

Management of collaborative partnerships for the delivery of social welfare services

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ABSTRACT

The South African social welfare system is characterised by the need for the transformation of services and the need for the promotion of service integration among different stakeholders. In the context of the socio-economic transformative processes brought by political reforms of the nineties partnership between stakeholders became a key for the improvement of services delivery by government departments. The Department of Social Development (DSD) prefers an alternative service delivery mechanism for the delivery of social welfare services. The developmental model of service delivery adopted by the DSD had a subsequent impact on the transformation of the policy framework, programmes as well as the restructuring of service delivery mechanisms. This required a form of partnership between the DSD and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the kind of collaboration adopted was different from the one that existed prior to the reconstruction and development process. The relationship between the DSD and NGOs has evolved over time, the value thereof being determined by the purpose of the relationship. However, it is important to note that in the new dispensation the DSD has developed policies which seek to transform racially based government-NGO relations. Collaborative partnership is therefore central to the DSD's value system, its service delivery model as it refers to both clients and role-players as partners. However, having a value system and ensuring the practical application in achieving the intended goals and better partnership outcomes seem to be a challenge for both the DSD and NGOs. This article examines the management of the collaborative partnership for the delivery of services in South Africa with specific reference to the DSD and NGOs. Managing the partnership is a crucial public administrative function for managers employed by the DSD. This article uses a case study

in order to analyse the collaborative partnership management processes between the DSD and NGOs. The article concludes that the DSD and NGOs are committed to collaborating in the process of delivering social welfare services, but that the current policy framework seems inadequate in ensuring that the partnership is managed effectively. It is also noted that the policy management regarding the alternative service delivery approach is not yet well-established within the DSD. Decentralisation in managing collaborative partnerships between the DSD and NGOs increasingly contributes to institutional incapacity for joint planning, coordination of activities and communication. In this article it is recommended that the DSD develops a strategy on alternative service delivery mechanisms to guide activities in the context of collaborative public management. This can be achieved using two alternatives: a policy splitting and a linear policy succession. Policy splitting is recommended to implement the Non-Profit Organisations Act, Act 71 of 1997, distinguishing between Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) requiring registration status to undertake NPO work, and NGOs collaborating with the DSD to deliver social welfare services. Linear policy succession implies replacing the Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers with a new policy with the same purpose, but incorporating other elements required for the management of collaborative partnerships between the DSD and NGOs.

INTRODUCTION

The South African social welfare system is characterised by the transformation of services and the need to promote service integration among different stakeholders. One of the broad goals of the country's Reconstruction and Development Programmes (RDP) was the alleviation of poverty, which has a direct impact on the DSD's social welfare programmes. The developmental model of service delivery adopted by the DSD had a subsequent impact on the transformation of the policy framework, programmes as well as the restructuring of service delivery mechanisms. Since 1994, the South African social welfare system has been characterised by the transformation of services and the need to promote the integration of services delivery by different stakeholders. This was inevitable in the context of the socio-economic transformative processes that followed the political reforms of the 1990s. One of the broad goals of the country's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is the alleviation of poverty. This goal has had a direct impact on the DSD's social welfare programmes. The developmental model of service delivery adopted by the DSD required this department to transform its policy framework, its programmes as well as restructuring service delivery mechanisms. This transformation called for a form of partnership between the DSD and NGOs different from the one used prior to the RDP.

The critical role that NGOs play in providing basic services and developmental programmes is recognised world-wide. Their existence and capacity to deliver are recognised and valued, irrespective of the precise nature of their work and operational scope, because they fulfil multiple roles and functions (Kuye and Nhlapo 2011:99). Their growth has been fostered by the fact that government institutions continue to contract out public services. This promotes NGOs' participation in policy development and implementation. The South



African social welfare system has evolved over different administrations, and is strongly rooted in the activities of NGOs. The country is not immune to the challenges and successes of transformation and policy reforms, including their impact on the functioning of NGOs as partners in service delivery.

