



The impact of the Vuwani protests on teaching and learning: Practical theological reflection

Kgatle, Mookgo Solomon
University of South Africa
kgatles@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

This article is a practical theological reflection on the impact of the Vuwani protests on teaching and learning. The protests were mainly caused by the refusal of the Vuwani residents for their area's inclusion into the newly established local municipality in the Vhembe District. The protests had a huge impact on teaching and learning in the area because more than twenty schools were burnt because of the protests. Teaching and learning in schools were disrupted, as learners were unable to attend school for more than seventy schooling days. This article is a practical theological reflection on such an impact. In order to achieve this, the article first outlines the protests in full detail including the causes and nature of the protests. The article also studies the impact of the protests on teaching and learning. The main purpose of the article is a practical theological reflection on the impact of the Vuwani protests on teaching and learning.

Key words

Vuwani; teaching and learning; municipal demarcation board; practical theology; Vhembe district; Malamulele

1. Introduction

This article is a practical theological reflection¹ on the impact of the Vuwani protests on teaching and learning. The impact of protests on teaching and learning has become a research interest. Steffgen and Ewen (2007:82) say that schools are increasingly becoming the focus of violence that affects students and teachers at all academic levels. McGaha-Garnett (2013:1) add

1 This interactive reflective process involves scripture, beliefs of the church, the one who seeks understanding, culture, and the specific ministry context to which theological reflection is applied.

that the exposure to violent in home and community environments, as well as injury due to violence, contribute to both reduced academic progress and increased disruptive or unfocused classroom behaviour for children, adolescents, and teenagers. Calvert (1999:84) reiterates that violence and/or the fear of violence have serious implications in terms of school performance, attendance, and graduation. The presence of violence affects communities, individuals, and community institutions (particularly schools) in ways that interfere with learning and success in academics.

This article is a practical theological reflection on the impact of the Vuwani² protests on teaching and learning. In order to achieve this, the article first outlines the protests in full detail by looking at the causes and nature of the protests. The article also studies the impact of the protests on teaching and learning. The main purpose of the article is a practical theological reflection on the impact of the Vuwani protests on teaching and learning.

2. Protests in South African context

South Africa has experienced high rates of public protest that have had an impact on the rights of children to enjoy a basic education. Monitoring over a period of five years indicates that protest-related action manifests in many forms, including the burning of educational infrastructure, and the barring of learners from accessing school premises and other sites of learning. Recent incidents in the Limpopo Province drew heightened attention to the extent and nature of the impact that protest-related action has on children's right to a basic education (SAHRC 2016:ii).The #FeesMustFall³ protests in South African universities for example had a huge impact on teaching and learning in 2015 and 2016 academic years. Teaching and learning was suspended for many months because of these protests. In some institutions exams had to be rescheduled to later dates.

2 Vuwani is situated in Vhembe District under Makhado Municipality in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

3 #FeesMustFall is a student led protest movement that began in October 2015 and in response to an increase in fees at South African universities (ENCA 2015). Protests started at the University of Witwatersrand and spread to the University of Cape Town and Rhodes University before rapidly spreading to other universities across the country (Kekana et al 2015).

3. The causes of the Vuwani protests

The protests were mainly caused by the refusal of the Vuwani residents for their area's inclusion into the newly established local municipality in the Vhembe district in Limpopo Province, South Africa. (Kanyane 2016:4; cf. Capricorn voice 2015). The Vuwani residents did not want to be merged with Malamulele⁴ and its surrounding villages to form a new local municipal entity. They would rather be part of the current Makhado Local Municipality than to be merged with Malamulele to form the new local municipality.

In September 2014, the Minister for department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) undertook an assessment of all municipalities across the country through back to basics programme, the results of which indicated, amongst others, that about a third of municipalities are dysfunctional whilst the other third is at risk. The assessment also found that several municipalities were not financially viable due to their geographic location and matters relating to taxation or revenue base. In Limpopo, the assessment conducted in December of that year showed that 8 municipalities were performing well; 12 had the potential to do well; while 10 were considered dysfunctional. This prompted the Minister of COGTA to invoke Section 22(2) of the Municipal Demarcation Act (MDA). The outcome of the invoking of Section 22(2) of the MDA in Limpopo Province resulted in the establishment of a new Local Municipality (LIM 345) in Vhembe District. The Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB⁵) then took a decision to amalgamate Vuwani and Malamulele into one new local municipality (Cogta 2016:3).

