

Service Delivery and Social Accountability in South Africa: Challenges and Community Organizations Context

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Abstract: Service delivery has been and is still a challenge to be dealt with in South Africa. While social accountability is deemed to be an important aspect in the democratic South Africa that should drive service delivery. Hence, in a South African context, the service delivery is expected to be carried out by the public servant in line with the adherence of social accountability. Furthermore, South African public servants are impelled to abide with the democratically reformed and transformed public policies which open for transparency and social accountability. However, an assumption is made that public servants have multiply the overlooking of such aspects in service delivery. The paper then argues that the reasons to overlook social accountability in service delivery, particularly in rural areas, is mostly caused by the initiation of riots, barricades, strikes and protests among others in townships and urban areas. Such initiatives build up fear for public servants and result in skewing service delivery to townships and urban areas. The paper concludes that aspects such as silence in and unjust distribution of service delivery have always dictated the execution of public duties from the post-democratic era. As a result, the level of social accountability in rural and urban areas becomes patently unequal. Accordingly, the paper recommends the enforcing and adherence of policies and legislative frameworks of service delivery to avoid biasness. This is a conceptual paper; thus, it uses literature-based approach as its methodology. Within that context, the rapid and narrative literature review is employed for the purpose, crux and premise thereof.

Keywords: Community organizations, Service delivery, Social accountability, Public servants

1. Introduction

Service delivery has been and is still a challenge to be dealt with in South Africa. According to Alexander (2010), South Africa has experienced a movement of local protests amounting to a rebellion of the poor. On the surface, the protests have been about service delivery and against uncaring, self-serving and corrupt leaders (Alexander, 2010). For case in point, there has been various protest in different cities that attest to the fact that service delivery is a conundrum in South Africa. For example, innumerable riots, barricades, protests among others that resulted in burning schools, demolishing infrastructure to name just a few are good examples of radiating the problem of service delivery in South Africa. Within that context, South African public officials are impelled to abide with the democratically reformed and transformed public policies which open for transparency and social accountability to deal with service delivery (World Bank, 2011; Ackerman, 2005). However, service delivery continues to be a challenge and unabated in South Africa, predominantly in the relative majority of rural areas. Accordingly, Burger (2006) presents

the results of case evidence which brings about decentralisation and participation through community ownership that is necessary for effective service delivery to rural communities. Considering community participation and engagement then there will be a direct or indirect thorough social accountability.

World Bank (2011) defines social accountability as an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement; this is where ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. Social accountability can also refer to as a form of accountability that arises through actions by electorates and civil society (Ackerman, 2005). In essence, one can argue that social accountability can be used as a tool to enhance and headway the development outcomes that revolves around service delivery. Although social accountability is deemed to be an important factor in the democratic South Africa, public officials have multiplied the overlook of rural dwellers than their urban counterparts in delivering services (Dassah, 2012; Institute for Security Studies, 2009; Burger, 2006). That derives from the fact that

delivering the services is skewed to urban areas and townships due to fear of riots, barricades, strikes and protests among others (Nkomo, 2017; Dassah, 2012; Allan & Heese, 2011). It therefore evident that urban and townships have the capability of initiating protests, strikes inter alia for the purpose of attention, particularly delivery of services. As a result, the level of social accountability in rural and urban areas has been patently unequal and this is not due to the level of interest of the rural dwellers but by predisposition actions of the public servants (Nkomo, 2017; Reddy, 2016; Owusu-Ampomah & Hemson, 2004).

One of the characteristics of social accountability is to have active involvement of the community members to influence decision making in terms of service delivery and in issues affecting their lives (Wahyuningsih & Hastjarjo, 2014). Considering the fact that social accountability includes civil society organizations, it is therefore important to acknowledge the different communities' organizations that serve as a bridge to service delivery. In essence, the community-based organizations have an ability to strengthen the improvement of service delivery and ensure transparency thereof. It is in this context that civic engagement can also form part of social accountability due to the involvement of people in the economic, social, cultural and political processes (Ackerman, 2005). Therefore, through engagements and organizations citizens have the opportunity to deliberate on the issues and hold the civic organization accountable.

