

# ***A SINGLE PUBLIC SERVICE FOR SOUTH AFRICA: PROCESS AND PROSPECTS***

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## **ABSTRACT**

**T**he South African government machinery has historically been organised as the public service and the local government service. This created a perceived lack of alignment at the levels of policy and service delivery, which was seen as a reason for poor government performance in addressing development challenges. The Department of Public Service and Administration therefore proceeded to create the legislative and institutional basis for a single public service. South Africa has a complex set of development goals to which the public service must respond and this requires thorough-going public sector reform, with due attention to major reform trends elsewhere in the world. While the efforts to construct the single public service attempted to incorporate some of these trends, it appears to have fallen short with respect to constructing a development paradigm for government services.

## **INTRODUCTION: THE FIRST FIFTEEN YEARS AND COUNTING...**

**L**ooking back at the trajectory of public service evolution in South Africa over the past fifteen years, policy debates and legislation have focused both on government and on governance. Government's performance according to the range of mandates, its service delivery failures, as well as corruption and maladministration, has been the subject of both media and academic analysis. Governance, or how social and economic processes are governed, and therefore how they succeed or fail, is an equally important, but less visible phenomenon that either enhances or impedes the performance of government.

The structure and organisation of government has for the period since 1994 been organised on the basis of the *Public Service Act, 1994* for national and provincial government, legislation crafted in the nineteen nineties, a time when South Africa was putting the basis of democratic government in place, and when the world was not yet the complex, information society that it is today. This Act covers the public service in the national and provincial spheres, but does not apply to local government. The South African local government system has no equivalent of the Public Service Act. Rather it has what is termed a separate personnel system whereby each of the individual 283 municipalities has the right to appoint, promote and dismiss their own staff subject to national legislation most notably the *Municipal Structures Act, 1998* and the *Municipal Systems Act, 2000*.

From 1996, the welter of policy and strategy that is a reality everywhere in the world, increasingly took hold in South Africa. Multiple policies, strategies, business plans and budgets added increasing layers of complexity to the work of Ministers and managers. What was all the new policy and paperwork about? Rather than seeking to answer this question, many critiques of public service performance argued against the need for continuing policy elaboration, in favour of a focus on service delivery practice (see Cameron, 2005). The critique changed little – it neither held back the policy flood, nor offered satisfactory answers to the challenges of service delivery. It was unable to do so for two reasons. Firstly, new policy and associated forms of governance intentions for the public sphere needed to be rendered explicit in order to weave a visible fabric for the emerging democracy. South Africa was just beginning to explore how it might operate in a competitive global economy, in which the terms of participation were rapidly changing, constantly placing new demands on governments. The emerging environment was characterised by global shifts towards ‘knowledge economies’ and ‘information societies’, economies dominated by services and innovation in economic production. Governments were challenged to introduce innovation in their approaches to major problems for social development such as poverty, HIV-AIDS and education.

Secondly, the public service had to shift from thinking and acting purely as a functional or administrative bureaucracy to thinking and acting as a competitive entity, geared towards remaking South Africa as a strong global economic player and an equitable society. Thus, in this context, *policy* and *service delivery* should become complementary techniques capable of being deployed for purposes of institutional and social change.

Building sufficient capacity within the public service had been left unattended (Cameron 2007:54), with management failures and competency deficits across all three spheres of government (national, provincial, local). Furthermore, corruption was becoming rampant, particularly focused on tenders for the procurement of goods and services. A further factor impeding the development of the public service in the period post-democratisation, was the commissioning of large volumes of policy, strategy and planning from external consultants, while limiting the participation of public managers themselves in these exercises.

Responding to widespread criticism of governmental performance with regard to co-ordinated action on poverty and development, the ANC’s Stellenbosch conference of 2002 adopted a resolution. *On Transforming the Public Service, the creation of a Single*

*Public Service and accelerating service delivery through Batho Pele* (ANC 2002) in order to construct a *single, development-oriented, integrated system of public administration* with metropolitan and local government. The resolution further stated that crafting the single public service “*should incorporate the move towards integrated service delivery including single access points of services for citizens*”. In the 2003 State of the Nation address, President Mbeki stated:

‘We will this year also finalise the proposal for the harmonisation of systems, conditions of service and norms between the public service in the national and provincial spheres on the one hand, and the municipalities on the other’ (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 2003).

Following from this, three periods of design of the Single Public Service (SPS) framework can be identified: the pre-2006 policy debates which led to the strategy paper; the legislative definition and stakeholder engagement between 2006 and 2008; and the current post-2007 active engagement with integrated public service delivery. This article discusses the development of the *single public service* concept over the period 2002 – 2008, the strengths and weaknesses of the draft legislation and the government programme towards fostering integrated public services across the three spheres of government. It draws attention to the formulation of ideas about public sector reform and raises questions about what the limits of legislation may be.

## DRIVERS AND CASE FOR A SINGLE PUBLIC SERVICE

Interviews with leaders of SPS work teams and analysis of two documents, in particular, offer insight into the thinking of the architects of the single public service programme. The strategy document entitled *A strategy toward the development of overarching legislation for the single public service*, (Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) 2006a) and a paper presented by Levin (2007), Director-General of the DPSA make reference to the drivers and case for a single public service.