4 Malamulele can refer to the town of Malamulele or the area of Malamulele. Both the town (approximately in the center of the area) and area are in the Limpopo Province of South Africa and predominantly occupied by Tsonga people.

5 The Municipal Demarcation Act (MDA), 1998, established the Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB) (Act 27 of 1998). The MDB is an independent body similar to Chapter 9 institutions supporting democracy though not embedded and defined in the Constitution. MDB is responsible for the demarcation of local government boundaries and the delimitation of ward boundaries. The scope is only limited to local sphere of government. Perhaps in future, its mandate can be broadened from municipal demarcation board (MDB) to demarcation management board (DMB) to include determinations of boundaries, demarcations and delimitation issues in all spheres of government (Kanyane 2016:1).

The residents of Vuwani who were opposed to the MDB's decision to amalgamate Vuwani and Malamulele into one local municipality took the MDB to Limpopo High Court. According to SAPS (2016:3) Traditional Leaders and community structures from Vuwani area formed a Task Team called Pro-Makhado Task Team [PMTT] to fight against the decision of the MDB. They convened several meetings to establish strategies to fight against the decision of the MDB. They then made a decision to approach the Limpopo High Court.

The court dismissed the application of the Vuwani residents who were opposed to the MDB decision to amalgamate Vuwani and Malamulele into one new local municipality. According to a report by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2016:25) an application by the Masai Traditional Council to set aside the MDB decision on the establishment of a new local municipality in the Vhembe District was dismissed by the Limpopo High Court. This led to a resolve to embark on a shutdown until the local government election date. The affected community of Vuwani approached the court with the relief of setting aside the decision on including the Vuwani areas within the new entity.

The main reason for the refusal of Vuwani residents for their area's inclusion into the newly established local municipality is tribalism. In Vuwani, in addition to legitimate concerns, what is driving protests according to Salga (2016:20) is the fact that certain groups of people do not want to live in a municipality where another group of people may be a majority. Busha (2016:1) adds that tribalism is also seen by the Vhavenda King's support of the residents' opposition to join Malamulele to form a new local municipality. Busha continues to say that the Vhavenda King has condemned the violent acts, but he supports the residents' opposition to join Malamulele to form a new local municipality. According to a report by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2016:3) there are individuals who use the demon of tribalism and ethnicity to fuel conflict amongst the community which has been hitherto living side by side in peace.

Large parts of the Venda-speaking villages now commonly referred to as Vuwani are against the new demarcation while their neighbours, who are Tsonga-speaking, have no problem with it. More than fifty villages in the Vuwani area are set to be part of the new local municipality, which will

have its headquarters in Malamulele. These villages want to remain in the Makhado Municipality. It was normal day in Tsonga-speaking areas where shops were open and children were attending school during the protests (City press 2016).

City press (2016) continues to report that a villager in Bungeni, which borders Mashao – a mainly a Venda-speaking area – said the community had taken it upon themselves to protect their schools against arsonists. It is clear that tribalism is the root of all of this, where people are not willing to be led by a certain tribal group that will dominate in the new local municipality. People from all these violence-torn villages are not willing to be part of the municipality because they believe it would come with strong influence from Tsonga people.

Other than tribalism the violence and destruction of property seen in Vuwani and surrounding villages is driven by few individuals, in leadership positions, whose economic and political interests are threatened by the process of demarcation (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2016:3). It was not local residents who were behind or taking part in the destruction of properties in the area. Thugs have been running amok, instilling fear among local residents, because there has not been any march by residents on the streets of Vuwani. It is stressed that the ongoing violent protest was not mass-based. It is true that there are issues of tribalism. However, there is also a bigger political agenda at play and despite the African National Congress (ANC)'s huge support base in this area; the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) have been invading this space to an extent where local leaders are finding it extremely difficult to hold meetings among themselves and with the respective communities (Citizen 2016).