In 1997, the DSD (then called the Department of Welfare) already established the National Interim Consultative Committee on developmental social welfare to mitigate some of the challenges experienced with regard to the fragmentation of the social welfare community, and the diverse stakeholders that deliver services (Department of Welfare 1997:20). The need to coordinate the collaborative efforts between NGOs and the then Department of Welfare (renamed the DSD since) would later lead to the development of the *Advisory Board on Social Development Act, Act 3 of 2001*. However, the intended benefits of these initiatives have not yet been realised. Lombard (2008:126) points out that the South African government's failure to support NGOs raises questions about its commitment to developmental social welfare services in the country.

This article investigates how social welfare policies provide for the management of a collaborative partnership between the DSD and NGOs to deliver social welfare services. To answer the question, a qualitative approach was used which allowed participants' views and perceptions of the phenomenon to be explored, including the meaning the respondents attached to collaborative public management in relation to developing and strengthening partnerships for the delivery of social welfare services.

This article examines the management of the collaborative partnership for the delivery of services in South Africa with specific reference to the DSD and NGOs. Managing the partnership is a crucial public administrative function for managers employed by the DSD. The article intends to put the evolution of the partnership between the DSD and NGOs into perspective and it provides hints for the review of policy management processes regarding the collaborative partnership. In order to meet its objectives the article provides an overview and identifies alternative service delivery arrangements before it examines the collaborative public management. It then outlines the policy framework for social welfare services as well as the outcomes of content analysis. Thereafter, the article proposes alternative policy options before it concludes.

OVERVIEW

Social welfare policy is a specific form of public policy; it is a subset of public policy concerned with the allocation of public resources to improve the wellbeing of individuals and the community (Dobelstein 2003:30–31). Social welfare policies are reflected in programmes planned to provide care and protection to vulnerable groups in the South African population.

A mixed delivery approach as an alternative form of social welfare service delivery is increasingly used by the DSD, based on the value of partnerships with NGOs. This approach is evident in the number of NGOs registered through the *Non-Profit Organisations Act, Act 71 of 1997*. However, although the number of role players in service delivery has increased, the majority do not necessarily have formal agreements with the DSD to deliver social welfare services. As a result, the DSD sometimes experiences problems regarding the effective management of service delivery by NGOs. These problems relate to the achievement of

common social welfare services goals, the coordination of activities, the protection of beneficiaries where necessary, and accountability to the DSD as the department mandated to provide these services. These problems are caused by the inadequacies of the two main policies currently governing the relationship with NGOs, namely the *Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers* (DSD 2004) and the *Non-Profit Organisation Act, Act 71 of 1997* (RSA 1997). The *Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers* establishes and defines the relationship between the DSD and NGOs based on funding and the redistribution of resources, while the *Non-Profit Organisations Act, Act 71 of 1997* focuses only on the registration of NGOs in the database of Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) providing a range of services in the country. Therefore there is a vacuum in terms of the description of the DSD's relationship with unfunded, unregistered and/or deregistered NGOs, and this has an impact on the overall management of service delivery by the NGO sector.

In response to the problem discussed above, the article explores the argument that ineffective management of NGOs leads to the DSD's inability to coordinate activities across the sector, thereby limiting its capability to provide a comprehensive approach in its response to the social welfare needs of the public. One possible solution to this problem is to develop a comprehensive policy on the management of the collaborative partnership between the DSD and NGOs. Such a policy would make provision for the mandate of the partnership, the establishment of common goals between the partners and joint planning, and would promote coordination and accountability mechanisms.

ALTERNATIVE SERVICE DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS

Governments adopt alternative service delivery arrangements as part of administrative reforms to sustain public service delivery (Hughes 2003:81). Part of public decision-making regarding the adoption of alternative service delivery involves creating a balance between production costs and management costs, which means that public managers have to identify how management costs influence production costs (Brown and Potoski 2006:326; Carr, Le Roux and Shrestha 2009:408). In order to do so, public managers have to understand the actual expenses government can cover from the budget allocated to deliver services, compared to how the third party costs these services and how much government is willing to spend on managing the third party's service delivery. The application of Public Administration theory (strategic planning, resource allocation and decision-making) is critical to assist public managers in making appropriate decisions on the adoption of alternative service delivery arrangements.