The most important driving components of the case made for a SPS in South Africa are: mobility and transfers of staff; assignment of powers and functions; integrated service delivery; policy co-ordination across spheres of government and the developmental state.

### Mobility and transfers

The transfer of staff across the spheres of government, more specifically from national or provincial government to local government was a primary consideration. The focus was essentially that of a set of legal mechanisms, including legislation and a *Transfers Framework* to enable government to move or deploy employees from one sphere to another. The apparent purpose of this major emphasis on transferability was derived from a perceived need to strengthen weak or malfunctioning areas of public administration; provide a mechanism to send fire-fighting individuals or teams into crisis situations; and, bolster jurisdictions lacking the ability or financial means to attract relevant expertise.

Most national departments, certain provincial governments, and the six metropolitan municipalities were the preferred places to work, either due to the fact that they actively pursued a strategic transformation agenda (whether more or less effectively), or that the pay was good. Some smaller municipalities were attractive to the local workforce, largely due to their rich tax base. The majority of the 283 municipalities, many of the provincial governments and at least a few national departments (for example, Correctional Services) were poorly endowed with staff sufficiently knowledgeable to run a late twentieth century service organisation, and were not attractive workplaces for government employees, either in terms of facilitating performance or in terms of attracting experienced staff. In terms of existing legislation, any transfer could only be effected through resignation from one part of government and a competitive appointment process to another. It was argued that legislation creating a single employer would facilitate the process of staff transfers across spheres of government.

## **Assignment of powers and functions**

The Transfers Framework is associated with an *Assignment Framework*, which addresses the assignment of powers and functions held by either national or provincial government to local government, or from local to provincial government. The logic here can be explained as follows: Some of the services performed in the provincial government sphere could better be performed in the local government sphere and *vice-versa*. For example, the provincialisation of emergency medical services in Gauteng province would ensure access to quality, specialist services, even for emergencies arising in small, under-resourced municipalities. Hence, the strategy document proposes a single public service model in which the re-assignment of powers and functions to appropriate spheres of government would be utilised in the interests of improving service delivery and government administration. Such re-assignment was seen to necessitate the transfer of staff to fulfil the requisite tasks, though transfer was also seen to be independent of assignment of functions from one sphere to another, based rather on the need for particular capacities in particular parts of government.

“One of the strongest arguments for a Single Public Service is the facilitation of mobility between the institutions of government. Greater mobility facilitates the transfer of functions between spheres, to allow services to be delivered at the most appropriate level, and also enables the deployment of managers to where they are most needed in government” (DPSA 2006a:7).

This framework was to be supported by the harmonisation of remuneration, conditions of service, and common norms and standards for employment and services in the proposed Public Administration Management Act, to be enacted.

## **Integrated service delivery**

By 1999, concerns about the capacity of the South African state had risen to a position of prominence on the national agenda, in particular with respect to the

service delivery capacities of certain provincial municipalities. The strategy identifies a range of issues that are symptoms of the capacity problem, including an absence of co-operative governance and integrated planning and budgeting across the spheres, poor accountability of municipalities and public entities, continued absence of a service culture, service delivery constraints by municipalities, as well as integration in service provision (*ibid*:6 – 9).

Concerns had been expressed by national government about the lack of capacity of municipalities. In 2004, national government identified 136 municipalities as *Project Consolidate* municipalities, which were those lacking capacity and requiring support from national and provincial government. The former Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) produced a national capacity framework for local government (DPLG, 2003).

It has been argued that there has been the development of patronage and clientelism, in local government which has been at the expense of service delivery and development. One of the most visible expressions has been the appointment of unskilled staff to positions for which they are not competent (Atkinson, 2007; Cameron, 2009; Municipal Demarcation Board, 2008). In the last few years numerous towns have seen protests, demonstrations and violent confrontations against poor service delivery (Atkinson, 2007:53–77). Hence, the intention of the SPS legislation was to supplement the *Project Consolidate* capacity building initiative, through creating processes to strengthen the public and municipal services at their weakest points. Where integration of back-office administrative or front-office service processes across the spheres was required, this would be made possible through the appropriate legislative and other means.

## **Policy co-ordination across spheres and developmental state**

The debates regarding the capacity of the state related also to the need for policy co-ordination across the three spheres of government, in order to augment service delivery effectiveness for government as a whole, in particular, local-provincial co-ordination to achieve national goals. Thus the issue of a single public service related explicitly (at the time) to the intention to create a *developmental state* which would *intervene decisively and coherently in the economy and society to address social and economic developmental goals* (DPSA, 2006a: 3).

One of the routes to a developmental state is seen as being the single public service, capable of *seamless and integrated service delivery* (*ibid*). Modernising the service delivery model is a recurring theme that strikes a chord throughout the strategy, underlining the need to create a public service that utilises contemporary tools, mechanisms and approaches. A *common culture of service* and high service standards; shifting towards integrated planning and budgeting; introducing monitoring and evaluation; creating the identity of a senior management service; human resource development strategy; e-government including front and back-office integration; access to government services through walk-in centres and multi-media platforms (DPSA, 2006a:3–5); all are presented as challenges or objectives for framework legislation.