Violent protests are also informed by the boundary determination processes that concluded too close to an election which prompted people to link this too much to an election and how it directly affects impacts on them (Salga 2016:19). Review of boundaries should be an ongoing process to fulfil developmental objectives of local government beyond the call of duty of five-year local elections lifespan. It should not just be a local government elections event happening at intervals to fulfil the mandate and interest of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) (Kanyane 2016:15).

The protests take place within the context, of a state that is generally unresponsive to peaceful protest and in fact places obstacles in the way of lawful demonstration (Equal education 2016:13). People protest because of a perception that the government responds to violent protests. The residents of Vuwani are emulating other similar protests whereby the government only responded after violent actions. While this perception is wrong, the local government cannot prove otherwise. The local government does not have a strategy to engage the residents in a normal way but pays attention when and where there is violence. This perception is more likely to cause more violent protests especially in the run up to 2019 national elections in South Africa.

In summary, the following perceptions are the reasons for the residents of Vuwani's refusal of their area's inclusion into the newly established local municipality:

- Fear of the unknown – contesting for positions
- Fear of being led by Tsonga speaking people
- Lack of knowledge for the locality of the new municipal offices
- Community service delivery programmes and developments
- Anticipation of losing business opportunities
- Minimum job opportunities for Venda people
- Premier and the Government consider Malamulele as important and better than Vuwani people
- More attention was given to Malamulele people; they also demand Government attention
- The Government was able to reverse the decision of the MDB for Malamulele and therefore, they can do it for Vuwani
- Lack of proper consultation by the MDB
- The new municipality will be situated in Malamulele
- Tsonga people will take charge of the new local municipality
- No services will be taken to Venda people

This perceptions or reasons for the residents of Vuwani's refusal for their area's inclusion into the newly established local municipality are going to be addressed later in the practical theological reflection section. The focus

shall be on tribalism, lack of community engagement by the MDB, service delivery programmes and developments, other opportunities for business people and work opportunities for young people and other unemployed population.

4. The nature of the Vuwani protests

The protests of the Vuwani residents against the area's inclusion into the newly established local municipality turned violent. There was destruction of property in which the government has invested millions. The future of learners in Vuwani was hampered because of these actions. Furthermore there was a continuing number of sporadic illegitimate, illegal and violent community protests leading to the increasing attacks on councillors, their families and assets (Salga 2016:25).

According to a report by Cogta (2016:4) a sporadic wave of violent unrest exploded in Mashau, Masakona, Doli, Masia, Bungeni and Vyeboom areas. The unrests were in the form of: Blocking of roads with the trunks, rocks, stones and pipes; damaging and burning of Government properties (mainly schools and vehicles); attacking and ambushing the police vehicles patrolling the area; attacking motorists and targeted attacks on specific community members and councillors. The report continues to say that the wave of protest turned so violent that 24 schools were torched and damaged in the process. Twenty-eight schools were burnt in varying degrees, of which 15 of these are voting stations, resulting in disruption of teaching and learning since 3 May 2016. In the process five private houses were also burnt (Cogta 2016:4). The vandalised schools are close to 50. It is estimated that the reconstruction of such schools will cost about R720m (Mostert 2016:1).

Chaos continued to rage as communities vented their anger over the MDB's decision to incorporate their villages into the new local municipality. In a village called Vyeboom, a house belonging to a villager believed to be supporting the move towards the new local municipality was torched. No injuries or fatalities were reported. A school was torched in broad daylight in the village of Mashao Doli. Several villagers who witnessed the incident said a large group of people arrived at the school at about 2pm, forced the gate open and started breaking the windows of Mariadze Inclusive School.

The school is new – villagers said it had only been operating for about three years (City Press 2016).

According to South African Human Research Council (2016:14) the challenge is the volatility of the situation in Vuwani. Some officials were exposed to danger and had to be withdrawn for their safety. While mobile classrooms have been provided there is no guarantee that the classrooms or the learners will not be under threat should learning resume. Chingwata et al (2017:6) says that violence continued for several weeks and entailed the destruction of public property, including schools. In effect, this was a single protest, albeit one that lasted a long time and covered a massive area. Cilliers and Aucoin (2016:13) add that this type of violence falls between the categories of vigilantism and service delivery protest as there were acts of organised vandalism or organised destruction of public property.

