

# **REALISING THE FULL POTENTIAL OF PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM PHILOSOPHIES: WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE NIGERIA'S SERVICOM AND SOUTH AFRICA'S BATHO PELE PRINCIPLES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Nigeria and South Africa have established themselves as strong continental players in the African region and wield a lot of power and influence. Both countries have played and continue to play important roles in international forums but have similarly sought to self improve their governance processes through initiatives that focus on enhancing public service efficacy. It can be argued that this is of primary importance because the improvement of public service delivery will significantly contribute to and propel the countries towards their desired changes and assist them in the attainment of their development visions.

The adoption of the Service Compact with all Nigerians (Servicom) and *Batho Pele* philosophies signal a realisation that the public service could do better, and needs to do better, in order to serve the public adequately. The Servicom philosophy has five principles namely; conviction, renewal, consideration, avowal and dedication. While South Africa's *Batho Pele* Principles consists of eight principles namely, consultation of users of services, setting of service standards, increasing access, ensuring courtesy, providing more and better information, increasing openness and transparency, remedying mistakes and failures and providing value for money.

This article is a critique of these philosophies, their content and its comprehensiveness as well as implementation. It also points out critical issues for consideration in an attempt to strengthen these initiatives.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria and South Africa are viewed as being amongst the continent's most powerful nations. The reason for this is that both nations have huge developmental potentials, have played, and continue to play, prominent roles with regard to pushing the African agenda on international platforms through their committed leadership in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU) as well as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative.

The NEPAD vision (which is a result of the merger of the Omega Plan and the Millennium Partnership for African Recovery Programme) arises from a mandate given to five initiating heads of states, among them-Nigeria and South Africa. This drive to re-energise the African forums is directly related to the fact that despite Africa's abundant resources (human and natural), it can be argued that the African continent has been riddled with governance challenges, which has had developmental implications for the peoples of Africa.

Although much of the blame could be laid at the doorstep of the colonisers, it is important to emphasise that, the reshaping of the continent's future rests on Africans who must strive to turn policies around for the better. In this regard, new initiatives aimed at ensuring that Africa's dormant potentials are fully actualised have led to debate and dialogue on African renaissance, the recognition and urgency for Africa to take control of its destiny and claim its place on the world stage. One of the areas that could be turned into a possible opportunity for effectiveness is government reform philosophies that seek to improve public service delivery in any given state.

There is a case for public service philosophies that underpin administrative reform in selected countries, given that one of the main objectives of any public service entity is to adequately develop its systems in a manner that best serves its citizenry. A number of reforms have characterised the public service in both countries (Nigeria and South Africa). Ademolekun (1986: 159-160) notes that administrative reforms refer to systematic changes in the administrative system designed to lead to a more efficient and responsive administration. In Nigeria and South Africa, there have been several attempts to reform the public service and much has been written about these (Kuye 2006; Levy & Tapscott 2001, Nnoli 2004). The aim of this article is to review and critique the current philosophies that underpin public service delivery in the two countries: Nigeria's *Service Compact with all Nigerians* (Servicom) and South Africa's '*Batho Pele*' philosophies.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF NIGERIA

Present day Nigeria consists of three previous colonial territories namely; the Colony of Lagos, the Northern and Southern protectorates. In 1906, the Southern Protectorate and Colony of Lagos were amalgamated and subsequently in 1914, all three (Lagos, Northern and Southern Nigeria) were amalgamated to form the Protectorate of Nigeria under one administrator. Although supposedly a political fusion, as Elaigwu (1994: 226)

notes, the British, like most colonial administrations, did not give thought to the form of administration that would best suit the people in the territories. Thus, the former colonies of Northern and Southern Nigeria were still administered separately. With the dawn of independence and the scramble for political control, this system promoted interpersonal rivalry, intertribal rivalry, regionalism and ethnicity at the expense of nationhood.