However, little light is shed on the size, shape or reasons behind any of these problematic elements and there is little clarity on how these elements are related. Given the poor problem definition, it is therefore difficult to understand precisely which aspects the legislation was primarily targeting in terms of enhancing policy co-ordination or building a developmental state.

Four clusters of issues and related mechanisms can be identified in the strategic objectives, namely:

While the mammoth task of public sector modernisation can be supported by enabling legislation for the sector itself, this remains a task which relies most on the direction set in overarching policy and legislation in particular mandate areas, such as health and education, and on leadership and institutional change management.

Thus, between the rock of IDP orthodoxy and the hard place of service delivery protests, national government proposed the idea of a single public service. Staff transfers across spheres of government to improve service delivery at important points in the

**Table 1: Issues and Mechanisms for a Single Public Service**

| Issues                                  | Mechanisms  |
|---|---|
| Seamless service delivery               | Transformation of systems and mechanisms for service delivery;<br>Integrated planning, budgeting and reporting systems;<br>Common norms and standards for services;<br>Interoperability of ICT transversal systems, financial and human resource systems;<br>Integrated service delivery platforms and front offices.   |
| Capable service delivery institutions   | Mobility of staff;<br>Shared vision and culture of service delivery;<br>Aligned training and capacity building.   |
| Effective governance and accountability | Stability and improved intergovernmental relations<br>Clearly defined roles, responsibilities, accountability and funding arrangements<br>Alignment of legislation;<br>Information security of systems;<br>Economies of scale in ICT goods and services;<br>Elimination of duplication of costly efforts in ICT, whilst replicating best lessons and practices. |
| Harmonisation of employment frameworks  | Employment practice framework including remuneration and conditions of service;<br>Employee relations framework;<br>Integrated performance monitoring and measurement.  |

*Source: Prepared from the SPS strategy, DPSA 2006a*

system, integrated service delivery to support a developmental state, and modernisation of government institutions, were three of the main elements informing the architects of the single public service approach. Yet, from the perspective of the strategy document and draft legislation, thinking about South Africa as a twenty-first century democracy is largely absent: 'The government is gearing towards the provisioning of a seamless public service by fostering a 'one department' work environment and developing internal service delivery standards to advance a 'no wrong door' service philosophy. As a result, government has embarked on various transformation initiatives aimed at achieving this goal. However, government continues to witness challenges associated with the extension and sustainability of the provision of services at all levels' (DPSA, 2006a:6).

A richer tapestry is constructed by Levin (2007:3) in an address to the Commonwealth Heads of Public Services, presenting the perspective of government as engineering change for societal advancement: The new public management framework is very specific on the rationale for administrative transformation in South Africa...major role for public service institutions in the processes of reconciliation, reconstruction and development in the country...while maintaining continuity of service to all levels of society, focusing on meeting the needs of the 40% of South Africans who are living below the poverty line ... Although substantial progress has been made, the public service is still perceived as being characterized by, for example, inequitable distribution of public services, ... lack of access to services, lack of transparency and openness and consultation on the required service standards, lack of accurate and simple information on services and standards at which they are rendered, lack of responsiveness and insensitiveness towards citizens' complaints, and discourteous staff....

The presentation outlines many of the initiatives in public sector reform, including the *Batho Pele* service-oriented framework and change management process, the 2014 government-wide access strategy, Thusong Service Centres, the *Batho Pele* Gateway Portal, the 1020 Gateway Call Centre, and a GIS-based tool to support making available relevant information at any access point. The emphasis in the paper is on access and service orientation from the perspective of over-the-counter-services. While counter-services are a very large part of what the public service is about and is addressed by the DPSA because this is their mandate area, it is a circumscribed perspective and does not address major components of public service delivery including education, health and policing, nor does it address local economic development and other non-counter based development mandates in the municipal sphere, which generally define *developmental states*.

The drivers informing this particular incarnation of a single public service are important to making a difference in the lives of the poorest citizens, but may not be sufficiently advanced to encapsulate a radical shift in the value of services to citizens within the next decade – a reasonable time-scale for a *developmental state* after the first fifteen years of democracy. Thus the case for a single public service, while sincerely argued, lacks depth with respect to those services most likely to have a long-term effect on poverty and quality of life, for example, education, preventative public health, reducing crime and domestic violence.

## INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL TRENDS IN PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS

International trends in public sector reform since the 1980s have been driven by governments seeking to construct new approaches to complex service delivery challenges, and these lessons have been captured and generalised by theorists. The reforms also emerged from a growing recognition that the efficiency and capacity of public services and public sectors was fundamental to the competitiveness of countries,

*'The capacity of the public sector to establish the right regulatory frameworks for development, to enforce them, to develop national productive capacity, to attract capital, and to act itself as a producer, are all in question. Again, globalisation has played its part in challenging the form and function of the public sector'* (Manning, 1994:280).