Other acts of violence in the Vuwani protests includes: a truck dropped sand in the middle of the road to block access; South African Police Service trailer burnt; purification system damaged; trucks belonging to a contractor and guard room burnt (Nandoni); DPW trucks burnt and a store room (Vuwani). Furthermore, 18 private vehicles windows smashed; 5 SAPS vehicles smashed by stones; 4 burnt houses; ITribal authority office and satellite police station damaged; attacking and ambushing the police vehicles patrolling the area and Targeted attacks to specific community members and Councillors (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2016:3).

These protests started with a simple demand of the Vuwani residents. It was the demand that they simply do not want to be part of the newly established local municipality. The protests for this demand however turned violent as schools were torched and other public and private property destroyed by the protesting residents. The Vuwani residents have a right to raise their legitimate concerns, and if such concerns are not addressed have a right to assemble and demonstrate in a peaceful way. The residents do not have a right to burn schools and or other public or private property especially the public schools used by children for teaching and learning. The future generation need such schools and libraries.

5. The impact of the Vuwani protests on teaching and learning

One of the biggest causalities in the Vuwani calamity is unfortunately the education of our children. Schools are becoming easy targets. It is unfortunate that the violation of children's rights to education is proving to be a trend with many of these protests (Cogta 2016:7). Protest action does affect the right to a basic education particularly when protestors descend into acts of criminality, as witnessed in the arsonist attacks on schools in Vuwani and Malamulele areas. The Vuwani incidents starkly brought to public attention the extent to which the right to a basic education can be affected by protest-related actions that take on a criminal element (SAHRC report 2016:30).

According to the report by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2016:12) the Vuwani protests set back teaching and learning between 3 May and 10 of August 2016, when teaching and learning effectively resumed. Based on the Department of Basic Education's briefings to the Portfolio Committee, the protests affected approximately 52 827 learners from 102 schools in six education circuits in the area. The writing of Preparatory Examinations in Grade 12 and other forms of assessment from Grades 1 to 11 were also affected.

The report continues to say that the Executive Mayor of the Vhembe District Municipality, on the 10 May 2016, declared Vuwani and surrounding villages as a local disaster. The Limpopo Provincial Executive Council endorsed the decision and directed that emergency funds be released for immediate requirements. To date the government had spent R22.4 million to acquire 76 mobile classrooms. There was an additional need for 26 mobile classrooms. More funding was needed for learning materials and long-term projects. The Department reprioritised and spent in excess of R40 million in the implementation of the catch-up plan (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2016:13).

However, it is important to note that not all the problems of the Limpopo Department of Basic Education (LDoE) can be placed at the feet of protesting community members in Vuwani. According to StatsSA12, only about one in 10 (10.8%) of schools in Limpopo had access to a library, a quarter (25%) had an administration block, less than one in 10 (7.8%) had a laboratory and less than three-quarters (67.4%) have access to piped water

prior to this tragedy. The LDoE further stated that the CSIR social audit on schools infrastructure in Limpopo found that there was a shortage of 6,217 classrooms in the province. Furthermore, the interim CSIR report highlighted that there was a shortage of 40,448 toilets. The vast majority (33,669) of which were pit latrines that need to be replaced (Equal education 2016:13).

Government's intervention through their inter-ministerial team should be applauded because learners were able to write their final examination. According to a report by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2016:22) there were ongoing engagements with various structures and commitments from districts heads. Various interventions were implemented by the Inter-Ministerial Committee to bring the situation under control. Several engagements were held with all stakeholders with a view to finding resolution to the impasse that ensued.

In all the meetings held, government and stakeholders agreed to work together to stabilize the situation by increasing Police visibility in the affected areas, removing barricades, ensuring continuous community engagements and fast tracking social cohesion interventions. The stakeholders includes, King Mphephu Ramabulana, all affected senior traditional leaders including those from Vuwani areas , Hlanganani as well as Malamulele areas, religious leaders, civic origination, Education forums, unions, NGOs and the different affected communities themselves. All stakeholders condemned violence and the destruction of property. They called on for stability in the area and appealed for normalization as well allowing learners to go back to school. They unanimously condemned any manifestation of tribalism in whatever form (Cogta 2016:5). The South African Council of Churches (SACC) hosted a national day of prayer for peace and national building at the Christian Worship Centre (CWC) at Mashau in Makhado Municipality (South African News Agency 2016).