Governments establish systems in order to enable themselves to perform their functions referring to the provision of economic infrastructure and collective goods and services; resolving and adjusting group conflict and maintaining competition; protecting natural resources; facilitating minimum access by individuals to the goods and services of the economy (especially the marginalised); and to stabilise the economy (Hughes 2003:88–90 and Thornhill & Hanekom 1995:1). The DSD as an organ of government has to provide basic social welfare services (collective goods and services) in terms of Section 27 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act of 1996*. Anderson (2006:235–236) insists that public policies involve the provision of services to enhance the personal and material wellbeing of people. To give effect to its mandate, and in recognition of the nature of its policies, the department of social development identified



a basket of social welfare services to deliver as goods and services to the public (DSD 2005:20–23). These services are rendered in collaboration with NGOs.

Alternative service delivery involves the relationship between public entities and non-public actors, the business sector and not-for-profit organisations, where the institutional function, service, task or assignment which an institution is obliged to perform is performed by a private party on behalf of the institution (National Treasury 2004:3–4). Warner and Hefetz (2008:155–160) identify complete contracting out and mixed production as the two main alternative service delivery forms. Levine and Fisher (1984:179) list privatisation, intergovernmental service delivery, improving operating productivity, de-professionalising bureaucracy and devolving service responsibility as alternative service delivery mechanisms. For the purposes of this discussion, the focus is on contracting out and mixed production as the preferred options that apply to the DSD.

The South African public administration system has established a regulatory framework in terms of which public entities, national and provincial governments can enter into public private partnership (PPP) agreements on matters relating to their functional responsibilities or service delivery competence (National Treasury 2004:3). The main reasons for contracting out services are reduced costs, better quality of services, management flexibility, reduced public monopoly due to competition, and the need to uphold the public's right to choose preferred service providers (Warner and Hefetz 2002:70–72). When it contracts out services, government maintains the responsibility to determine the quality, timing and quantity of the services to be provided. For example, the DSD has contracted out the payment of social assistance to registered beneficiaries. Through a competitive procurement process, the payment of different social grants was outsourced nationally to a private company. This allowed public managers more time to facilitate access to social assistance through streamlined grants registration and administration.

In terms of the *Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers*, the DSD outsources social welfare service delivery by means of three options, namely purchasing and financing by subsidising programmes, a closed tender, and an open tender (DSD 2004:20). These financing options are invariably applied based on the historical collaborative partnership between the DSD and NGOs.

COLLABORATIVE PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Collaborative public management is the process of facilitating policy development and implementation by means of multiple organisational arrangements (McGuire 2006:33). One of the benefits of administrative reforms is the recognition that the government cannot take full responsibility for the delivery of public goods and services. Alternative service delivery through partnership with NGOs is currently being used by the DSD. NGOs in this regard is a collective name for all organisations irrespective of whether they operate at community, provincial, national or international level or are aligned with religious institutions. According to Hughes (2003:81), subsidisation occurs when the government provides a budget to the private or Non-Profit sector for the provision of particular services where the government is involved in monitoring the utilisation of funds. Currently, the DSD provides subsidies to NGOs through the implementation of the *Policy on Financial Awards to service providers*.

This policy defines the relationship between the DSD and NGOs based on the allocation of funds for services rendered (DSD 2004:7). In order to manage the collaborative partnership effectively, public managers have to know what this partnership is and how it is influenced by collaborative public management. This study is centred on understanding the partnership between the DSD and NGOs. When collaborative public management is applied, public managers are responsible for policy development and implementation monitoring by collaborating partners. They also have to manage the partnership to ensure the realisation of the initial objectives for collaboration. Managers involved in collaborative public management must consider elements such as collaborative governance, structures and management skills, and modelling the collaborative partnership (Thomson and Perry 2006:22).