## SERVICE DELIVERY IMPERATIVES: THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

The Nigerian government consists of the federal government, 36 state governments and 774 local governments, with extensive government machinery in all the three tiers of government making its executing agency a large one with a complex structure. Over the years, several projects and programmes that have been initiated and commissioned have not necessarily been seen through to fruition. This has brought about a concept known as *abandoned projects*. Akobundu (1995: xxxi) notes that there is a huge magnitude of abandoned projects in Nigeria. This is because spending does not necessarily translate to project delivery.

The public funds paid out to the concerned contractors do not translate to actual service delivery and complaints from the public are hardly addressed as issues of probity and accountability are disregarded with little or no consequence whatsoever for the contractors. The need for better service delivery as a means for improving the socio-economic conditions of the citizenry is critical as non-delivery of services enriches a few, wastes public resources and deprives the masses of the programme/project benefits that would have otherwise accrued to them.

Ayida (1987: 58) observes that "it is not easy to explain the collapse of essential services in Nigeria". This statement is true not only for essential services but for all public service delivery imperatives in general. There is inadequate water supply in all major urban centres, persistent failure of the electricity supply, breakdown of communication networks (notably roads), rapidly deteriorating social services which can be traced to attitudes of public officials as well as crises in management at all the levels of government. This is further complicated by the fact that while the bulk of the services are to be delivered at local levels, resources are withheld at the centre, making the centre all-powerful and extremely attractive for coups and counter coups. Suberu (1990: 270) notes that the constitution placed *virtually the whole gamut of public affairs within the exclusive legislative competence of the centre*. This issue of resource control and utilisation at the appropriate level of government is of a precarious nature and prompted the *Second Republic* leadership to promulgate the *Revenue Act, 1981*, with the distribution of revenue as follows: Federal government – 55%, State government – 35%, local government 10% (Ekpo, 2004: 21).

The tides may be turning as the Obasanjo regime (1999-2007), in recognition of the role that all the other levels of government could play to improve service delivery, has recognised Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) as a mainstream activity of the federal government with its own administrative structure, a situation which is applaudable, if properly managed. This move has uplifted the status of IGR to a fully fledged ministry

with a responsible minister in the office of the Presidency since 2003. The IGR Ministry's mission is "to provide sustainable framework for integrated planning and collaboration amongst the three tiers of government for more transparent, effective and efficient service delivery to the people" (Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, Youth Development & Special duties 2006 [http://www.nigeria.gov.ng/fed\\_min\\_inter\\_gov\\_aspx](http://www.nigeria.gov.ng/fed_min_inter_gov_aspx) Accessed: 25 May 2006). A position which has in turn triggered the establishment of similar ministries at state level to harness intergovernmental relations activities, as is the case with Lagos state (<http://www.lagosstate.gov.ng/ministry/ministry.htm>. Accessed: 23 May 2006).

## SERVICOM (SERVICE COMPACT) PHILOSOPHY

According to the Office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Servicom is based on the principle that Nigeria can realise full potential if citizens receive prompt and efficient services from the state. It requires a show of commitment and renewal, consideration for all the rights of Nigerians to enjoy economic and social advancement, the need to deliver quality services in a dedicated manner that is fair, honest, effective and transparent (<http://www.servenigeria.com/index.php?option=comcontent&task=view&id=5&Itemid=6> Accessed: 23 May 2006).

The introduction of the Servicom philosophy in 2004, signals the nation's entry into a critical phase. The initiative is unprecedented in the history of the country, where for the first time, government has taken the lead in educating the masses to rightfully demand quality service (<http://servenigeria.com/index.php>. Accessed: 23 May 2006). This is a remarkable effort given that the issues of non-delivery, corruption, indiscipline and lack accountability have plagued the Nigerian public service for so long have remained uncurbed because the public servants expected the people to be grateful for services that are rightly due to them. A situation summed up by the then President of Nigeria (Mr Olusegun Obasanjo) noting that (Servicom, 2006)

*Nigerians have for too long been feeling short-changed by the quality of public service. Our public offices have for too long been showcases for the combined evils of inefficiency and corruption, whilst being impediments to effective implementation of government policies. Nigerians deserve better. We will ensure they get what is better.*