The paper argues that there is a slight skew that result in biasness when it comes to the delivery of service. Considering literature-based analysis, the paper argues that bias of service delivery in South Africa is a result of public officials' avoidance of social accountability. Nkomo (2017) claims that the delivery of services is skewed mostly to urban areas and townships due to fear of and capability of initiating riots, barricades, strikes and protest amongst the other. Hence, in rural areas service delivery moves at a very slow pace or remain stagnant; for case in point, the removal of pit latrine, issues of water, roads, infrastructures have been called for, amongst the other. Accordingly, that radiate the ineffectiveness of public servants in service provision for rural settings as compared to urban counterparts. From a conceptual point of view, the paper explores the nature of social accountability in urban and rural areas regarding the biasness of

service provision in communities of South Africa. In the midst of the challenges of delivering services in South Africa, the paper provides different kinds of community organisations and acknowledge their purposes in delivery of services.

2. Methodological Approach

This is a conceptual paper and uses literature-based approach as its methodology in order to explore service delivery and social accountability in South Africa. With that context, the paper employed the rapid and narrative literature review for the purpose, aim, crux and premise thereof. That is, rapid and narrative literature review helps in exploring and analyzing or appraising the existing practice in relation to the topic of service delivery. Accordingly, considering literature-based analysis, the paper argues that biasness of service delivery within the public sector is a result of public officials' avoidance of social accountability towards rural dwellers. Conceptually, the paper explores the complex nature of social accountability in both urban and rural areas of South Africa.

3. Service Delivery as a Mandate for Public Servants

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa made it a mandatory for service delivery programs (refer to section 152 and 153). Substantially, the World Bank (2011) echoed that the advent of democracy in South Africa compelled the government to make service delivery a mandate hence enshrined in the constitution. According to World Bank (2011), the legacy of apartheid presented the democratic South Africa with enormous public service challenges. Thus, the government made it a mandatory to address the challenges by enshrining constitutional rights to services and service delivery programs (World Bank, 2011; Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). Thus, this mandate to deliver services to local communities is emphasized in terms of section 152 and 153 of the constitution of the republic of South Africa (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). That is the reason why local administrators are deemed to be the custodian of community resources or coffers of service delivery. Hence, they are being delegated with the responsibility to utilize resources to ameliorate the basic needs services of the local communities, more specifically water, electricity and infrastructures among others (Okafor *et al.*, 2015).

Concomitantly, there are legislative frameworks that are based specifically on public participation in a form of radiating social accountability as the best mechanism in ensuring service delivery. Thus, Molepo, Maleka & Khalo, (2015) emphasized that the legislative frameworks have a significant impact on the matter of service delivery in the public space. Having social accountability in consideration of public participation that is enforced through the regulations ensures that the public officials are obliged to carry out the mandate (Molepo *et al.*, 2015). Evidently, it is noted that public servants have a critical role to play in ensuring the effectiveness and fast-tracking of the process of service delivery. One of the legislative frameworks that mandate public servants for service delivery, in that regard, is *The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele White Paper)*.

The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery is concerned with the way in which services are being delivered, particularly the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. The white paper seeks to put public servants under duress to foster the provisioning of services and to have a good sense of decorum, attitudes and follow the procedures (Reddy, 2016; Molepo *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, public functionaries should be held accountable with the responsibilities that are being designated to them. Furthermore, public servants should ensure that Batho Pele principles are adhered to when delivering services to be able to give an active and meaningful response to the service standards expected by the communities. Listening to the community views becomes the first step to ensure that engagement and participation become fruitful and benefit for both the community and public servants. The Batho Pele principles allow the communities to interrogate the work of the public servants and demand answers when their aspirations and needs are not met (Molepo *et al.*, 2015).

Notwithstanding that, in terms of service delivery the paper is adamant to the fact that public servants together with the community members become the driving force of change in service delivery. Although there are legislative frameworks that mandates for service delivery, public servants are often lambasted for their nature of being corrupt, sluggish, ineffective and inefficient in delivering services to the citizens. Such has led to many communities losing confidence, trust and patience from the government in respect of service delivery; hence, the

innumerable protests. Thus, the impediments of conveying service delivery in South Africa mostly revolve around biasedness, political patronage, pomposity, corruption *inter alia* (Day, Cornell, & Malherbe, 2021; Reddy, 2016; Allan & Heese, 2011). Above all, corruption seems to impact negatively on the budget of service delivery due to squandering of monies from public purse; thus, it tarnishes the genuine image of the country. It can be vividly alluded that corruption becomes a foe of service delivery affecting mostly rural areas than urban areas as such there is a need, through community organizations, to foster social accountability in order to achieve service delivery.