Collaborative partnership is therefore a relationship where two or more organisations or actors who share a common purpose agree to work together to achieve that purpose. This implies that there should first be a partnership which takes the form of collaboration in order for that relationship to work. As already stated, partnership with NGOs is used as a philosophy for social welfare services, as reflected in policies to acknowledge the value of the social welfare service delivery. The choice and application of collaboration with NGOs as a preferred alternative service delivery arrangement requires the implementation of collaborative public management as a standard for public managers who manage collaborative partnerships.

In mapping the factors that influence successful policy implementation, Brynard (2009:565) argues that inter-organisational cooperation is a factor that cannot conclusively lead to successful policy implementation. The nature of the policy and its intentions should guide policy analysts and public managers in deciding whether cooperation and collaboration are required. However, in view of the organisational value of the partnership with NGOs in service delivery, social welfare policies developed by the DSD should make provision for the meaning and the form of collaboration required. As stated previously, the DSD has developed and facilitates the implementation of the *Non-Profit Organisations Act*, Act 71 of 1997 and the *Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers* to support collaboration with NGOs in the delivery of social welfare services. Any form of alternative service delivery takes place in terms of the broader framework for collaborative public management, which is an essential public management technique to be mastered by the public manager.

Elements to be considered by managers involved in collaborative public management are namely: Collaborative governance, collaborative structures, collaborative management skills and modelling the collaborative partnership. These elements are briefly examined below:

Collaborative governance

When applying collaborative public management, it becomes inevitable for the public manager to manage across organisational boundaries. That is why Thomson and Perry (2006:24–25) maintain that partners must understand how to work together while the public manager has to understand the shared responsibilities accompanying collaborative partnership.

Collaborative structures

In order to achieve the purpose that brought organisations together, an operating system has to be established, which will focus on policy implementation and management – ‘doing



what it takes to achieve a goal' (Thomson *et al.* 2007:26). Collaborative public management occurs in various settings which would require the public manager to relate with horizontal stakeholders within the hierarchy of the organisations as well as horizontally across different organisations in the partnership.

Collaborative public management skills

To be effective in undertaking collaborative public management, public managers have to acquire and demonstrate a set of skills and behaviours. These are useful competencies when consistently applied to inter-organisational relations. These skills are grouped into five categories, which are:

- Leadership and management competency comprising of collaborative leadership and decision-making, cross sector design, organisation and management and effective and inclusive participation skills;
- Process competency comprising of effective communication, working in teams and groups facilitation and negotiation and conflict management;
- Analytical competency comprising of evaluating and adapting processes
- Knowledge management competency comprising of integrating technical and scientific information and using information and communication technology in collaborative processes;
- Professional accountability skills comprising of personal integrity and professional ethics and self-knowledge and reflective practice skills (Emerson & Smutco 2011:9).

POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES AND OUTCOMES OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

The adoption of mixed delivery approach as an alternative form of social welfare service delivery is on the increase based on the value of a partnership with NGOs adopted by the DSD. This is evident in the number of NGOs being registered through the *Non-Profit Organisations Act, Act 71 of 1997*. As the number of role-players in service delivery increases, the majority of them do not necessarily have formal agreements with the department of social development to deliver social welfare services. As a result, the DSD experiences problems regarding the effective management of service delivery by NGOs, which consists of the achievement of common social welfare services goals, co-ordination of activities, protection of beneficiaries where necessary and accountability to the DSD as the mandated department to provide these services.