These engagements by various stakeholders yielded results in the final examination of Grade 12 learners. The Vhuronga 1 circuit in the Vhembe district came out in first place with 81.2%, despite being affected by the Vuwani protests. The Edison Nesengani Secondary School, which falls under the Vhuronga 1 circuit, was amongst the schools that obtained a 100% pass rate. Mopani in second place and Waterberg in third place

(Timeslive 2017) followed the Vhembe district, which has come out as the province's best-performing district for two years in a row.

However, these results of these grade 12 learners would have been better if the burning of schools did not disrupt teaching and learning. It is reiterated therefore that the right to protest should be carried out with due regard to the rights of other people. While some protesters are free to advance their interests through assembly, demonstration, picketing and petitioning, resorting to burning of schools undermines the right to a basic education for thousands of children who are affected through these acts of arson. The destructive nature of the protest will result in the diversion of resources that could have been spent on improving education facilities being spent on rebuilding of school infrastructure and replacement of learning and teaching materials (City Press 2016).

The most vulnerable in the Vuwani are learners in basic education especially the grade 12 learners. The violent nature of the protests became a barrier to teaching and learning because learning could not take place in such an environment that is not conducive. The burning of schools and other public infrastructure should be condemned in strongest terms and criminals should be arrested. The rights for the Vuwani residents should not infringe on the rights of children to basic education. Protests in any given day should not be a barrier to learning. It is therefore imperative that violent protests and their causes be prevented at all costs.

6. Practical theological reflection

6.1 Community engagements

The Vuwani residents would not have taken the MDB to court and violent protests would not have emerged had the MDB engaged the Community members in Vuwani about the possible amalgamation of Vuwani and Malamulele to form a new local municipality. Matthew 5:25 says: agree with your adversary quickly, whiles you are in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you are cast into prison. In this context, the Vuwani residents had to take the MDB to court because they failed to engage them on the matter.

Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with groups of people who are affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations with respect to issues affecting their well-being. When done well community engagement can bring a wide range of benefits to those involved in a particular project or plan, including to local people. It can increase trust in and improve the reputation of councils, and deliver improvements to services. In programs that involve high levels of community participation and control, there is greater peace and stability (CDC 1997:9). If the MDB engaged the Community of Vuwani they would have built trust and the matter would have been transparent. This was supposed to be done before arriving at the final decision to amalgamate Vuwani and Malamulele.

MDB should consider the inputs by community members before arriving at the final decision. They should not impose their decision on the community members. Jesus warned His disciples about such leaders who lord over other people. Jesus calls them “rulers of the gentiles” who exercise lordship over them and authority upon them’ (Mk 10:42). Leaders in this category according to Kgatle (2015:93) do not care about the people they are leading. In this understanding, leaders are dictators and autocrats because they dominate and rule their followers or subordinates. They take advantage over other people, instead of serving them. They dictate to their followers or subordinates because they think that leadership is authority and lording over others.

The inputs by community members are important to maintain peace and stability in the demarcation process. According to Kanyane (2016:10) the MDB should conduct intensive engagement process with the community to hear and scientifically analyse the opinions of the residents. Before the MDB takes a final decision about demarcation of municipal boundaries, incorporation, amalgamation, disestablishment and delimitation of wards, it must run a number of tests to satisfy itself that the decision taken is within not only the law, but also unifying.

Kanyane continues to say that when delimiting wards, it should not come at a price to tarnish the communities hope for reimagining their future. In essence, it is therefore crucial that the MDB should go beyond the call of duty to consult the affected communities through number of robust

engagements processes prior and post issuing notices to absorb the shocks. This should be coupled with advocacies and awareness campaigns about the role of MDB. Over and above issuing notices and gazetting the decisions, the communication system should also be modernised through the use of multiple social media platforms (Facebook, mobile phones, Whatsapp, Twitter and SMS) and other technology applications where one can lock in (Kanyane 2016:10).