That connotes to that fact that the views of community members through community participation should be fully taken into cognizance for better service delivery. It can be pointed out that, the quality of service delivery depends on the performance of public administration at the local level practiced by local institutions and community participation (Clarke & Missingham, 2009). Conversely, public servants tend to forget that their mandate is to serve the best interest of the people through proper service delivery. As a consequence, poor social accountability and poor engagement with the community members compromise the benefits of people and result in poor service delivery (Clarke & Missingham, 2009). It is for this reason that community organizations are impeccable transportation of service delivery in South Africa. That will help to alleviate the problem of egoist and biasness by public servants in terms of delivering services to the people who gave and entrusted them with power to serve.

4. Challenges of Service Delivery in South Africa

The birth of democracy in South Africa in 1994 depicted a promising picture of good service delivery for most disadvantaged black people in the country (Tsheola, 2012). Therefore, democratic breakthrough after 1994 does not mean that South African had achieved almost everything in terms of delivering the services. South Africa is still confronted with various challenges when it comes to delivering services to their constituency after 20 years of democracy (Mokgopo, 2016; Tsheola, Ramonyai & Segae, 2014; Tsheola, 2012). One of the challenges of service conveyance is a cancer of corruption in the political office bearers. It can

be vividly alluded that corruption is an enemy of service delivery and such needs to be corrected. The political office bearers tend to forget that their mandate is to serve the best interest of the people by improving service delivery, not to see their positions as a status (Ababio, 2004). They are entitled by law to ensure that the needs of the people are met. Even though corruption seems to be the South African's lifestyle, it affects service delivery as well as tarnish the genuine image of the country. Be that as it may, one can argue that delivery of services will remain a mere gesture or a procedure on the paper while people are suffering and enduring lack of access to services.

Wahyuningsih and Hastjarjo (2014) posits that another barrier in delivering services is the allocation of budget have been dominated by the bureaucracy. The electorates have not been given an opportunity to get an access to the budgeting policy process to share their concerns and views (Ababio, 2004). That tends to sideline and limit the public engagement in submitting suggestions in terms of the programs or projects that are meant for service delivery. The author further argued one more related challenge is the lack of information, transparency and social accountability in the deliberation of processes (Wahyuningsih & Hastjarjo, 2014). In essence, the citizens have not been able to vigorously push their developmental mandate in development planning because they do not have necessary information to align their development with that of government. Mathekga & Buccus (2006) made an assertion that it is very imperative that the deliberations of service delivery cannot be detached from the discussion of public administration and community participation. It can be pointed out that, the quality-of-service delivery depends on the performance of public administration practiced by the public.

Political issues both within the local municipality and also in national government impact negatively on the governance and service conveyance. The inauguration of municipal bureaucrats who are not sufficiently skilled and based on political patronage and jobs for friends becomes a limitation on the efficient and effective performance of local administration (Masiya, Davids & Mangai, 2019; Okafor, Matiwane & Onuigbo, 2015). The interferences in that regard have led to the increasing of the protest around the country, because of different political ideologies and agenda to protect their

own private interest (Mokgopo, 2016; Allan & Heese, 2011). Service conveyance demonstration (protest) is stirred up by poor service delivery, the moral obligation for which lies with the public servants. For case in point, a protest in Vuwani Malamulele is the result of poor governance, lack of alacrity by public servants to deliver basic services to the community (Mokgopo, 2016). Thus, issues of biasedness in delivering services is an instigation that exacerbate the innumerable protests, barricades, strikes among others in South Africa (Day *et al.*, 2021; Carrim, 2010). Consequently, those can be regarded as the communication people use on the ground demanding accountability from the public servants for the failure of meeting and delivering services to their communities (Reddy, 2016; Carrim, 2010; Institute for Security Studies, 2009). Thus, social accountability cannot be circumvented in that regard; looking at the challenges of services delivery such as unfairness, unequitable delivery of basic services, biasedness, corruption, not competent of bureaucrats *inter alia*.

5. Community Organisations on Service Delivery Improvement

According to Abegunde (2009), people in developing countries have recently looked up to their governments to meet their basic socio-economic needs; conversely, such governments are not putting strenuous efforts to deliver the services due to greediness and egoistic. It is also reflected that public officials turn to overlook rural communities when it comes to service delivery at the expense of urban areas. As highlighted, there is a perception that rural dwellers cannot hold public officials accountable in their performance due to their incapability to initiate riots, protests and barricades among others (Day *et al.*, 2021; Hussain, Khattak & Khan, 2008). Within that context, there is a miss rating of social accountability in a quest to addressing the issues in relation to service delivery (Masiya *et al.*, 2019; Ackerman, 2005). As a result, the public servants and/or the government does not deliver services as it should. Due to the fact that government is not delivering the services as required, it has become to the attention of the citizens or community members to have their self-help initiatives to accelerate the delivery of services and transmogrification of social advancement (Abegunde, 2009; McLeod & Tovo, 2001).