The abovementioned problem is caused by the inadequacy brought by the two main policies that are currently governing the relationship with NGOs, namely: the PFA and the *Non-Profit Organisation Act, Act 71 of 1997*. The PFA establishes and defines the relationship between the DSD and NGOs based on funding and redistribution of resources while the *Non-Profit Organisations Act, Act 71 of 1997* only focuses on registration of NGOs in the database of NPOs providing a variety of services in the country. There is a vacuum in terms of the description of the relationship with unfunded, unregistered and deregistered NGOs and this has an impact on the overall management of service delivery

by the NGO sector. It is therefore assumed that ineffective management of NGOs leads to the DSD's inability to co-ordinate activities across the sector. As a result, it limits its capability to provide a comprehensive approach in its response to the social welfare needs of the public. The possible solution to this problem is the development of a comprehensive policy on the management of the collaborative partnership between the DSD and NGOs. This kind of policy would make provision for the mandate, the establishment of common goals between partners, joint planning, and promotion of co-ordination and accountability mechanisms.

This article has stressed that the *Non-Profit Organisations Act*, Act 71 of 1997 and the *Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers* are inadequate in allowing an effective management of collaborative partnerships between the DSD and NGOs in the delivery of social welfare services. Table 1 outlines the objectives of each of the two above-mentioned policies. This paves a way for one to depict the inadequacy that exists between the two policies.

Table 1: Objectives of the *Non-Profit Organisations Act* and the *Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers*

Objectives of the <i>Non-Profit Organisations Act</i>	Objectives of the <i>Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an environment in which NPOs can flourish. • Establish an administrative and regulatory framework in terms of which NPOs can conduct their affairs. • Encourage NPOs to maintain adequate standards of governance. • Create an environment in which the public can have access to registered organisations. • Promote a spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility in government, and other interested parties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish the funding relationship between the DSD and service providers that render social welfare services. • Determine the requirements and mechanisms for making financial awards to service providers. • Provide a tool to facilitate the transformation processes in the delivery of social welfare service. • Develop the capacity of previously disadvantaged organisations. • Create an enabling environment for new service providers previously excluded from government funding.

Source: South Africa 1997 and DSD 2004:7.

Based on the comparison of objectives above, it is evident that both policies focus primarily on establishing the administrative facility and regulatory framework, and on the funding relationship. There is no provision for the management of the relationship between DSD and NGOs outside of these main objectives. Except in the objective of promoting cooperation and joint responsibility with government departments and other parties, the *Non-Profit Organisations Act*, Act 71 of 1997 does not refer to collaboration and partnership as key words inherent in the administrative and regulatory framework. In the foreword of the *Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers* to Service providers, the Minister responsible for the DSD recognises that “government continues to make efforts to ensure greater collaboration and partnership with NGOs and civil society in general” (DSD 2004:1) and that social development has become a joint responsibility of the government and NGOs (thus a partnership), with the government providing the necessary funding.

ALTERNATIVE POLICY OPTIONS

The preliminary outcomes of the analysis of social welfare policies in this article are linked to what Cloete, Wissink and De Coningh (2006:140–144) list as considerations for policy options generation, namely, problem identification, determining objectives and alternatives (for policy change). Except for the *White Paper for Welfare* (South Africa 1997b), the DSD does not have a comprehensive policy that guides the management of a collaborative partnership between the DSD and NGOs. Quade (1989, cited in Cloete *et al.* 2006:129) argues that

...the key to the analysis of public policy is the identification of policy and organisational goals. To be rational in our policy choice of actions we have to know what we want to achieve. Until it is decided what a policy or programme is supposed to accomplish information about policy alternatives, costs and effects has no particular value.

Clarification of organisational goals and objectives relating to collaborative partnerships with NGOs is an essential component of how the relationship is established and maintained. If the DSD's policies recognise a partnership with an NGO, then there needs to be clearly defined goals about what that partnership is, who the partners are and how the partnership should be developed and managed. An analysis of social welfare in relation to collaborative partnerships with NGOs demonstrates that the mission, vision and values of the DSD reflected in Table 1 can be viewed differently from a policy development context. The fact that policies are often diverse and fragmented supports the argument of the article that the key policies, namely the *Non-Profit Organisations Act*, Act 71 of 1997 and the *Policy on Financial Awards for Service Providers* of 2004, are generally inadequate in supporting the capacity of the DSD to manage its collaborative partnership with NGOs. The value and purpose of generic and programme-specific policies is recognised, but the design of such policies seem to create a policy management problem for public managers in their management of collaborative partnerships between the DSD and NGOs rendering social welfare services (Cloete *et al.* 2006:126).