Community engagement and local government accountability to citizens can be strengthened through innovative platforms such as the use of social media, and community radio stations. According to a report by Salga (2016:13) this will ensure that communities have positive experiences when dealing with municipalities. Ward councillors in this context are very important as they serve as the interface between the citizens they represent and the municipal officials who design and implement development polices. The councillor's job is not just to serve as the voice of the people, for the expression of their community needs, but also to act as a watchdog and to ensure the municipality implements policies to address the needs of citizens. Councillors should thus be sensitive to community views and responsive to local problems.

The report continues to say that some of lessons that are unique to this period and the kind of protest currently taking place are that the South African democracy is maturing as seen in the number of people who take up their democratic right to challenge the board in court. Undercurrents may be because of not tackling the social cohesion element. It is important to note that real issues lie with and are expressed by people on the ground who are directly affected but who do not have direct access to courts or to the MDB (Salga 2016:19).

The MDB should come down to the level of the community members and approach the affected members instead of relying on the outcome of the courts. Indeed justice can be administered outside the courts. This is not to undermine the justice system in South Africa but to recognise the fact that community engagement at times is better than court cases and their outcomes. In this context, the MDB should make an effort to make that they consult all the stakeholders in the community. These include religious, political, business, traditional leaders and other people on the ground.

6.2 Inclusive human community

It has been observed that the use of ethnicity, racism and religion is one of the most dangerous things to kill societies and starts endless wars. Therefore, the Vuwani residents must refuse to the part of those who want to wake up the demon of tribalism, which was buried in democracy, to destroy communities. The architects of apartheid and racist South African ghosts should not be awakened, for they belong to the dungeon of darkness and not in the beautiful land (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2016:4).

Inclusive human community is one of the ways to deal with such demons and make sure that they do not resurrect. It is the ability of all South Africans to co-exist in spite of and because of difference (Gqola 2001:98). The difference here does not only refer to race but also ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, geographical locations, education and gender as well as perspective shunting between self and other (Wicomb 1998:367). It is the biblical symbol of peace, a symbol of unity for South African people. Inclusive human community is a symbol of reconciliation, which affirms God's covenant with His people. It is God's covenant with all South Africans, irrespective of origin, religion or colour (Dickow & Moller 2002:177).

The same God is in a covenant with the people of Vuwani and Malamulele regardless of their tribes. God loves all of them and desire to see peace among His people. In the presence of God, people are not classified according to their ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical ability, geographical locations, education, gender and other forms but as human beings. In this context the people of Vuwani and Malamulele should unite as human beings in the spirit of Ubuntu and not according to their differences. A new local municipality in the Vhembe district belong to all people who live in it regardless of language or tribe.

In the same length, the benefits of such a new local municipality belong to all people who live in the municipality. The new local municipality regardless of the location of its offices should provide community service programmes and developments to all the members of the municipality. Business and other opportunities in an inclusive human community happen to everyone whether Tsonga or Venda or any other tribe. Inclusive human community

is principled on unity of all people. People in that community find each in their diverse cultures and languages.

According to Kgatle (2017:7) inclusive human community is able to address the root cause of violent protests. It addresses divisions because it unites people of different political affiliations and ideologies. Inclusive human community is able to address tribalism because it believes in cultural diversity. It recognises all ethnic groups in South Africa. It believes that South Africa is rich in diversity with 11 official languages and many other dialects. Inclusive human community is an ideology of equity and equality that is able to afford all its citizens opportunities regardless of race, age and gender.

In this context, inclusive human community makes it possible for the people of Vuwani and Malamulele to live together regardless of their tribe or languages. 23 years after democracy, division among people should not exist according to their tribe just like during apartheid but they should be able to live together without divisions. In inclusive human community, diversity of cultures is seen as a blessing than an obstacle. It is a way in which the Tsonga and Venda people can learn from each without fighting each other.

6.3 Community service delivery

Some of the reasons that the Vuwani residents doubted to join the newly established Malamulele Municipality was that they will not receive service. They thought that the community service delivery programmes and developments would cease once they became part of the new local municipality. They thought that the premier and the government would consider Malamulele in terms of delivery of services more important than them. The Vuwani residents perceived that there would be no services taken to Venda people.