The Servicom philosophy is a well articulated concept arising from a review of service delivery in 2003, which sought to examine institutional environments for service delivery, reflect on peoples' lives and experiences, and draw a road map for a service delivery programme (Servicom, 2006). The review report (Servicom, 2006) noted that:

- services are not benefiting people as they are inaccessible and indifferent to customer needs;
- public confidence is poor and institutional arrangements are confusing and wasteful;
- service delivery programme should rather respond to citizens and consumer demand;
- service entitlements and rights (including timeframes and fees) should be communicated to the people;

- information on performance should be published;
- services should be redesigned around customer requirements; and
- leadership commitment should be mustered from the top (along side values such as selflessness, integrity, accountability, openness, honesty objectivity and patriotism).

The SERVICOM (Service Compact with all Nigerians) has five principles namely:

- *Conviction* – Nigeria can only realize its full potential if citizens receive prompt and efficient services from the state;
- *Renewal* – commitment to the service of the Nigerian nation;
- *Consideration* – to respect the needs and rights of all Nigerians to enjoy social and economic advancement;
- *Avowal* – to deliver quality services based upon the needs of citizens; and
- *Dedication* – to provide the basic services to which each citizen is entitled in a timely, fair, honest, effective and transparent manner.

The location of the Servicom structure is in the office of the President, with ministerial units which reports to the minister in charge. The key role of that Servicom structure is to ensure that the public is aware of the Servicom principles and that charters (operational plans) are in place and displayed for the public to see. The key roles of the ministerial Servicom units are to spearhead departmental compliance through customer surveys, training, production of performance reports, serve as a link between Servicom and the ministry as well as to manage the customer grievance procedures. However, the fact that the devolution mechanisms at state and local government levels are unclear and that stakeholder participation is an optional component minimises the impact that this unit should have had.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa was a country torn by racial divisions as a result of the Apartheid system of government that promoted the interests of a few at the expense of the majority of its people. The South African liberation struggle, like most other liberation struggles, had an underlying class issue although this class struggle was distinctively linked to racial lines. However, in an attempt to attain complete freedom, an intrinsic part of the struggle was to emancipate previously oppressed groups through participatory democracy. One of the aims of the new democracy was to address the class and racial divides through improvement in service delivery hence it can be said that the removal of political, socio-economic inequality were intertwined and thus, is and remains, an overriding goal in the South African state (Ile, 2000: 16).

With the first democratic government being formed after the 1994 elections. With the establishment of a democratic system of government through a peaceful process, transitional mechanisms were put in place through the drafting of the South African constitution that enabled a truly democratic government. The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 has been hailed as a masterpiece and seeks to enable

the achievement of governmental goals, including improvement in service delivery. The challenge, therefore, of building democracy in South Africa thirteen years after independence still includes how best to manage institutional processes and interactions within the governmental framework in a manner that promotes the delivery of quality public service for millions of South Africans that were previously not serviced.

## SERVICE DELIVERY IMPERATIVES: BRIEF SYNOPSIS

The South African public service, prior to 1994, was aimed at excluding the non-white population from several of the service provisions of the state. Most of the informal settlements where blacks resided were either without or with sub-standard basic amenities such as housing, water, electricity, roads and clinics. This was the scenario that led to the development of two distinct systems comprising of the first and third world economies within South Africa.

Another challenge for service delivery in the South African public was the task of synergizing the fragmented public service that catered for the different racial groups. This became a huge challenge for the new democratically elected government in 1994 with as many as 53 departments in the central administration and about 60-82 departments in the self governing Bantustan territories (Kuye, 2006: 177). This situation posed a range of governmental challenges such as resource limitations (human, financial and otherwise) and manifest in conflicts between races and classes leading to mistrust and other systemic crises such as corruption and policy contradictions. The new government had to find a way to reinvent the machinery of government and to provide the desired levels of service to all South Africans.

With delivery challenges in practically all sectors and departments, the South Africa public service of 1994 had to move the divided nation forward, given that the dawn of democracy provided a window for a new beginning and integration. At the attainment of democracy, South Africa was presented with the challenge of transformation – both institutional and policy wise. Another challenge related to how to deal with the legacy of apartheid while at the same time shaping up to the demands of a democratic and global environment (<http://www.infogov.za/otherdocs/2003/10>. Accessed: 29 May 2006).

