

MAKING USE OF 'BATHO PELE' PRINCIPLES TO IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY IN MUNICIPALITIES

MA Mofolo (Dr Mngoma Public School, Welkom)

W Smith (Retired lecturer, Central University of Technology, Welkom Campus)

The ever-increasing residents' demands and serious incidences of violent protests against poor service delivery standards pose a challenge in municipalities. Poor service delivery causes violent protests, and at the same time huge damage to public properties. Thus, it becomes a challenge to the councillors and employees in municipalities to practice and implement the policy frameworks, such as 'Batho Pele' principles beyond 'across the counter' service.

'Batho Pele' Principles are regarded as the answer to address the impatience and protests that could result from the failures of municipalities around fulfilling the promises of social and economic development in broader context. Consequently, this article aims to propose that 'Batho Pele' principles should be used and followed in municipalities as a broader strategic mechanism to enhance community participation and accountability.

Key phrases: Municipalities, service delivery, 'Batho Pele' principles, community participation and accountability, violent protests

1 INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, it is legislated that local government should interact with communities in an endeavour to carry out the responsibilities of service delivery to ensure growth and development in a manner that promotes and enhances community participation and accountability (White Paper 1998:ix).

When considering challenges faced by municipalities of ever-increasing residents' demands and serious incidences of violent protests against poor service delivery standards, it gives the impression that community participation and accountability is a mirage in some municipalities. This assumption is supported by violent protests that are discussed in the next sections of this article.

However, this article rests on the assumption that the key to address the impatience and protests that result from the failures of municipalities concerning fulfilment of the promises of social and economic development is the broader implementation of 'Batho Pele' Principles. In other words, 'Batho Pele' principles should not be implemented only to individual residents 'across the counter', but should also serve as an approach when addressing collective needs of residents.

2 PROTESTS OVER NON-DELIVERY OF SERVICES

"Give us clear vision that we may know where to stand and what to stand for - because unless we stand for something, we shall fall for anything" (Peter Marshall).

Atkinson (2007:53) reveals that in 2005, numerous towns in South Africa experienced protests, marches, demonstrations, petitions, and violent confrontations particularly due to non-service compliance by municipalities. After the National and Provincial elections held on 22 April 2009, it was expected that a state of tranquillity with regard to service delivery would be experienced. Unfortunately what puzzles, is that even currently, protests over lack of service delivery in municipalities continue. Recently, it was reported that the residents of Thandakukhanya and Piet Retief, a town, which is 300 km south of Johannesburg, was the first to embark on violent protest about service delivery (Molele 2009:7).

Ndingane (2009:1) in his article on the front page of The Star Newspaper included a photograph in which residents of Diepsloot, north of Johannesburg went on rampage over the lack of housing on 5 July 2009, blocking off roads in the area. In another protest incident, on 7 July, SAPA (2009:4) in the Daily Sun Newspaper reported that the residents of Dinokana, near Zeerust in the North West Province barricaded the N4 road linking Botswana and South Africa, in an attempt to protest about lack of municipal service delivery.

Chuenyane (2009:11) in his article in the City Press listed all violent protest incidents experienced in the country recently, and singled out two incidents that took place in the Free State Province at Jagersfontein, where the community hall and the municipal offices were set alight; and in Bothaville, where eight people were arrested for alleged public violence. All foregoing incidents of protests were directed against poor municipal service delivery.

Atkinson (2007:53) agrees that these mass protests are directly linked to municipal ineffectiveness related to service delivery and poor response to the grievances of community members. In line with Atkinson, Kroukamp (2007:16) has found that municipal performance to deliver quality services adequately, are questioned because of alleged financial irregularities, maladministration, corruption and mismanagement.

Thus, it is unfortunate that violent protests against poor service delivery appear to be the plague that South African municipalities will have to bear for a long period. As alleviation to aforesaid municipal problems this article would like to advocate 'Batho

Pele' principles as an integral part of operational culture in municipalities, which should be practiced in order to regain residents' trust. It is also advocated that public institutions should use 'Batho Pele' principles in all corporate proceedings as a strategic mechanism to address the shortfalls of municipalities.