Theories of change in the public sector away from rule-driven bureaucracies towards flexible, responsive institutions became popular in the eighties and nineties, with concepts such as strategic management (Nutt & Backoff, 1992; Smith 1994), strategic planning (Bryson 1995), catalytic government (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) and change management (Clarke & Clegg, 1998; Lovell (ed), 1994; Senge, 1999) entering the discourse on public services across the world and in South Africa. The search for the Weberian *ideal type* bureaucracy, in which the hierarchical structure of the organisation, presided over by an administrative head, and operating within the prescripts of law and frameworks of bureaucratic rules, provides the foundation for achieving the goals of public service Weber (1964:324–341), was progressively being superseded. The new search was for ways of managing the increasing complexity of the societal demands which public services were seeking to meet, in circumstances where the rule-driven approach was no longer sufficient to address complex and chaotic social change. From the notions of *reinventing government* observed in the American public services in the Clinton era (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) to the Malaysian *Vision 2020* (Government of Malaysia, 1994:1-16), civil services were rethinking their tools and approaches for effective delivery of health, education, justice and economic services.

These related ideas of strategic management and managing change addressed the need for rapid, continuous and subtle adjustments and readjustments in direction and decision-making, in order to create a future state defined by achievement of the goals set, hence creating opportunities to shift towards ever new and changing goals. In this context, governments sought to become agencies of societal development rather than mere functional bureaucracies, while at the same time fostering a culture of accepting change as a constant, what Senge (1999) calls the 'dance of change'.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, concepts such as integrated governance, *joined-up* government, networked government, and practices such as knowledge management and electronic governance became part of the paradigm of public service design. Integrated governance responded to the growing problem of service delivery failures due to the reality that a particular social outcome, for example, poverty reduction, could not be achieved

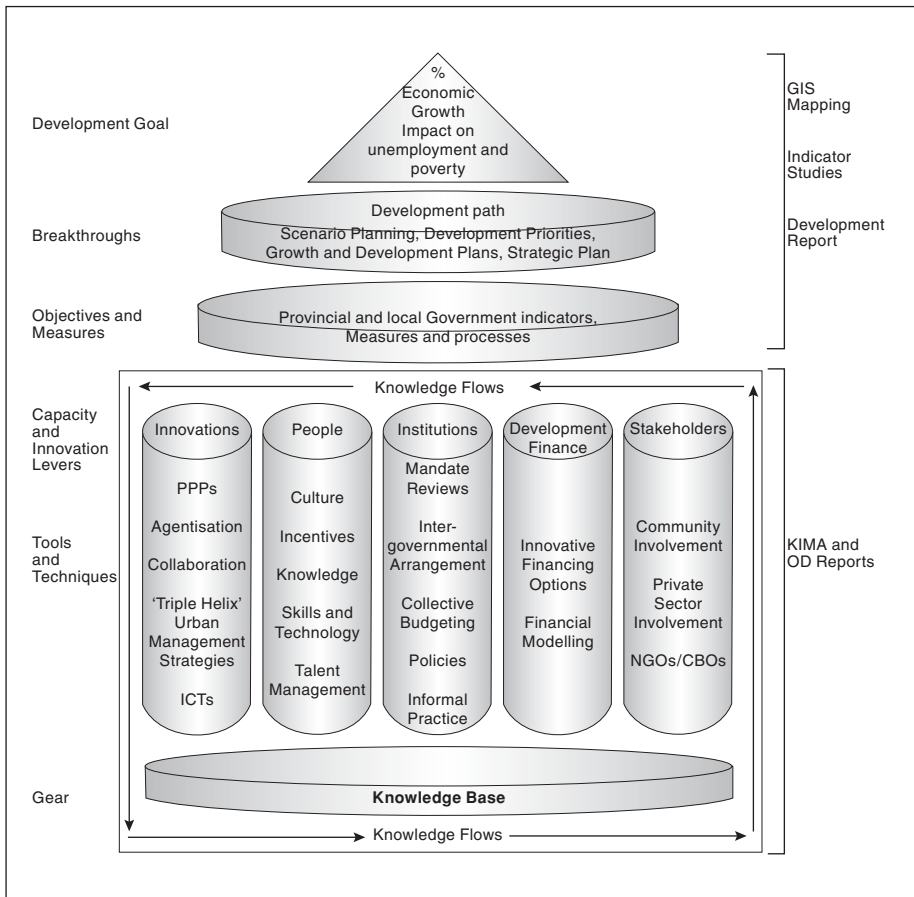
by the action of one government agency alone or even one sphere of government alone. This required the co-operation and collaboration of government structures that did not share a mandate, nor a set of goals and least of all, a common culture amongst staff. The availability and affordability of information and communications technologies (ICT) led to the incorporation of these new technologies into governance processes, both as channels for delivering services and for facilitating the rapid transfer of information from one part of government to another, and from government to the public sphere.