Some further governmental challenges that the building of a new nation brought along with it included:

- the further development of a series of governing frameworks through several Acts and policies, all of which set the stage for the delivery of services. In fact, the New South African Democratic Government excelled in terms of putting together the Constitution as well as other government and sector specific plans and policies. One of the key pieces of legislation that sought to address the nature of service delivery is the *Batho Pele* principles as contained in the White Paper of 1997. The *Batho Pele* principles were to underpin the quality of service that is desirable from a government point of view.
- the implementation of relevant policies and programmes. Since 1994, the South African public service has been responding to these service delivery challenges by exploring and implementing alternative methods of service delivery (Towards a Ten

Year Review, 2003). The effectiveness of these strategies has been varied as there have been pockets of success with a major work still to be done in terms of improving delivery to the people, thirteen years after independence.

## **BATHO PELE PRINCIPLES OF SOUTH AFRICA**

President Thabo Mbeki (State of the Nation Report, 2005) noted that *the state has made progress in recent years in improving policy coordination both within and across the spheres, but these efforts need to be consolidated with greater attention being focused on implementation...more attention needs to be given to overseeing or managing the delivery process.*

The *Batho Pele* principles (White Paper of 1997) fundamentally sought to re-engineer the manner in which services are delivered from one that is government focussed to one that has a strong customer focus. The *Batho Pele* principles are:

- consultation of users of services;
- setting of service standards;
- increasing access;
- ensuring courtesies;
- providing more and better information;
- increasing openness and transparency;
- remedying mistakes and failures; and
- getting the best value for money.

The *Batho Pele* initiative is about putting people first and aims to enhance the quality of services delivered in a manner that improves accessibility, efficiency and accountability to all recipients of public goods and services (Department of Public Service and Administration, <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgov/publicadmin/bathopele.htm>. Accessed: 23 May 2006).

## **CRITIQUE OF THE SERVICOM AND BATHO PELE PHILOSOPHIES**

**F**irstly, the philosophies of Servicom and *Batho Pele* philosophies present a service delivery opportunity that is significant, transformational and a major shift from the way the public service operated and delivered services in both countries. In both instances, a poor service delivery culture had been the norm. It was brought about by the fact that services were orchestrated to be provided for a privileged few, in the case of South Africa, and where the public service did not quite recognise its existence as emanating from the need to serve the public, as in the case of Nigeria. Hence, in both countries, the public service had little or no appreciation for the manner in which it related to most or all of its customers (public). The value of the Servicom and *Batho Pele* is that it places the customers (public) at the centre of all service delivery activities, and by so doing, gives power to the public to demand adequate services.

Secondly, the philosophies of Servicom and *Batho Pele* are fairly well articulated, although the Servicom seems to be more comprehensive as it clarifies principles, structure for implementation and gives clear criteria for monitoring and evaluation. The shortcoming, however, is that it appears that implementation is almost non-existent. *Batho Pele*, is a fairly developed framework but, as Kuye (2006: 185) argues, it “did not concern itself with the question of what services are provided, neither did it address the volume, level and quality of services”. While a work still needs to be done for all government departments to effectively apply the principles, it is safe to say that there are pockets of improved service delivery in various areas.

Thirdly, both philosophies call for government units to focus on *integratedness* (both in planning as well as delivery) in a manner that ensures that appropriate services are delivered to the people. This so because, it does not matter to the public that a particular service (e.g., provision of national identity books) is supposed to be delivered by a specific department (e.g., Home Affairs), if they are unable access grants from the Department of Social Development, then Government is seen not to have lived up to its commitment. Likewise in Nigeria, if a child of school going age is admitted into school for the first time, immunisation cards may be required, however, if that is not made available through the neglect of the Ministry of Health, then government would have failed in its commitment.