3 SERVICE DELIVERY IN MUNICIPALITIES: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are" (Theodore Roosevelt).

Through history it has been the commitment of South African government in the democratic dispensation to ensure regular service delivery to all households. What is central to this commitment is the right of all South Africans to have access to a common minimum standard of services. In this way, this credo satisfies the constitutional duty of all spheres of government to ensure that this is fulfilled (Department of Provincial and Local Government 2002:5).

The guideline levels in line with the World Health Organisation standard for local governments is the rendering of free basic services and it is stipulated that a basic amount of water of a minimum of twenty five litres per person should be supplied free of charge, in order to promote healthy living. In South African municipalities this has been defined as six thousand litres per household per month. It is also stipulated that the provision of a basic level of sanitation services should be provided, and where possible, it should be through the existing water-borne sanitation system. The first fifty kilowatts of electricity should also be supplied free of charge to support all households, as well as free refuse removal services (Department of Provincial and Local Government 2002:5). The non-compliance of municipalities to these issues is the cause of mentioned riots.

One of the fiscal mechanisms to subsidise service delivery to low-income households in municipal areas is that the Constitution stipulates that local government is entitled to an equitable share of nationally raised revenue. This subsidy serves to enable municipalities to provide basic services and perform their functions. It was indicated in the National Budget Review document (2005:156), that local government's equitable share was raised from R7,7 billion in 2004/05 to R11, 4 billion in the 2007/08 financial year, and horizontal division between municipalities would be based on a redistributive formula that would favour poor municipalities with less revenue-raising capacity.

In addition to above government subsidies to municipalities, Trevor Manuel (the former minister of Finance), in his budget speech in 2007, indicated that the local

government equitable share should receive a further R5 billion for the delivery of free basic services, which was to benefit an average of about eighty (80) per cent of South African households. As extra subsidy, the Municipal Infrastructure Grant allocated an extra R400 million for the total eradication of the bucket system; and a further R600 million for the electrification programme, as well as R1,4 billion for bulk water and sanitation infrastructure and R950 million to deliver water and electricity to schools and clinics. These 'windfalls' should have served to empower municipal service delivery.

The Municipal Systems Act, (Act No. 32 of 2000), section 73, stipulates that municipalities should use allocations in order to give priority to the basic needs of the local community, engage in the development of the local community, and ensure that all members of the community have access to basic services.

When the above are taken into consideration, it is clear that the National government is adequately providing for service delivery to be successfully realised in local government. Apart from making use of financial resources it is proposed that municipalities should also make use of 'Batho Pele' principles as part of service delivery.

As backdrop to mentioned problems, this article would want to propose the way 'Batho Pele' principles should be implemented as a framework for good performance and service delivery.

4 'BATHO PELE' PRINCIPLES AS OPERATIONAL CULTURE IN MUNICIPALITIES

"... Organisations shape their own future by creating a mental vision and purpose for any project, large or small. They don't just live day to day with no clear purpose in mind. They identify and commit themselves to principles, relationships, and purposes that matter most to them" (Stephen R. Covey).

According to the National *Batho Pele* White Paper (1997), 'Batho Pele' is a Sotho expression meaning 'People First'. To this end, the Ward Committee Resource Book (2005:19), as embedded in the legislation recognise that, 'Batho Pele' Principles should actually be implemented and emphasise local government institutions in order to promote the culture of good performance.

The Ward Committee Resource Book (2005:19) indicates the eight principles of 'Batho Pele', which include the following:

- consultation;
- service standards;
- access to services;
- courtesy in treatment;
- customer information;
- openness and transparency;
- redress; and
- value for money.

Each Principle as part of operational culture in municipalities receives attention in the paragraphs that follow.

4.1 Consultation (preferences/affordability)

The principle of consultation means that municipalities should consult with representatives of the communities in which they are situated about their preferences, affordability, level and quality of municipal services that are rendered. To this end, research should be conducted about various ways of consulting with members of communities. The findings then could provide municipalities with information that would be appropriate to act upon to enable effective service delivery. Such research could be done through customer surveys, interviews with individual users, meetings with ward committees, meetings with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), as well as meetings with Community Based Organisations (CBOs).

Additionally, it is essential that municipalities should have detailed databases of various stakeholders that could be consulted for assessment of service delivery standards.

