

# Africa Public Service Day

23 June 2005

## Report from the Stellenbosch Panel

### 1. Introduction

Africa Public Service Day 2005 had as its theme, “The role of the State in the reconstruction of Africa”, and emanating from that, the issues pertaining to public service reforms in order to fulfil that role. The mode of engagement whereby panels of policy actors at Parliament in Cape Town, as well as at the Universities of Pretoria, Stellenbosch, Fort Hare, KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo, and in Bloemfontein, were linked via DSTV, already reflected a creative search for new solutions. To add to the stimulation of creative thinking, each panel was surrounded by a gathering of local stakeholders that could pose questions to be explored in the national dialogue. The purpose of this report is to focus on the contribution from Stellenbosch. This will be done by briefly explaining the composition of the panel and studio audience, by highlighting aspects of the input given by panel members and the questions posed by the studio audience, by summarising the discussion in the studio after the national dialogue, and the steps identified to ensure that the creative energy released by APSD 2005 will not be allowed to just die away again.

### 2. The panel and studio audience

The Stellenbosch panel consisted of the following members:

- a. Prof. Johan Burger, facilitator, Director of the School of Public Management and Planning of Stellenbosch University ( [apjb@sun.ac.za](mailto:apjb@sun.ac.za) );
- b. Prof. Mark Swilling, Sustainability Institute, and School of Public Management and Planning, Stellenbosch University ( [Mark.Swilling@sopmp.sun.ac.za](mailto:Mark.Swilling@sopmp.sun.ac.za) );

- c. Dr. Goonasagree Naidoo of the Department of Political Studies, University of Cape Town ( [gnaidoo@humanities.uct.ac.za](mailto:gnaidoo@humanities.uct.ac.za) );
- d. Dr. Moenieba Isaacs of the Programme for Land And Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape ( [misaacs@uwc.ac.za](mailto:misaacs@uwc.ac.za) );
- e. Dr. Thomas Mogale of the School of Public and Development Management, Wits University ( [mogale.t@pdm.wits.ac.za](mailto:mogale.t@pdm.wits.ac.za) ); and
- f. Dr. Norman Maharaj, Public Service Commissioner ( [.Nmaharaj@opsc.gov.za](mailto:Nmaharaj@opsc.gov.za) ).

Apart from the panel, the studio has been set up to also accommodate room for approximately 30 studio audience members from the various departments of the Provincial Government of the Western Cape, as well as senior students and associates of the School of Public Management and Planning of Stellenbosch University. The following people participated as studio audience:

Provincial Officials: Mr R Adams, Mr A Assim, Ms D Elford, Ms L Esterhuysen, Ms J Fortuin, Mr G Fredericks, Mr F Jacobs, Ms C Joelson, Mr D Kruger, Ms C Mentoor, Dr I Meyer, Mr M Mfene, Mr T Mguli, Mr S Twani, Ms R Wentzel.

PhD & MPA students: Mr A Lewis, Mr FS Habtemichael, Mr P Mutagoma and Ms NT Matshabane.

Visiting senior Danish managers/mid career students from Copenhagen: K Petersen, MV Jungersen, O Winslow.

### **3. Input by panel members**

The consensus nationally during the dialogue was that *the State is back after its New Public Management winter..., but differently from the bureaucratic state of old*. This provided the context within which “model” stakeholders serving the interest of African societies with their huge developmental challenges were defined as the conclusions of the Stellenbosch panel.

The service to society, also repeatedly defined in terms of “good governance” during the APSD dialogue, starts with the needs of the most important stakeholders, namely

members of society. The challenge to be seriously grappled with is to ensure **participation** in the form of engaging them meaningfully - not symbolically or on the level of rhetoric only - in all aspects of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. Such meaningful engagement is based on accepting that development is not about individual dependence on developmental public services, nor about being empowered to become self-sufficient and independent, but being empowered for interdependence whereby the investment made in developmental services earns dividends through the unleashing of social capital. This is the spirit of *ubuntu*. This, however, is only possible if information flows freely to each and every corner of the African continent, which implies **transparency**.