Governments on every continent have sought the holy grail of e-governance. While many countries have pioneered innovations in e-governance, notably Singapore (electronic courts in the 1990s), Malaysia (electronic information management systems, also in the 1990s), India (electronic government in rural areas from the early 21<sup>st</sup> century) and Brazil and the US (electronic voting), many projects failed because these were typically mega-projects with high associated risks, including lack of management skill and being prone to corruption in procurement processes. Despite these failures, applications of ICT in government are now commonplace, particularly at the level of e-administration. The largely uncharted territory of e-governance is in the realms of electronic services or e-services and e-democracy.

How did the South African government perceive the challenges of recreating a public service for a new century, with respect to provincial and local government? The earliest initiatives in this regard are those of the metropolitan government of Johannesburg, who in 1997 – 8 embarked on the iGoli 2000 strategy, aiming to create Johannesburg as a *world class African city*. Other metropolitan governments adopted forward-looking strategies – in 2007 the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality adopted a *Growth and Development Strategy 2025*, aimed at addressing its sagging industrial fortunes, and a *Digital City Blueprint*, aiming to connect businesses and households to new media platforms. In 2006, the Gauteng provincial government (GPG) adopted a *Gauteng City Region* development agenda aiming to foster a *globally competitive city region*; while the KwaZulu-Natal government adopted various developmental strategies aimed at increasing the province's participation in the information sector including investing in an ICT and electronics cluster at Pinetown. Of these various initiatives in development-oriented policy, few addressed the issues of public sector reform in an explicit and detailed manner.

The GPG November 2005 report on *Capacity of the State: Breaking through to 2014* adopted the perspective that achieving the goals of consistently high economic growth and increasing economic participation, thereby reducing unemployment, required new ways of thinking about the capacity of the state. These considerations pointed to capacity levers including innovations in public management, reshaping the culture and knowledge environment for people working in the services, institution building, adopting development financing models and approaches, and working with stakeholders including business, communities and the non-governmental sector; with periodic reviews of knowledge and innovation management (KIMA). The interplay of mechanisms for and purpose of public sector reform, as conceptualised in the report, is reproduced below in a generic diagram that could be applied to any institution of government.

**Figure 1**



Source: Adapted from Gauteng Provincial Government 2005

## The Legislative Approach Adopted: 2006 - 2008

A system of vertical integration for national, provincial and local government was established through the *Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act, 2005*. Despite this, national, provincial and local governments continued to operate in separate silos. Although there is an improved focus on co-ordination, limited integration takes place in planning, budgeting and reporting. As a result, budgets and other resources allocated cannot be leveraged for maximum impact. A single public service encompassing national, provincial and local government was seen as a solution to this lack of co-ordination (RSA 2008).

Several drafts of the SPS Bill were prepared by the work team, of which the final draft was published with an invitation for public comment in circa April 2008. The Bill was

then introduced in the National Assembly in June, but later withdrawn. The Task Team for the Single Public Service was constituted of the Departments of Public Service and Administration, Provincial and Local Government, Health, Water Affairs and Education, the National Treasury and the South African Local Government Association (DPSA 2006a:3), operating under the Governance and Administration (G&A) cluster of Directors-General.

There were two rounds of drafting for the SPS Bill. First the strategy was translated into various drafts of legislation and debated between March and October 2006; then the work team consulted with departments, municipal government and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), as well as taking input from constitutional and labour law experts, to incorporate their contributions to the draft legislation presented to Parliament in 2008.

Van Schoor's (2009) overview of the period is informative: In the first round, the emphasis was on providing a legal framework for integrated government across the spheres, for particular areas where the spheres could have similar systems and conditions of service. Another important focus was on the creation of public entities within municipalities which were seen as a potential threat to integrated service delivery as they were regarded as corporatised institutions responsible to their own governance structures and boards, not directly to government. During the consultations on the draft legislation, the debate about municipal public entities was often raised by municipalities, and by trade unions who wanted municipal entities to be covered by public administration legislation. For example, with respect to the City of Joburg where this remains a contentious issue due to the extent of development of a group of municipal-owned entities operating as companies: "If we don't include them, then most of local government employees in the metros fall outside the framework" (Van Schoor, 2009).

One of the main tasks in the preparatory period for legislative drafting was to establish the status of conditions of service in local government. The joint study between the Department for Public Service and Administration and the Department of Provincial and Local Government (now Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs) revealed a large disparity in terms of remuneration in a small municipality versus remuneration in a metropolitan municipality, despite attempts by SALGA to harmonise conditions of service through the Bargaining Council. However, with respect to salaries, an elaborate grading system would be required since someone working in a small municipality would not earn the same as a person doing the same job in a metro, due to the budget being derived from revenue rather than from the fiscus.

A further matter that occupied the attention of the drafting team was that transfer of staff between spheres on a large scale, in order to address identified capacity problems would run up against the reality that, constitutionally, government cannot force staff onto a municipality; and can transfer staff away only by agreement amongst the relevant parties. Thus, the limitations of legislation in solving a complex capacity problem became apparent early on. It was later noted that government would have to consider secondments rather than permanent transfers, and would need to establish the necessary relationships between the spheres of government to enable the transfer of skills, with the agreement of the employers concerned.