Vuwani protests are not categorised as a service delivery protests per se but the perception by the Vuwani residents that they may not receive services in the new local municipality fuelled their refusal for their area's inclusion into the new local municipality. While this is a perception by the Vuwani residents, nonetheless it might be reality in many local municipality in South Africa where racism, tribalism, nepotism and other forms of

discrimination still determine who should receive the services. These make the concerns of the Vuwani residents legitimate especially in a country where class, gender, age, race determine how one is treated by those who are supposed to provide service.

The principles for public service delivery in the White Paper on Transformation of Public Service Delivery of 1997 include public as the clients and access to services by community members. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 and the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997 make an important contribution towards a new attitude among public servants and citizens regarding service delivery. These pieces of legislation attempt to reposition the recipients of services as the most important people whom the public servants have a duty to satisfy (Raophala 2013:13).

However, service delivery of basic services like water, electricity, and sanitation and refuse removal at local level is still poor in many communities in South Africa regardless of powerful constitution, legislations and policies. Service delivery is failing, the governance system is not functioning, and not putting people and their concerns first (Salga 2016:18). Service is still delivered to people according to their tribe and language group. Hence the people of Vuwani doubt that if they join Malamulele they might not receive services the same way they have been receiving them in their current municipality.

In order to restore the confidence of the people of Vuwani about service delivery, the local government should adopt servant leadership as their style. Jesus taught His disciples that they should not act like the “rulers of Gentiles”. They should not lead by exercising authority or by exercising lordship over others. They should serve one another. In Mark 10:43-45 He said “... but so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the greatest, shall be servant of all. Even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

According to Kgatlle (2016:128) Servant leaders demand to serve and acquire a position later. They seek to minister first and become great later because of their heart to serve. Kgatlle continues to give an example of a “waiter” in a restaurant; who directs the customers to the table first (e.g., table for

two or three), serves the customer and gets “benefits” later. Another good example is that of a petrol attendant who normally asks the motorist what type of fuel they use, performs other duties like changing oil and pouring water into the engine, washes the windscreen and asks for the payment later. This is putting service first, position, and money later.

The local government should encourage their Public servants to do the same if they want to serve the people and prevent possible protests in places like Vuwani. The top leaders in government should also follow suit if they are serious about delivering services to the people of South Africa. They need to be servant leaders if they are serious about dealing with violent protests. They should not be after positions but the desire to serve others. Positions in servant leadership come after service because servant leaders are centred on serving others. Servant leaders remain humble even after appointed to a higher position. Servant leaders are able to listen to the subordinates in order to address their needs. They see beyond their current challenges. Servant leaders empower others in order for them to grow. Servant leaders are first to arrive and the last to leave.

7. Conclusion

This article has studied the impact of the Vuwani protests on teaching and learning through a practical theological reflection. The protests were mainly caused by the refusal of the Vuwani residents for their area’s inclusion into the newly established local municipality in the Vhembe District. The protests had a huge impact on the teaching and learning in the area because more twenty schools were burnt as protests turned violent.

8. Recommendations

The MDB should engage the Vuwani community in order that the process of transition into the newly established local municipality becomes peaceful. They need to explain the reasons for the amalgamation of Malamulele and Vuwani to form the new local municipality. MDB should not only rely on the outcome of the Limpopo High Court or any other court. It should seek settlement with the Vuwani residents if possible outside the court processes. The outcome of court processes may further anger the people Vuwani and cause protests that are more violent. Community engagement

by all stakeholders can bring a halt to the violent protests that compromise the education of the children.

The residents of Vuwani should be assured that the services would be delivered to them regardless of their tribe. They need to convince the people that becoming part of the new local municipality will not compromise the services they have been receiving at their current municipality. Furthermore, government needs to sit down with the key people in Vuwani and assure them that they will not lose business should they become part of the new local municipality. Equally, the unemployed population in Vuwani need to know that job opportunities will be available to all people regardless of their tribe. If the above is not done, the protests are more likely to continue and cause further disruptions in teaching and learning.