The enabler of the above engagement is visionary and decisive leadership, which brings us to the second group of stakeholders, the leaders of the continent, whether they are regional, national or community leaders. These leaders must accept **accountability** for the outcomes of developmental service delivery and must ensure **predictability** through their commitment to the rule of law. The challenge is therefore to develop a leadership culture based on credibility and integrity, respected by society and public servants alike.

Public servants form the third group of stakeholders, and defining the “model public servant” again starts with accountability and therefore integrity. This integrity contains an attitude of compassion with people as well as competitiveness in service delivery for and with people. Such an attitude is based on context-specific knowledge and willingness for continuous learning to expand that knowledge. There is no room for arrogance of bureaucracy and its accompanying superficial learning whereby a “language” is acquired to merely say the right things and hide incompetence behind a boring drone of ideology. It is also based on a willingness to acquire the relevant skills and mastering contemporary technologies that will ensure competitiveness without losing sight of context. The combination of compassion and competitiveness will invariably lead to context-relevant customisation, which is a characteristic of good governance and of the caring state.

Development of a positive leadership culture and the learning to be undertaken by public servants brings us to the fourth and final stakeholder group to be focused upon, namely academia. Africa’s development challenges simply do not allow room

for objective ivory tower auditor-like academics criticizing the other stakeholders from a distance, telling them what they are doing wrong, based on the wisdom gained from textbooks. Criticism remains important, and the textbooks should not be burned, but knowledge transfer to the other stakeholders must be informed by knowledge generation from practice. Action research amongst the people and amidst the problems to find pragmatic solutions is expected of Africa's academia.

The construct "development" may not have received the same focus during APSD deliberations as good governance, and one of the panel members expressed the need to unpack it in a similar manner. This needs to be done in order to consider the contemporary approach in certain quarters to posit human security as a critical aspect of the developmental state yet we also heard the extent to which human rights have been sacrificed in the pursuit of this following the September 11 attacks in the USA. This better understanding of what the real challenges are for a developmental state will remove any ambiguity about the essential and vanguard role of the State in meeting these challenges.

In conclusion to this summary of summaries received from members of the panel we should consider whether the deliberations of the panel in particular, but also of all the panels contributing to the APSD dialogue cast any new light on the challenges of Africa's development. Probably little has been said that were not said before from political stages, in state of the nation addresses, budget vote submission speeches or lecture rooms all over Africa. But the motivation and energy derived from the APSD experience and unleashed amongst panel members and participants should not be underestimated, nor allowed to fade into nothing over time. The creativity of the organisers and the contributions of participants must somehow be captured to ensure that the resources and effort were investments made. This "somehow" became the topic of a further round of dialogue between panel members and other participants in the Stellenbosch studio after the cameras were shut down.

#### **4. The Stellenbosch studio dialogue.**

The intensity of the national dialogue allowed little time for obtaining input from the studio audience during the broadcast. Upon a request from the audience, the discussion continued afterwards and comments from the audience mostly turned to

Provincial experiences on impediments to reform and manifestations of bad governance.

Aspects highlighted, include the “poaching” of staff from one another whereby lack of capacity is continuously being shifted around instead of being addressed, lack of commitment to and involvement in sincere transformation and development and so many senior managers’ unwillingness to accept development challenges and successfully engage with communities. It also focussed on the issue of language whereby beneficiaries cannot express their needs in their home language because public servants cannot understand that language, which results in such breakdown in communication that services such as health services are rendered totally inappropriately. Finally, lack of engagement with beneficiaries is a reality in flagship initiatives such as the N2 housing project.