Thus, by the second legislative drafting round, it was recognised that a number of measures aimed at improving service delivery would be needed, in addition to legislation (*Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act, 2005* proposed Public Administration Management Act) and in addition to existing endeavours such as *Project Consolidate*.

One of the main issues encountered in the second legislative drafting round was concerns about the much higher salaries of municipal officials, in particular municipal managers, based on revenue. Local government wanted to keep its own bargaining structure, but agreed that the Minister might introduce measures in both bargaining councils (public service and local government) to reduce disparities and include SALGA as the body to consult to overcome this problem. The senior management service (SMS) would be outside collective bargaining.

It could be argued that many of the issues discussed in the 2006 strategy document would be better addressed through means other than legislation and this did come up for discussion during consultations. Local government questioned whether legislation was needed to achieve integrated service delivery: 'For conditions of service, transfer of staff and service centres you do need legislation, but some of the other areas needs working together, persuasion. The SPS legislation really only deals with a part of the bigger issues around integrated government across three spheres. Some of the work streams are not dependent on legislation...(we are) trying to work within the current framework through signing agreements' (*ibid.*).

Turning now to legislation, Section 3 of the Public Administration Management Bill, introduced in the National Assembly in 2008, set out its object as being to "ensure efficient, quality, collaborative and accountable service delivery by institutions to alleviate poverty and promote social and economic development." (RSA 2008). In order to achieve this object, the Bill proposes, *inter alia*, measures for establishing integrated service centres and for promoting electronic government services; measures for establishing or abolishing government components and promoting accountability (national, provincial or municipal public entities); provisions for the transfer of functions across national and provincial institutions; matters pertaining to the Senior Management Service; measures for appointments, transfers and secondments, collective bargaining and conditions of service; and establishment of the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA).

This is a more carefully crafted document than the 2006 strategy and draft legislation, but remains within the same frame, namely a service delivery focus to *alleviate* poverty, rather than to construct a public administration to meet the agenda of a developmental state. The problems posed by the increasing complexity of service delivery, and by the lack of suitable capacity for a public service oriented to function effectively in the 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge- and technology-based economy, are not identified or addressed. The section of the Bill aiming to establish the PALAMA is unimaginative 'The Academy must enhance the quality, extent and impact of the development of human resource capacity in institutions through education and training' (Clause 32 (2)). Furthermore, no reference is made to the duty to implement the range of policies, strategies and plans for which national and provincial treasuries annually release funds.

## The Five Work Streams Approach: 2007 and continuing

While debates on the content of legislation continued, work on creating a single public service took shape within the existing legislative frameworks of the *Public Service Act*, 1994, the *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act*, 1998 and the *Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act*, 2005. The Single Public Service Programme Management Office, established in the DPSA, co-ordinates four work streams designed to foster the goal of an operationally integrated front office, with common norms and standards for service delivery at every government service counter in the country. In addition to the legislation work stream (1), the four operational work streams are enhanced access to services (2), ICT enablement of integrated service delivery (3), human resource management norms and standards (4), and a public sector anti-corruption strategy (5) (RSA 2008a, 42), each led by a different unit in the DPSA.

*The objective of the non-legal side of the programme is the creation of a single public service, establishing integrated service delivery points from which citizens can access services ... strategically aligning various institutions across the three spheres so they begin to complement each other in a very directed fashion when it comes to service delivery. The disparate way in which we think about front and back office has done a great disservice to citizens and is possibly compounded by how we think about the constitution – as independent spheres... If we're seeking to achieve a particular country goal, we can't do this without focusing on the collective mandate of government – mechanics of it – all of that may be towards a particular desired end state ...' (Singh, 2009).*

Singh (2009) presents a perspective on the four work-streams: The work on enhanced access to services has two threads, facilitating the adoption of the *Batho Pele* philosophy at the local government sphere, promoting a common culture of *people first* at all spheres of government. The second thread is about the location and availability of government services within easy distance and the Thusong service centres, including fixed and mobile centres, are the main vehicles for the current service delivery push. Thusong service centres, established with the intention of building the integrated front office of government, are being reviewed to assess their value in making a difference where poverty levels are highest. The review poses a number of questions including whether demand patterns are well understood by government – whether the government, NGO and citizen perspectives on demand for services symmetrical or asymmetrical; and whether there is effective spatial planning? A mapping exercise is being conducted in the fifteen integrated rural development nodes with respect to eight government services – health, education, home affairs, police services, justice and constitutional development, labour, government communications and the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). The review is focused both towards assessing the ease with which people can reach services, as well as whether the relevant departments have put in place effective norms and standards, modelling the services and observing the big picture. Further analytical studies will be

done, as the current studies have only focused on a limited number of services with respect to the public service, and do not give a picture of the local government services layer. Geographic information systems (GIS) mapping will be an important tool for building an integrated inter-sphere service delivery model, as it provides the capability to present a map with relevant statistical and qualitative data regarding demand and supply of services: “(it is) virtually impossible to see the picture if it’s in text...need GIS to see underutilised infrastructure or shortages...will inform us...sometimes (it is) not more money needed, but better planning” (Singh, 2009)

