often no consequences for the failure to achieve those standards. Should this become a culture, it would become difficult to change.

Cultures however are created, promoted and sustained through a dialectic between structure (defined processes and systems) and agency (through the kind of people recruited, and promoted, and how those people and the organisation itself, relate to each other, how the individuals and the institution treat and account to stakeholders, and how they define themselves in relation to the rest of society).

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<sup>16</sup> “Revitalising Public Service Delivery”, Ngema K, in Service Delivery Review, Vol 3, No.3, 2004.

## 7. CONCLUSION: IMAGINING THE FUTURE

It is clear that the effective implementation of the reoriented public service of the post apartheid state will require public servants that are professional, skilled and adequately remunerated. Equally, however, public servants, especially those in a developmental state, have to realise that they are ultimately servants of the people; responsiveness to the basic requests of the public needs to be creative and swift.

In delivering services, the public service has to focus on the following:

### Responsiveness:

- Responsiveness to the Public
- Responsiveness to Executive Government
- Responsiveness to Politicians
- Proactive Responsiveness to the social and political environment.

### Accountability:

- Accountability to the public
- Accountability Executive government
- Accountability to politicians - in terms of the oversight role of politicians

The Public Service in a developmental state has several internal challenges to its functioning. Among them are:

- Monitoring and evaluation of staff and the services it delivers, as well as the way the institution functions overall.
- Management of financial resources so that they may be optimised.
- Acquiring the relevant skills to be able to execute the delivery mandate.
- Investing in proper knowledge management systems so that appropriate records can be kept for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation. This requires appropriate and up to date knowledge management and information systems in terms of IT infrastructure. But knowledge resources also have to be generated in order to be able to read the socio-political and economic environment within which the public

service has to operate. This requires understanding of citizens and the cultures by which they organise and associate.

- Innovation in ways in which services can be streamlined in more effective and efficient ways to create synergies and facilitate integrated co-operative planning with other areas of the public service and the state. In this regard co-operation and co-ordination would be key.
- Recruiting, training, attracting and retaining appropriate skills.
- Instituting an ethical regime that would be in line with *Batho Pele* principles but that commit all public servants to non -corrupt activities, and in the case of the senior echelons of the service regulate consultancy, procurement and tender processes as well as create a post public service employment regulatory regime for senior managers to counter corruption or the potential to exploit information gained through policy and regulatory processes for personal financial gain.

This in part, has been recognised by Government, who through the Department of Public Service and Administration, has developed a programme called “Project Khaedu” with the objective of exposing senior managers in the public service to delivery issues at the coalface. In addition, a toolkit for practical management, problem identification analysis and resolution has been developed to identify and solve problems in process, budgeting and financial management, people management (in terms of recruitment, training, support, performance management, and discipline), and organisational design and decision-making. Key in this regard is building in processes for accountability.

While this seems like a great turnaround strategy, an exclusive or even predominant focus on instrumental management driven solutions cannot be a substitute for creating a balance between technical management and targeted interventions to effect a change in the culture of the public service at all levels. In the absence of this balance, the public service risks eroding the store of credibility and legitimacy that it derives from functioning within the context of a free, open and democratic society.