Considering the preconceiving and miss rating of social accountability by public servants, there has

been the formulation of community-based organizations in order to deal with issues related to service delivery (Masiya *et al.*, 2019; Reddy, 2016; Matibane, 2010; Abegunde, 2009). It could be argued that the formulation of community-based organizations aim was to bring services closer to the community. Consequently, poor performance of public servants in meeting the socio-economic needs has been acknowledged as one of the motives behind the vast proliferation of the community-based organizations (Matibane, 2010; Abegunde, 2009; Clayton, Oakley & Taylor, 2000). Community based organizations have different nomenclature depending on the aim and type of service offered. For example, there are community development associations, welfare organizations, civil society organizations and united community youth movements among others (Clayton *et al.*, 2000). Just to highlight few examples of the organizations, one can realize a pivotal and distinctive role that the organizations are playing when it comes to service delivery.

5.1 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can be classified with the organizations that form part of delivering services to the community. The organizations ensure that the services and the needs of the people are then delivered by providing different services. Thus, they make a great impact and change to the individuals and the society at large (Slaymaker, Christiansen & Hemming, 2005). The role of the non-governmental organizations in the communities and the society is to ensure the increased local capacities to enhance social welfare (Slaymaker *et al.*, 2005). It can also be alluded that NGOs seek to come up with a sustainable solution and involve beneficiaries in the development process, including in health sectors (Wilson, Lavis & Guta, 2012). These NGOs can be viewed as the effective way of service delivery because they are efficient and transparent to the community members. However, non-governmental organizations are required to report or to account on their stakeholders or donors to attest those services has been delivered to the people (Batorowicz, Mcdougall & Shepherd, 2006).

5.2 Civil Society Organisations

Civil society also serves as a vehicle to service delivery because it is characterized by active, diverse and inclusive citizen participation (Batorowicz *et al.*, 2006; Clayton *et al.*, 2000). Members of the civil

society are responsible for reporting the needs of the people to those in the authority in government spheres. Therefore, continuous engagements with members of the civil society throughout the process of design, implementation and evaluation of the projects, policies or programs legitimizes decisions and enriches the outcomes of the services to be delivered (Wilson *et al.*, 2012; Clayton *et al.*, 2000). It can be pointed out that civil society serve as the basis of applying the bottom-up approach precisely because it enlarges the people's choices by giving them a platform to engage in various challenging issues of the community.

Within that context, one should be aware that there is a robust connection between community-based organizations and social accountability in order to promote social welfare and deal with community challenges such as service delivery (Slaymaker *et al.*, 2005). Consequently, such strong relationship will ultimately lead to the speeding up of the processes of service delivery. Accordingly, service delivery can be dealt with by community-based organizations looking at their nature, aim and capabilities they possess. Moreover, community-based organizations are designed to engage and galvanize individuals in the community to take actions towards achieving the common goal, particularly addressing issues (Hussain *et al.*, 2008). In addition, one can stress out that community-based organizations are well informed and designed to address the local problems, because they comprehend their local context and are vigorously connected to the whole populace of the community (Wilson *et al.*, 2012).

6. Results and Discussion

The dawn of new and democratic South Africa in 1994 meant the great enthusiasm, vigorous and great expectations of the swift basic needs and service delivery (Masiya *et al.*, 2019; Burge, 2006). However, that was not case looking at the current South Africa where relative majority of its constituency are still experiencing inadequate service delivery. The protests, riots, barricades among others are a good example to portray a picture of inadequate service delivery. It can be argued that the democratic breakthrough in 1994 did not mean the achievement of service delivery as it intends. South Africa is still confronted with various challenges and backlogs to deal with service delivery, that can overlap in years to come. Issues in relation to that are unabated corruption, ineffectiveness and

inefficiency of public servants which contributes to the slow pace of achieving service delivery. Be that as it may, delivery of services will remain as a challenge, gesture or a procedure on the paper (rhetoric) if social accountability is not taken into consideration. That is not due to the level of interest of rural dwellers to face that but is the result of predisposition actions of public servants. Inevitably, the accession of government's authority in every sphere is marked by dynamics which subsequently result in the bias and avoidance of social accountability. Although the South African public servants are impelled to abide with the democratically reformed and transformed public policies which also open up for transparency and social accountability within the public sector, service delivery is unabated in relative majority of rural areas. Thus, poor people, particularly in rural areas will suffer and face the inadequate delivery of services.