References

- Busha 2016, Monthly newsletter, investment and economic matters, social and political updates – the Vuwani saga, 59(1), pp 1–1.
- Calvert W.J., 1999. Integrated literature review on effects of exposure to violence upon adolescents. *ABNF journal*, 10(4), p.84.
- Capricorn Voice 2015. Violent protests and vandalism not the answer for Vuwani, 9–15 September 2015.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997. Principles of community engagement. *CDC/ATSDR Committee on Community Engagement*.
- Citizen 2016. Vuwani violence caused by thugs from elsewhere. [Online] Available: www.citizen.co.za [Accessed: 7 May 2016].
- City Press, 2016. 60 000 pupils affected as schools continue to be set alight in Vuwani. [Online]. Available: www.citypress.news24.com [Accessed: 06 May 2016].
- Cilliers J. & Aucoin C., 2016. South African scenarios 2024: politics, violence and growth in the rainbow nation. *ISS Paper 294*, 1–24.

- Chigwata T.C., M. O'Donovan and DM Powell., 2017. Civic Protests and Local Government in South Africa. *Working Paper Series No. 2*. Cape Town: The Civic Protests Barometer 2007–2016.
- Cogta 2016. Executive member's statement by the honourable Makhurupetje, MG Limpopo, MEC for COGTA to the extraordinary sitting of the Limpopo Provincial Legislature on the situation in Vuwani. The meeting was held on the 9th of June 2016 at Lebowakgomo legislature chambers.
- Dickow H. & Moller V., 2002. *South Africa's rainbow people: National pride and optimism, a trend study*, 59(2), 175–202.
- E-NCA 2015. Protests grow over university fee hikes. [Online]. Available: www.enca.com. [Accessed: 23 October 2015].
- Equal Education, 2016. National investigative hearing on ensuring the right to basic education in the context of protest and equal education. Submission to the South African Human Rights Commission, June 2016.
- Gqola P., 2001. Defining people: Analysing power, language and representation in metaphors of the new South Africa. *Transformation* 47(1), 94–106.
- Kanyane M., 2016. Ward delimitation: impact on municipal service delivery. Human Sciences Research Council, 1–17.
- Kekana M Isaacs, L & Corke E. 2015. Tution fee protests shut down two of South Africa's biggest universities. *Eye Witness News*. [Online]. [Accessed: 22 October 2015].
- Kgatle M.S., 2015. Servant leadership in Mark 10: 35–45 applied to African Pentecostal Christianity. Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria.
- Kgatle M.S. 2016. *Servant Leadership: The Path to Success*. Lulu Press, Inc.
- Kgatle M.S. 2017. The causes and nature of the June 2016 protests in the city of Tshwane: A practical theological reflection. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3), a3845. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.3845>

- McGaha-Garnett V. 2013. The effects of violence on academic progress and classroom behaviour: From a parent's perspective. *Vistas*, 1–9.
- Mostert M. 2016, Friday at noon-signals from this week's news. *Institute for future research* 1067(1), 1.
- Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2016. Announcements, tabling and committee reports, the third session, fifth parliament, reported on Thursday, 8 December 2016.
- Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2016. Debate on the Vuwani's situation by Minister David Mahlobo, MP, on 17 May 2016, 1–6.
- Raophala M.H. 2013. Municipal service delivery in Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality in Limpopo Province: A case of Lenyenye Township. Doctoral dissertation, University of Limpopo.
- Salga consolidated report, special national assembly of 18–20 June 2016. Boardwalk Hotel, Nelson Mandela Bay, Eastern Cape.
- Sahrc 2016. National investigative hearing into the impact of protest-related action on the right to a basic education in South Africa. Reported on 15 June 2016.
- Saps 2016. Case study on Vuwani demarcation protest. 30 June 2016, 1–14.
- South African News Agency 2016. Government hard at work in Vuwani. [Online]. Available: www.SAnews.gov.za [Accessed: 13 May 2016].
- Steffgen G. and Ewen, N. 2007. Teachers as victims of school violence. The influence of strain and school culture. *International Journal on Violence and Schools* 3(1), pp.81–93.
- Timeslive 2017. Schools affected by Vuwani protests praised for matric results. [Online]. Available: www.timeslive.co.za [Accessed: 5 Jan 2017].
- Wicomb Z. 1998. Shame and identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa. In D Attridge and R Jolly (eds), *Writing South Africa: literature, apartheid and democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.