In spite of discussing these negative realities, the overwhelming sentiment expressed was the need to continue the process started by the APSD dialogue in the Province. The idea of continuing as a “think tank” with regular opportunities to explore reform issues and share experiences in order to retain momentum was expressed. Space should also be provided on the internet for continued dialogue. The facilitator undertook to follow up on these suggestions.

## **5. Next steps**

The following plan of action is proposed:

- a. Report to Provincial, municipal and community leaders on the need expressed to continue the reform dialogue;
- b. Set up a “chat room” for internet based dialogue;
- c. Create further opportunities for reform related discussions between all stakeholders in the Province. In this regard, the coming Winelands Conference may be used as a milestone event.

The outcome of the Stellenbosch gathering can be summarised as a sincere commitment to ensure that the ripples caused by APSD 2005 do not die away, but rather gain momentum to change and energise service delivery in the

Province. Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi and the APSD 2005 project team must be congratulated on the success of the APSD 2005 project, which in itself should serve as case study on how to purposefully and meticulously serve challenging objectives and overcome the impediments in the way towards reaching such objectives.

## **Annexure: Abstracts of inputs by panel members**

### **Abstract -Africa Public Service Day, by Dr. Goonasagree Naidoo**

Although there has been much progress in terms of meeting the immediate service delivery objectives by the South African public service, there are still various factors that influence service delivery outcomes. The lack of optimal service delivery is due to the detrimental legacy of apartheid, lack of sufficient resources (fiscal, human resource and technical), institutional culture, socio-economic malpractices (such as theft), and too short a time since 1994 to implement all aspects of the new policies of the South African government successfully. More significantly, ineffective policy implementation, and a lack co-ordination, communication, accountability and transparency are impacting on service delivery outcomes. It is also evident that the needs and demands of South African society outweigh the capacity of the public service to deliver services at the requisite pace.

The debate serves as a vehicle to advance rapid improvement of service delivery in South Africa. The debate reflects that it is necessary to improve leadership and governance, to accelerate service delivery at the pace that is needed in South Africa. The public service also needs to address weaknesses and challenges that impact on its ability to deliver services. For example, the improvement of policy implementation is crucial for effective service delivery. The approaches and strategies should reflect changing trends in South Africa, regionally and internationally.

The improvement of service delivery in the South African public service cannot be achieved in isolation from other fundamental processes, procedures, systems and approaches. The South African public service needs faster responses to the needs and demands of society, better utilization of resources, improved monitoring and performance and a more conducive work culture, to maximize efforts by departments. Due to the complexity of service delivery, the South African public service cannot simply rely on a particular approach to meet its objectives, but rather must adopt several parallel approaches, which should be adaptable to each situational context in South Africa.

The need for an integrated framework is not only required to improve service delivery technically, but also to develop techniques based on, for example, communication, co-operation, developing partnerships, team work, improving transparency, promoting a code of ethics, and using a communitarian approach to provide services to South African communities. The objective is to turn the public service into an effective vehicle for service delivery, imbued with a concern for performance and greater consideration for the interests of society, particularly poorer communities in South Africa.

The improvement of service delivery cannot be achieved in isolation from other fundamental changes within the South African public service. It forms part of an essential shift in culture. In this regard, there is a need for an acceptance of local narratives within the South African context. The shift is to ensure that improved service delivery is a dynamic social activity out, of which social, cultural and political imperatives are integrated within a leadership and governance framework in the South African public service. It is important for the South African public service to take cognizance of socio-economic, cultural and political perspectives of employees of the public service, as well as recipients of these services. This is important to create a conducive environment for the improvement of public service delivery.

Within the context of regional and global integration, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has raised critical issues on every facet of South African society. The South African public service is no longer isolated, but acknowledges that it is part of and contributes to the larger sphere of global governance. It is an aspect of transformation that necessitates the South African public service to taken cognizance of this, if the public service is to be relevant within the African context and be in accordance with the common vision of socio-economic development in the African continent. What is required is effective leadership and governance that can genuinely accelerate service delivery performance by the South African public service, as well as partnerships locally, nationally, regionally and globally, based on shared responsibility and mutual trust. It is concluded that valuable lessons can be

learnt from the debate. The attributes of a multidimensional and multifaceted leadership and governance framework that are appropriate for the unique diversities in the South African public service are promoted.