The purpose of policy analysis is to find the best policy option available to an organisation, by assessing options against organisational values, net social and economic benefits, constituency interests, the resources required, and professional judgement (Anderson 2006:128–133; Cloete *et al.* 2006:138–139). Alternative development seeks to answer the question “What needs to be done, if anything, about the problem?” (Anderson 2006:109). The policy change model presented by Cloete *et al.* (2006:291) was applied for the alternatives generated in the analysis in this article. A policy analyst can propose policy maintenance or adaptation, policy termination, policy innovation or policy succession, based on the outcomes of the analysis process. In this article, the policy succession option is proposed based on changes in service delivery strategies, service delivery demands and changes in the environment in which social welfare services are delivered.

Cloete *et al.* (2006:295) defines policy succession as the purposeful replacement of an existing policy by another one in the same sphere of activity. This can be done *via* two alternatives, namely, policy splitting and policy linear succession. Policy splitting in relation to the *Non-Profit Organisations Act*, Act 71 of 1997 would involve the separation of

regulations related to NPOs, which are currently operating widely in South Africa, but are not necessarily involved in social welfare service delivery, compared to NGOs, which are operating primarily in collaborative partnership with the DSD in delivering social welfare services. If the DSD splits the regulatory framework, the Department will be in a position to manage the diverse NPOs currently registered in terms of the *Non-Profit Organisations Act*, Act 71 of 1997 and contained in the related database of NPOs. In addition, NPOs, which are currently accredited and regulated by programme-specific policies, would be allocated a separate regulatory framework. Both components would be derived from a common generic NPO regulatory framework. The current institutional capacity and resources in the DSD should be reconfigured to ensure that this alternative works.

Linear policy succession is applicable to the *Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers* (2004). According to Cloete *et al.* (2006:295), this alternative involves “total termination of the policy and a new policy is formulated to achieve same policy objectives”. A new policy should be developed to replace the current *Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers* and it should have funding relationship as one of its elements in relation to the management of a collaborative partnership between the DSD and NPOs.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that NGOs play a significant role in the delivery of social welfare services in South Africa. In the country’s historical and socioeconomic development, various factors have played a critical role in sustaining the partnership between NGOs and the DSD, to such an extent that working without this relationship seems unimaginable for the DSD. A collaborative partnership with NGOs is therefore a predominant and preferred alternative service delivery approach for the DSD in the delivery of social welfare services. Nevertheless, alternative service delivery is not a well-established policy management approach in the DSD. While the *Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers* refers to both outsourcing and collaboration with NGOs as the basis for the allocation of funding, very little is provided for in terms of policy and management practices by other policy frameworks. This has contributed to a lack of capacity for public managers to manage the partnership, resulting in a fragmented approach to understanding and managing collaboration with NGOs.

The DSD has made an effort to manage the collaborative partnership effectively by establishing an appropriate institutional structure in the form of the directorates responsible for the NGOs and partnerships, and service provider management and support. However, the decentralised function and fragmented responsibilities are increasingly contributing to institutional incapacity to deal with the joint planning, decision-making, coordination and contract management required for collaborative public management. This article therefore concludes that the social welfare policies developed by the DSD thus far do not yet provide for the management of the collaborative partnership it has with NGOs. However, the DSD does recognise and acknowledge working jointly with these organisations as a principle essential for more effective service delivery. Thus, at present, this principle does not yet serve the purpose of an alternative service delivery arrangement, but it can potentially lead to improved service coordination and integration among partners if policies are revisited.



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