

Chapter 59

Operation Sukuma–Sakhe: A New Social Contract for Decentralized Service Delivery and Responsive Governance in KwaZulu–Natal

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the emerging new social contract that connects government departments, communities, civil society, and the private sector through Operation Sukuma-Sakhe (OSS) in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa. This program is designed to expedite service delivery and development by addressing communal challenges such as poor or non-existent service delivery and lack of coordinated government programs and cooperative governance efforts. Social contract theory forms an analytical and conceptual framework to gauge the government’s commitment through the OSS program in delivering decentralized services in partnership with communities and other development sectors. The effective functioning of OSS depends on the full and equal commitment of government, underpinned by a new social contract with other departments, the community, and citizens as both recipients and agents of decentralized service delivery. Primary data sources were interviews with OSS regional officials, supplemented by documentary data from the literature and state and local government sources.

INTRODUCTION

In South Africa the endemic lack of basic services not only impacts on standards of living, health, and well-being, but also affects the overall socio-political and socio-economic conditions of communities and ultimately impacts on the overall quality of life (Cebekhulu, 2013). The situation has led to a “massive crisis of delivery” (Zulu, 2013, p. 70) underpinned by gross poverty, high unemployment rates, and income inequality, and without quality and sustainable basic services, the poor will continue to sink into destitution and underdevelopment. Only a package of integrated structural reform can reverse this dire situation (Gumede, 2014). With the prevailing socio-economic challenges, communities are poor and

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fragmented due to the lack of human and financial resources, and their poverty is aggravated by few of the available resources and assets being utilized for their own development and empowerment (Cebekhulu, 2013; Malala, 2015; Terreblanche, 2012). This unresolved service delivery crisis has led to escalating anger and frustration as people feel cheated out of their long-cherished hope of “liberation [that] would bring with it freedom from political oppression inflicted by racism with its attendant ills—poverty, hunger, homelessness, ignorance and diseases” (Zulu, 2013, p. 65). Indeed, service delivery that is non-existent or of poor quality remains an aggravating issue for South African development.

South Africa is currently engulfed by multiple challenges: poor service delivery, high profile cases of corruption, high cost of living, slow economic growth, high rates of unemployment, death on the roads, a high crime rate, and a threat to the independence of public institutions (Sunday Independent Newspaper, 2013). One could argue that the political center is disintegrating. South African citizens have long sought a democratically elected government which would effectively address their needs and aspirations (Thakahthi, 2000), and the failure to meet these challenges has triggered nation-wide strikes and demonstrations. President Zuma, during his State of the Nation address, dismissed the link between strikes and poor service delivery (2014, p. 14):

...the right to protest, peacefully and unarmed, is enshrined in the Constitution. However, when protests threaten lives and property and destroy valuable infrastructure intended to serve the community, they undermine the very democracy that upholds the right to protest. The dominant narrative in the case of the protests in South Africa attributes to government’s failure to deliver on its development, democratic and service delivery mandate.

Zuma went on to argue that:

...however the protests are not simply the result of failures of government but also of the success in delivering basic services. When 95% of households have access to water, the 5% who still need to be provided for, feel they cannot wait a moment longer.

Zuma (2014) suggested that people’s expectations could be addressed through a National Development Plan (NDP) that calls for the convergence of a capable state and an active and responsible citizenry. The NDP was adopted in 2012, with the aim of eliminating poverty and reducing inequality by 2030. This would require the South African Government to reconfirm the commitment made in its Reconstruction and Development Programme in 1994. However, South Africa still faces the triple challenge of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, challenges faced by all democratic administrations. The Zuma administration is focusing on five priorities: education, health, the fight against crime and corruption, rural development and land reform, and job creation (Zuma, 2014). Zuma acknowledges that the government cannot achieve these aims in isolation, but must work collaboratively with the business and employment sectors to increase South Africa’s economic growth rates above 5% in order to create the much-needed jobs.

Development in South Africa faces three major challenges: the state’s fiscal foundation, the capacity of the public service, and the international environment (Habib, 2014). Demands and expectations to deliver basic services are enormous but resources are limited. Nengwekhulu (2009) blames poor or

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