## **Position Paper by Prof Johan Burger, facilitator Stellenbosch**

When then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki made his, “The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World”, speech at the United Nations University on 9 April 1998, he *inter alia* related his African Renaissance vision to conditions of peace, stability, prosperity, and intellectual creativity. Now, seven years later, it is clear that the vision was not merely a dream. Much has been realised in a short time through engaging with global issues and setting up supra-state structures such as the Pan-African Parliament, NEPAD and the Peace and Security Council to remove impediments and support the realisation of that vision.

We also see very visible evidence of hard work to put in place mechanisms and arrangements for enhanced development and service delivery. An abundance of new world-class legislation, regulations and guidelines prescribe how service delivery operations and development projects should perform. In this, at least the intention to perform better is described so that operations and projects are executed competitively with the best the world of public service reforms has to offer.

However, acceptable levels of accountability, predictability, participation and transparency, which are acknowledged as key features of good governance (Fuhr, 2000:65; Asian Development Bank 2004) demand a level of sophistication in public sector reforms where service activities are not only structured, executed and supported competitively, but also comprehensively aligned with and measured against particular and widely shared strategic visions for society. It demands strategic integrity whereby all services and their delivery processes, as well as that partnering and competitive arrangement surrounding them are integrated with each other and with the strategic vision.

This does not imply “one-size-fits-all” solutions, because appropriate public services are expected to be delivered and society is developed in a context sensitive manner, and this delivery and development and their long-term impacts are expected to be sustainable, thereby providing real investment in society, the environment and the economy. The link between strategy and operations therefore must allow for high

levels of customisation, as opposed to the traditional bureaucracy that treated it as routine, ongoing, standardised, and functionally isolated.

The sub-themes and principles selected for Africa Public Service Day 2005 describe a cluster of needs and issues related to that “tactical” area between strategy and operations. If that is not sound, it will always inhibit exemplary strategic initiatives and sound operational directives from delivering the condition that would set in motion the positive spiral of prosperity and intellectual creativity towards even more prosperity implied by a “renaissance”. Such sound tactical management is concerned with the set-up on how to serve the vision and achieve strategic objectives. This “set-up” addresses institutional arrangements, localities, networks and alliances, and then also the long-term multi-activity endeavours (programmes) derived from policy objectives and choices. But it simply must also address organisational culture.

Unfortunately, because tactical initiatives function in ongoing organisations, they are also vulnerable to the weaknesses of those organisations. This is probably the main reason why delivery falls short of expectations in so many developing countries (Brinkerhoff, 1991: 8): When tactical programmes suffer from the weaknesses of the organisations they belong to, they cause projects and operations to fall short on outcome expectations even though these projects and operations deliver the expected output. The need is therefore to focus on ensuring capacity to deal creatively with the tactical environment, including making entire organisational design and dominant organisational culture conducive to integrated delivery; else activities will constantly revert back to following the way of least resistance.

The debates on Africa Public Service Day are strongly influenced by academia. The question we have to answer is when tactical capacity is failing, is it due to inappropriate capacity development or even lack of knowledge generation on what appropriate capacity development should be? It is argued here that aspects of ethics, better resource utilisation, a more focused development orientation, empowerment and greater equity in service delivery, greater responsiveness and better information as the underlying principles of the role of the state in the reconstruction of Africa call for a much more intense tactical focus.

*Our history of struggle, and the indomitable spirit of our people have taught us that survival is not about fitness alone. It is about perseverance, comradeship, wisdom and caring. To grow and develop you need to be strong to stay the course, to adapt to change and to take care of those displaced by it – Trevor Manuel, 2001*