Several studies realised the importance and the usefulness of social accountability in reassuring a more transparent government and an inclusive public engagement in service delivery (Wahyingsih & Hastjarjo, 2014; Batorowicz *et al.*, 2006; Ackerman, 2005; Ababio, 2004). Social accountability leads to the point of government openness and engagement of the communities for expediting service delivery (World Bank, 2011; Mathekgga & Buccus, 2006; Ackerman, 2005). Furthermore, the ineffectiveness and maladministration of the government has led to the poor service delivery in the country (Mokgopo, 2016; Okafor *et al.*, 2015). Subsequently, the failure of government to provide the basic services derives from the cancer of corruption rooted in the political office bearers and their inability to execute their mandate designated to them (Allan & Heese, 2011). It is of utmost importance that, there should be collaboration among the people working in the same environment regardless of their culture, creed or religion to ensure the success of the services and avoid rivalry, protests, riots *inter alia*. Furthermore, issues around corruption are seen the key role players hindering service delivery in South Africa. Thus, government is not putting strenuous efforts to deliver the services due to corruption, greediness and egoistic of public servants. Much emphasis on service delivery has been put in urban areas whilst non-urban areas are being sidelined without the provision of basic services (Alexander, 2010; Hussain *et al.*, 2008). Then, it can be concluded that the bureaucrats are faced with a myriad challenge in the process of delivering services due to ambiguity and bone of

contention between rural and urban settings. It is therefore recommended that the best mechanism in conveyance of service to adopt is community-based organizations (CBOs) approach.

Community based organization could be a better vehicle to deliver services in the midst of the challenges that the South African government is faced with. It could be argued that the establishments of community-based organizations was precisely because of the concerns that raised in terms of service delivery. Thus, the members of the community acknowledged that their needs and demands have never materialized in that regard. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that community-based organizations cannot be disregarded when deliberating on the issues of the service delivery. That is because the nature and aim of the community organizations are in an actual fact the driving force of different kind services. It has been divulged further that community-based organizations often provide services and offer support to the most marginalized, disadvantaged, neglected and stigmatized sections of the society (Wilson *et al.*, 2012).

The community-based organizations ensure the effectiveness and proper service delivery because their purpose is driven by passion and the alacrity to improve the social welfare of the community (Slaymaker *et al.*, 2005). These are based on the voluntary of the individual with a zeal to change the situations and improving service delivery in their communities. It is in this sense that all the benefits and services acquired from the organization are shared equally and justly without any government interventions and such will assist in terms of building the society and the communities. As a result, the facilitation of social cohesion, social capital and social network will then be a vehicle towards building the community. It cannot be muted instead it must be proclaimed that community organizations play a critical role in raising funds, mobilizing local resources and to enhance their capacities to ameliorate the social distresses (Batorowicz *et al.*, 2006; Hussain *et al.*, 2008). These organizations do not exist in vacuum; they exist to serve the interest of the people. Despite the paucity of government interventions, community-based organizations play a profound role in conveying services to the people. Hence, it is recommended that for proper, better and swift service delivery there is a need for a clear collaboration between community-based organization and public servants; provided the acts of

corruption, self-interests, biasness, ineffectiveness and inefficient among others are dealt with.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper highlighted the challenges of service delivery in South Africa in the midst of formulated legislative frameworks. Considering the fact that legislative frameworks are perceived to be the suitable guide in the process of service delivery. However, even in the presence of good policies and legislative frameworks, service delivery has been perceived as a dire scourge that relative majority of South African people are still confronted with. There is a lack of interaction, relationship between service providers and receivers (beneficiaries). To attest to the abovementioned statements, there are protests, riots and barricades among others that follow one another and/or happen concurrently in a form of demanding service delivery. The result of such kind of acts are assumed to be instigated by the ineffectiveness, maladministration, incompetency, corruption and biasness in the delivery of services; hence there is a poor service delivery. Nonetheless, the paper reveals that the realization of sluggish and poor service delivery brought about a picture of community-based organizations as the impeccable approach for service delivery. Hence, the paper recommends the involvement of community organization in the process of service delivery.

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