The argument is made that the *first generation* of Thusong centres, in the period 2007-8, was focused on achieving this target. The current phase is aimed at building the quality of service in those centres – planning, service standards, front office quality, signage, creating *one stop shops* in urban malls. It is noteworthy that the concepts of integrated service delivery and *one-stop-shops* are at least five years old in the DPSA context. The Centre for Public Service Innovation developed the concept in 2003, but it came to nought. The SPS Programme Office has taken the one-stop-shop concept up again, working with GCIS, the City of Joburg and others to make good on the promise of an urban mall. The test site in Soweto’s Maponya Mall is at an advanced stage of planning, including space for the Gauteng Provincial Government Department of Transport, Home Affairs, Umsobomvu Youth Fund, Department of Labour, and the City of Joburg services.

It is going to be catalytic, the one to show the change...The intention is that this will be an experiential learning laboratory where we fix queue management, how you deal with standards, how you deal with cash and training a cadre of public officials to work on the vertical and horizontal.. (*ibid.*).

In 2009, of the proposed 283 Thusong service centres – one per municipality – 137 centres are operational, and the Soweto mall model is intended to offer lessons and effect change across centres. *But what’s the difference now from 2003?* Singh argues that there may be a few significant differences – the SPS work programme is now a component of government’s Programme of Action; there is a dedicated cross-functional team developing the service centres; objectives are set in individual performance agreements of public managers; there is a dedicated budget to avoid unfunded mandates; and draft legislation to cement the whole is being debated in government and in parliament. But the process has not been without challenges: this is one of the most difficult jobs to co-ordinate across the three spheres – if it’s not in line of sight in terms of priorities, and comes in from the side, (institutions) will deal with it when they’re able. ... Priorities at one sphere are not necessarily same at others (*ibid.*).

The ICT and anti-corruption thrusts appear to be at the early stages of development and the electronic government initiative has significant challenges with respect to using ICT to enhance delivery in six identified pro-poor services at the national sphere of government (Williams, 2009). An anti-corruption framework is in place in the public service and local government, and DPSA is endeavouring to understand what worked in both these cases and to draw these lessons into a single strategy and prepare training on norms and standards (Singh, 2009). While data on corruption is not readily available,

public reporting of corruption suggests that it is a significant contributing factor to service delivery failures, despite the existence of the said frameworks.

## Where are we now and where we are headed?

According to the documents and interviews, service delivery, ICT and anti-corruption are presented as the major thrusts for change, with the human resources framework underpinning this. The SPS work programme is incorporated in the Programme of Action of the Governance and Administration clusters of Cabinet and Directors-General. However, it is not incorporated in the agenda of any of the other clusters, where the service delivery issues are debated. This is mitigated to some extent by the participation of departments such as Social Development, Health and Education and National Treasury in the G&A cluster, but may be too restrictive an approach to enable the SPS work teams or the G&A cluster to leverage collaboration across national departments for successful implementation.

Building a well-capacitated operational system in the provincial and local government sphere, responsible *inter alia* for education, housing and infrastructure, as well as counter-services, will be a large, complex and long-term undertaking. It may be conceived as a number of work-streams as discussed above; or as a series of steps aimed at building real capacity across the spheres of government through concerted short and long-term investment in education and training for a 21<sup>st</sup> century South African public administration. For now, the single public service objective is still a key focus area for national government, though there are many steps to be taken, including discussions with the trade unions, before the legislation can be passed. A number of matters arise in the context of a discussion of human resources norms and standards.

The *capacity argument*: The Programme Office is mapping out the human resources situation at the Thusong service centres, in an attempt to develop a response to the problem that there is typically less operational and management capacity at centres outside the cities. This relates to a systemic problem of limited capacity in the society and the trends is for people with skills to be located in the cities. The major challenge here is that skilled people are generally attracted to those municipalities that pay well and are typically located in urban areas, the larger tax base underlying the ability to pay. Hence, service centres outside the urban areas cannot compete for operational and management capacity.

This leads to the *mobility argument*: If public servants are unlikely to move to the under-capacitated municipalities, then government needs to foster mobility – the movement of human resources from where expertise sits to where it is needed. Currently, movement across spheres of government and between municipalities requires the individual concerned to apply for a post at the new location and to resign from the existing department or municipality. This initiative will facilitate the transfer of personnel from local to public service or back and without a break in service. It creates an environment of equal pay for equal work and similar conditions of service across all spheres. Three problems arise here. *Firstly*, this has major fiscal implications in terms of how pay will

be funded; *secondly*, this has implications for the constitutional independence of local government, meaning that transfers can only be effected by consensus with the relevant municipal management; and *thirdly*, employees, as long as they are consulted, can ultimately be transferred from municipalities by both their employing municipality and the Minister of Public Service and Administration without their specific consent.