4.2 Service standards (level of quality)

"... communication capacity is as important as providing basic services"
(Jack Mokobi).

To make aware community members about municipal services, they should be informed about the level and quality of municipal services through making use of local newspapers and copies of the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) should be left in the local libraries.

With regard to monitoring service delivery standards, municipalities should also hold workshops for ward committees and other organisations to inform them about their (ward committees and organisations) roles. When new services are introduced, municipalities should also follow the same procedure as indicated to inform their communities to ensure access to services.

4.3 Access to services (equality)

As shown above, municipalities should ensure that all members of communities have access to their services. Through IDPs and Service Delivery Budget Implementation Plans (SDBIPs), municipalities should ensure that community members; particularly those who are in greater need, have access to services. These could be done through establishment of units in residential areas (shopping complex) to provide identical services, such as, payment of rates and services, buying of electricity coupons, and customer care.

To this effect, this could help to reduce the distance community members, have to travel towards facilities and resources that are located in a central area. It could also be important that community members should be encouraged to access and use such units in order to avoid long queues at municipal offices.

In this way, municipalities should consider decentralising service delivery points so that the needs of people could be met with speed.

4.4 Courtesy in treatment (politeness to communities)

In addition to the physical rendering of services, "Batho Pele" principles also require that members of communities should be treated with politeness and consideration when services are provided 'across the counter'. In this way, municipalities should make codes of conduct available to their employees and such principles should accentuate that good manners to the members of communities is one of the most important duties of municipal employees. These codes of conduct should also specify that municipal employees should treat community members "*as customers who are entitled to receive the highest standards of service*".

As a result, municipalities should internally specify and make available to employees, the standards that indicate the manner in which customers should be treated. Among other standards, these could be included:

- greetings and addressing customers, as well as identifying names when dealing with customers, whether in person, on the telephone or in writing;

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- using appropriate language when using written communications, and when verbally communicating to customers, to use a friendly tone of voice;
 - indicate to the community member the maximum length of time that would be required to obtain a response to his/her enquiry, and in the event of a complaint, indicate how it should be dealt with and whom it should be referred to; and
 - be sympathetic when dealing with people who have special needs, such as the elderly or people with physical impairments.

In order to achieve above standards, municipalities should develop a programme to train all employees who deal directly with the public, whether face-to-face, in writing or on the telephone, so that they could be able to meet and perform adequately according to those standards.

4.5 Customer information (accurate and up to date)

Mokobi (2002:40) once said, *"...We need an informed citizenry that appreciates challenges we face in addressing the legacy of the past. Inform them also about resource limitations so that they themselves can engage in micro-economic and community development activities to improve their own lives"*.

In this way, municipalities should ensure that all community members receive detailed information about the extent of municipal services. For example, municipalities could inform communities about capital projects in their areas/wards in the current and the next financial year. When doing this, municipalities should provide full, accurate and up-to-date information about the services they provide, and stipulate who is entitled to those services. This exercise should be carried out properly in order to ensure that all those who need information, have access to such information in order to act as expected.

"People without information cannot act responsibly. People with information are compelled to act responsibly" (Ken Blanchard, Bill Hybels & Phil Hodges).

Various media and South African languages should be made use of to meet the various needs of different customers. Simple language and user-friendly formats should be used to ensure that information reaches everybody, and this should be accompanied by graphical material or illustrations to make it easier to understand. Brochures should also be made available at municipal offices, schools, libraries, clinics, shops, and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as at community based organisations (CBOs). In addition, information should be provided through public notice boards and municipal websites.

4.6 Openness and transparency (full disclosure)

As part of access to municipal services, members of communities should be informed in what way municipalities operate, and the price of various services, such as the tariffs for basic services (sanitation, electricity, and refuse removal) as well as rates in the proposed budget. Again, full disclosure should be provided about salaries of councillors and managers in municipalities. In such a way, openness and transparency could be the cornerstone of good governance and management.

Municipal councillors should hold meetings with residents in wards to convey this information as indicated. Municipal departments should also publish annual reports to be made available to the members of their communities, indicating in simple language and user-friendly format:

- achievements of municipal departments and how the previous year's budget (operational and capital budgets) was spent;
- municipal departmental priority projects as reflected in the IDP for the following year; and
- a name of a contact person in municipality and contact number from whom they could obtain further information.

