

SERVICE DELIVERY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Prior to the 1994 elections the government to be, namely the African National Congress (ANC) was wooed and dined by the international proponents of the Neo-liberal philosophy. These countries donated lavishly to this liberation organisation's "war coffers" with the idea that they had to introduce the dictums of the IMF and World Bank when they came into power. The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) was already imposed globally. The bank requires that borrowing governments must accept privatisation of public organisations in order for them to get access to loans and debt relief. Country after country, world wide, had already taken this route when the ANC took power through a negotiated settlement. The Washington Consensus is another case in point where the neo-liberal project for Africa, with South Africa as a driving force has been established. The ANC government implemented GEAR as the South African version of neo-liberalism. This policy eroded the central purposes of production and distribution and cost recovery became the new word for all organs involved in providing basic services.

How The Neo-Liberal Project Has Impacted On Service Delivery For The South African Population.

During the past year we have witnessed many protest actions of various communities right across the country in response to poor service delivery of the basic needs of society. The state, represented by local governments, which are supposed to provide services to the community, became the facilitator between private companies and the communities for service delivery.

The direction of service delivery became haphazard although methods have been worked upon for the past ten years. This can be attributed to the constantly changing institutional frameworks. All of us can recall the fanfare with the introduction of the Redistribution Delivery Programme (RDP), which was later followed by Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) and now Asgisa (Accelerated Growth Initiative). According to an HSRC report of January 2004, the public expenditure for service delivery to eradicate the backlog is inadequate. The current target is to clear the backlog for water delivery by 2008 and for sanitation by 2010. The report concluded that at the current level of investment calls for R2.3 billion for infrastructure for electrification and R3.2 billion for water and sanitation.

In the recent past, changes were introduced with regards to cost recovery to accelerate delivery and the provision of free basic services. This is due to the contradiction between the willingness to pay and the ability to pay. The HSRC report concluded that social spending had increased over the last decade from 52.9 percent a decade ago to 58.3 percent in 2004. We can thus see that the government expenditure was less than 6 percent for health, education, welfare, housing and other social services. The government needs to spend more on social service to eradicate the current backlog. The sad part is population is not static. All of us are aware of the lofty ideals of the Freedom Charter; i.e. Houses for all, the doors of learning shall be open, etc. This is while the South African labour force is showing a declining trend or at least the job creation rate is not sufficient to absorb an ever increasing number of job seekers and the current job creation myth is in sectors that make use of casual and/or temporary employment, with its consequent insecurity and low wages.

The burden of unemployment has fallen hardest on the labourers. Job shedding has been concentrated mainly in the less skilled and lower paid occupations. The rural population and migrant workers lag in their access to the provision of infrastructure and the social wage.

The Provision Of Basic Services Is Both A Constitutional Requirement And A Social Necessity:

Water

Basic service delivery at present cannot supply those who are the most desperately in need and who can least afford it. An immediate relationship between cost delivery of a service and the revenue received from the beneficiaries has generally not been possible. The problem is mostly due to the project management of the process and the privatisation of these services.

Funding of local governments, and their growing power but lack of capacity is hindering the process. Capacity in this case only means incompetence. A situation has arisen where some South African communities suffer from diseases related to a lack of clean water and sanitation services. This is due to the

privatisation of water – the corporatisation of water. A system of pre-paid water meters has been introduced in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal regions. The result has been that the poor who could not afford the costs resorted back to collecting water from polluted rivers and streams. The outbreak of cholera was inevitable. . The sanitation infrastructure of many a municipality or local government cannot process the sewage and this poses health hazards to the community “of maaier in die water”.

Electricity

The HSCR reported that in 1994 ESKOM declared that it has the capability to generate excess electricity, but only 36% of the South African households had access to electricity, which means that ± three million households were without electricity. The backlog of electrification proved to be another failure of the government. It was predicted that in 2000 about 2.75 million households would be without electricity but it rose to 3.65 million by the end of that year.

Investments in the distribution networks were falling significantly short of what was required to maintain the infrastructure and to extend the network to meet the growing demand. As a result the government’s objective to provide secure and reliable electricity is under threat. The power outages in Johannesburg and Cape Town is testimony to this. The government’s response to this was to establish Regional Electricity Distribution Services (REDS) based on market principles. In other words, privatisation or corporatisation of electricity service on the basis of the cost recovery philosophy.

Once again the contradiction between the willingness to pay and the ability to pay was revealed. A process of increased infrastructure for the community, with less accessibility to use of the service due to the lack of money to pay.

Public Transport

The development of toll roads right across the country is another indicator where the government has abdicated its role of service provider but instead opted to play the facilitator’s role. The rail system had been neglected over the past years, which has forced people to make use of the road transportation system. This caused the road system to deteriorate beyond imagination. Private companies have then been established to provide and maintain public infrastructure at a cost to the population. Parastatals become more and more under pressure to implement cost recovery principles and procedures. The restructuring process is underway and already we have seen the unions responding to this threat. The essential service of rail transport is being diverted to the department of transport, while the so-called core functions are streamlined, downsized, right sized, etcetera, to meet the Structural Adjustment Programme hammered out during the Washington Consensus.