In light of the above, some considerations to facilitate the effectiveness of the Servicom and *Batho Pele* philosophies are clarified below:

- • The value of the Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) mechanism and its management in supporting the effectiveness of the philosophies should be recognised. In South Africa, Chapter 3 of the Constitution, 1996 promotes co-operative government among the spheres of government. However, it can be argued that while the architecture of the new democratic state is in place, many areas of service delivery especially, the performance of the public service requires much improvement (Towards a Ten Year Review, 2003: 75). In Nigeria, chapters 1 and 2 of the Constitution seek to promote integration but in practice, there is limited integration amongst levels of government and this hinders service delivery. This article argues that in order to achieve the desired goals of a specific country and in light of these reform philosophies (i.e., Servicom and *Batho Pele*), one of the critical elements that must be strengthened is IGR and its management. This is even more so given that there has been increased interaction amongst and between spheres of government within each country making IGR more complex and intensive. Wright (1988: 467) describes IGR as a

*Huge complex building under continual construction and reconstruction. The edifice has no single deliberate overall design or consistent architectural motif. There is a non-stop remodelling and renovation, plus minor and major internal repairs; there is even selective raising and often whole floors and wings are added.*

It is, therefore, critical that attention be given to the management of IGR, with a view to making interpretations that smooth out complexities and that ensure improved coordination of the relationships among spheres of government with a view to improving service delivery.

- Improved communication and sharing of information amongst government units and with the public is recommended. This has to be effective to have the desired impact on service delivery. An effective communication is one that ensures that the intended message reaches the receiver. In the public service, the executive and administration must communicate better as this builds trust (Levy & Tapscott, 2001: 88). Furthermore, service delivery is affected by diminished trust in public officials which in turn decreases the legitimacy of the relations between citizens and the executive (Wright, 1988: 43). Within that framework, building social partnerships must be understood as a process of trust production (Boguslaw, 2002: 47-48). The utilisation of effective communication within and across government levels/spheres could lead to high levels of co-operation with the public service as national, state, local government structures and citizens collectively form a problem-solving group bringing about increased trust and refined relationships.
- It is necessary to create/strengthen monitoring and evaluation structures to act as a watch-dog, assist dissatisfied clients and also make recommendations to the departmental heads on how to reinvent, energise and transform their processes and activities to deliver quality services. These could be decentralised with units located at each department and charged with a mandatory role of monitoring across the nation and reporting on what works, what does not and how it could be made to work better. To date, the issue of monitoring and providing remedial support to various stakeholders in the process of delivery has been less than satisfactory. It may be argued that a weak link in the delivery chain could also have been due to non-compliance with and non-adherence to the existing sectoral framework resulting in oversights in the monitoring and evaluation of progress.
- Orientation and re-orientation of the public service are recommended. There have been pockets of training with regard to the philosophies of *Servicom* and *Batho Pele*. These are, however, not enough. While an attempt is made to train those in the public service, new entrants to the public service could have training in these philosophies as part of a mandatory orientation programme. Thus, the understanding of these issues may require the orientation and re-orientation of member of the public service towards a service orientated one.
- *Finally*, the public should also be educated about these philosophies. For the public to demand adequate service, they have to be well educated and informed on these philosophies. While some attempts have been made to train public officials on the concepts of *Servicom* and *Batho Pele*, more could be done through public campaigns to ensure that the public is well aware of these philosophies and their implications. Without a strong public awareness these campaigns will not be as effective as they ought to be.

## CONCLUSION

Nigeria and South Africa are strong role players in the African region and wield power and influence. The adoption of the *Servicom* and *Batho Pele* philosophies signal a realisation that the public service could do better, and needs to do

better, in order to serve the public adequately. The Service Compact with all Nigerians (Servicom) philosophy has five principles namely; Conviction, Renewal, Consideration, Avowal and Dedication. While the *Batho Pele* Principles (South Africa) consists of eight principles namely, consultation of users of services, setting of service standards, increasing access, ensuring courtesy, providing more and better information, increasing openness and transparency, remedying mistakes and failures and providing value for money. The philosophers are fairly well-developed; however, their implementation needs to be significantly strengthened as it ultimately amounts to nothing if members of the public do not see improvement in the quality of service delivery that they are supposed to promote.

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