The reports issued to community members should be treated as mechanisms through which municipal departments could account to the public, and as such, identical information should also appear in municipal annual reports to the provincial and national government departments.

4.7 Redress (communication and correctional measures)

According to Mokobi (2002:40) what need to be done is *"to create as fast as possible capacity to communicate, particularly in smaller and rural municipalities"*.

To this end, municipal councillors and employees should make sure that, in an instance where the promised standard of service is not adhered to, community members should be called to attend meetings where it should be explained what caused non-compliance. A full explanation should be provided and subsequently, speedy and effective correctional measures should be effected. It is important that when complaints are received, community members should in return receive a sympathetic and positive feedback from wards councillors or municipal employees. The capacity and willingness to take action if things are not the way they were promised, is very crucial in order to avoid violent protests.

Municipalities should have in place complaints systems and procedures that would enable staff to identify problems. The channels of complaints should take the form of face-to-face meetings, complaint boxes placed in strategic places in municipal buildings, as well as making use of the telephone and computer networks to voice and collect complaints that could identify shortcomings in service delivery.

The availability of channels or complaints systems should be well published to the community members and should be easy to use in order to achieve its effectiveness. Municipalities should inform the public and provide the details concerning complaints boxes, telephone numbers, and web site addresses for the use of computer networks.

In an instance where a delay is unavoidable in responding to complaints, the complainant/s should be timeously informed about its progress and at what time the response could be expected. Complaints should be thoroughly investigated and the councillors and employees should maintain impartiality. In the case of an individual complainant, ethical confidentiality with regard to the particulars of him/her should be protected in order to encourage complainants to voice their discontentment in the future.

When responding to complainant/s it should be ensured to address an individual's enquiries and feelings. In the event of a face-to-face meeting with a complainant, municipal managers should also train staff members to be able to take action themselves to 'put things right'. It is also crucial that complaints systems in municipalities should be structured to enable the recording of suggestions made by members of the communities in order to improve service delivery in future.

In order for staff members to take action when a complaint is received, handling procedures linked to complaints should be well-known by employees in municipalities, subsequently, training should be provided to all staff members who are offering 'across the counter' service and who are directly involved with members of communities.

4.8 Value for money (cost-effective)

Services should be provided as efficiently and effectively as possible to give the public the best possible value for money. This issue requires that service delivery should be improved, and also that the public should have access to municipal services, but it should be ensured that absolute cost-effective procedures are created.

“Being proactive is more than taking initiative. It is recognizing that we are responsible for our own choices and have the freedom to choose based on principles and values rather than on moods or conditions. Proactive people are agents of change and choose not to be victims, to be reactive, or to blame others” (Stephen R. Covey).

Therefore, it comes to the fore that 'Batho Pele' principles should be used as guidelines in encounters with individuals in 'across the counter' service and as a communication tool with individual groups (ward committees, NGOs, and CBOs), and community members at the residential areas/wards. In this way, municipalities should be flexible, proactive and more resident-oriented. In his 'statement of the nation' address in 2002, the former President, Thabo Mbeki, cited in Crous (2005:8) called on all people of South Africa to *“arise and act – Vuk' uzenzele!”* and went on to pledge that government *“will strive to give real meaning to the strategic challenge facing the Public service – Batho Pele”*.

Crous (2005:9) makes a note that *Vuk' uzenzele* does not mean, *“arise and talk”* or *“arise and think”* or rather *“arise and plan”*, but in actual fact *“arise and act”* is a better explanation. Therefore, if councillors and employees act as expected in municipalities, residents should be able to act in positive ways.

5 CONCLUSION

This article rests on the assumption that the key to address the impatience and protests that result from the failures of municipalities concerning fulfilment of the promises of social and economic development is the broader implementation of 'Batho Pele' Principles. It is also advocated that public institutions should use 'Batho Pele' principles in all corporate proceedings as a strategic mechanism to address the shortfalls of municipalities.

As a conclusion it should be accentuated that the implementation of 'Batho Pele' principles demands that municipalities should be flexible, innovative and proactive when implementing this piece of legislation as an effective system for public service delivery.

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