Health and Education

The current cost recovery project was extended to the Health System. Basic health services were decentralised from provincial hospitals to community hospitals. Local governments were given the responsibility to manage this process. The argument being punted is that health services are brought to the community. Ambulances are also decentralised to service the community without servicing the community. These bleeding hearts do not have the community’s plight at heart but aim to replace their responsibility to the community with the community taking responsibility for their own basic health care, with the resultant competition for services amongst the community. The result is long queues and poor service delivery.

The same applies to the education system. Forgotten is the demand for a free compulsory education for all. The responsibility for education and training falls more and more on the shoulders of the community with the same cost recovery principles. The uneven development of the South African population on a micro and macro level results in some cases that learners do not have access to learning due to the inability of their parents to pay the school fees. The same applies to tertiary education where the lack of funds debar many from entering the community of education and training. Education and training has become a business run by the community for the community. The educational institutions are compelled to pay for basic service delivery. The learners’ parents are paying or staying without basic services delivery for their households, paying learning fees to have access to learning, and some of these fees are used to pay for basic service delivery.

Housing

Although housing is a provincial responsibility it is the task of municipalities to identify beneficiaries for the state's housing programme and to forward these to the department of local government. The needs of the South African population are basic and simple but they depend on the state to provide it for them. This fact, coupled with the "shock" of violent protest against the ANC government is the stark message to the future government.

Statistics from a document "Urbanisation" revealed that in the early 1980's that there was a formal house for every 3.5 white people in South Africa and only 1 house for every 43 black people. In 1989 Gauteng contained 412 000 formal houses in black townships, with 422 000 shacks in backyards and 635 000 shacks on vacant land. More than 7 million people throughout the country live in shacks of one kind or the other. According to a ABSA bank survey in 2004 the South African government was able to build only \pm 1.5 million low cost housing between 1994 and 2003. The same survey estimated that around 30% of the economically active population is unemployed, this is a clear indication that a significant portion of households are not able to afford even meagre housing facilities. This is while the country is experiencing a rapid urbanisation process, with ever increasing informal settlements. We already saw that the increase in urbanisation results in an increasing conflict due to the population competing for these basic and simple needs. To use one example "Cape Town has a housing backlog of 261 000 homes, but estimates indicate that the city has the capacity to build only 11 000 houses a year. And with an annual influx of 16 000 people a year into the city, delivery cannot meet demand." (Mail and Guardian online 5 April 2006).

Cost Recovery And The Sustainability Of Service Delivery

There is a contradiction between the provision of basic services and the poverty of the population. The high level of disconnection's by TELKOM after their roll-out campaign of telecommunication services for the rural population is a clear indication of the inaccessibility for those willing but unable to pay for services. The decrease in water usage after the installation of prepaid meters is another example. The conventional approach to the financial sustainability of projects is cost recovery for service provided. There is a strain between the poverty of people and the meeting of cost.

Cost recovery in itself means cost. In some cases the technology and personnel involved in this process is more expensive than the revenue collected. The low access to services due to the inability to pay results in the increase of cost for the services and less revenue to the provider. The South African population growth is not static and service delivery is facing an ongoing challenge that seems insurmountable with the current neo-liberal policy of the South African government. This is while a huge area of working class poverty of the South African population indicates that wage employment is unable to satisfy the basic necessities for life and household support.

The Response Of The People

In response to the ANC government assault being mounted on the population through this neo liberal project, a variety of new community organisations began to rise to challenge all the above social epidemics within the community. These organisations based in particular communities and in their defence is a direct response to the Neo-liberal policies of the state.

The state's inability to be a provider and it's failed promise of service delivery has been the spark that ignited the establishment of community organisations that resulted in the development of social movements. These organisations also took up the strategy of direct action. They concentrated their activities within their localities and on immediate issues. Resistance spread across the country. In Soweto, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) switched on the disconnected electricity. In Cape Town (Khayalitsha) residents of Mandela Park put people evicted from bank owned houses back into the houses and occupied the banks' offices. Residents of Phomolong in the Orange Free State, engaged in violent protest against poor service delivery and the stalling of government subsidised housing. These movements have engaged in action that threatens stability and order according to government officials. They have challenged the very boundaries of what was for a very short-time seen as political after the demobilisation of the organisations of the people.

Conclusion

The social movements are currently challenging every move from the ANC government to implement their neo-liberal policies. They have fought off private companies that were hired to evict them in Cape Town; disconnection's in Durban and Johannesburg; poor service delivery in the Orange Free State and the

privatisation of water in the Eastern and Western Cape. Their biggest triumph was to mobilise an estimated 20 000 people in the Red March during the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

What is to be done ? We are currently seeing a process where a minority of people are either joining the formations of the APF in Jo' burg or Cape Town on a regional scale or on a national scale trying to build the Social Movement Indaba (S.M.I) . Comrades, let us start building these organisations.

E. De Klerk

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