The *harmonisation argument*: Equal pay for equal work is a laudable, but loaded concept. What does this mean in the particular context of uneven capacity, unequal tax bases, low collection levels of municipal service fees in poor municipalities, dissimilar services targets and operational requirements? Furthermore, what are the implications for similar types of work in very different economic and social contexts, for example the responsibility for local economic development in Sisonke District Municipality in rural KwaZulu-Natal, as compared to responsibility for local economic development in Ugu District Municipality along the KwaZulu-Natal south coast? Harmonisation of conditions of service – pensions, medical aid, leave and other matters are likely to be very large-scale exercises. The 2008 draft remuneration framework for the single public service 2008 is not yet in the public domain, but it is argued that the intention of the framework is to improve the position of government in becoming an employer of choice. However, a policy of *equal pay for equal work* is not necessarily a lever for mobility across the public service and local government, as this may hold little attraction for people who wish to live in urban centres near schools, shopping malls and other amenities. If employees are transferred against their wishes, there is a real danger it will lead to a brain drain of skilled staff out of the municipalities. Ironically attempts to improve capacity in the local government sphere could in fact have precisely the opposite effects, namely the denuding of capacity (Cameron 2009). It is acknowledged by the Programme Office that this is a complex area of work (Singh 2009).

## CONCLUSION: LESSON LEARNED AND VALUE GAINED

**W**hile the focus of the single public service initiative is on creating integrated services, drawing the human and financial resources from where they are to where they are needed, it is also acknowledged that new services are needed. New services, for example, may include information and advice services, necessary in the context of high poverty levels and low educational levels. However, the public service innovation initiative of the early days of the millennium appears to lack momentum in gaining ground across government. While the concept of service centres is a potentially powerful and innovative concept which has been successfully applied in developing countries – the Egyptian model, for example, appears to be succeeding largely through the application of computerisation at the citizen interface (Elkadi, 2007) – this element is lagging in South Africa.

Public sector reform is contextual to particular countries and economic eras. South Africa today is engaged in a nation-building project, in an era characterised by heightened global competition as compared to the previous century. The demand for knowledge as a major factor in social and economic development, against the background of pervasive

poverty in income, infrastructure and services, is great. Public sector reform requires a powerful motivating force, an objective around which to mobilise public servants and local stakeholders. This appears to be missing from the SPS initiative of government. One of the objectives of public sector reform should be to focus the energies and resources of the whole of the public service towards poverty reduction, to exceed the relevant Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Such a campaign is not visible in the public domain.

Poor performance in educational quality at the primary and secondary levels, resulting in low gross enrolment ratios in tertiary education, leads to a continued capacity deficit in both private and public sectors, thereby reducing the ability of the nation to effectively address its development agenda. Improving the performance of the education system is therefore fundamental to building a future competitive bureaucracy and an equitable society. However, the SPS initiative appears to focus largely on counter services, with some attention to understanding demand patterns for selected government services such as education, health or social development, but with limited attention to the need for continuous administrative reforms across the majority of provincial and local government services.

Capacity is partly connected to the educational base and part attitudinal. Behavioural and institutional change management is as important an element of public sector reform for South Africa, as is the institutional development effort (Project Consolidate) or the single public service approach.

Good governance is less about legislation and more, much more, about what is done in relation to what needs to be done, how well it is done and the capacities of those doing it. While investing in a legislative drafting process, the Department for Public Service and Administration has begun to tackle the more difficult, more intransigent questions of translating policy into practice and building adequate capacity for effective governance, and other major challenges of the day. But the process is just beginning and provincial and municipal government must join the battle.

Backlogs in public infrastructure and services and poor access to services are phenomena that contribute to the poverty levels experienced by an unnecessarily large proportion of South African households. Fifteen years after the first democratic elections, the obstacles encountered in public service delivery have negatively affected the nation-building project to the extent that the building blocks for long-term local economic development remain absent in the majority of municipalities. In this regard, the initiatives to create a single public service, with greater flexibility in assigning powers and functions and in transferring staff are important, but may be insufficient to the goal. It is argued here that there are just not enough government employees with the requisite skills to run efficient municipal administrations throughout the country. Furthermore, the turn around in administration and revenue generation required in the greater number of municipalities requires particular sets of skills in managing and leading institutional change. In addition, while poor municipalities can benefit from their administrations being run more efficiently, they can benefit more from the design of strategies for social and economic development that are practicable in resource-poor communities. Finally, the constraints of institutional

culture in terms of willing acceptance of the transferee ‘from the city’ may militate against achieving a turn-around in the short term.

It may be appropriate to consider more explicitly the goals of public sector reform, and to revisit where the SPS project fits in the scheme of change. Integrative thinking about public sector reform in relation to its specific roles in a wide range of development mandates may be more desirable than broad brush thinking in relation to the concept of a developmental state. Such an approach may better enable the single public service programme to achieve a measure of success within the broader landscape of South African public sector reform. Arising from the above analysis, a thinking canvas for goals, reforms and mechanisms is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Rethinking goals and mechanisms for public sector reform, South Africa 2009 - 2014**

| Goals  | Reforms  | Mechanisms   |
|--|--|--|
| Social and local economic development to reduce income and asset poverty and create a competitive economy. | Governmental institutions appropriately capacitated to design and implement complex development strategies, with regular adjustment.                                   | Single public service identity with integrated planning, budgeting, reporting systems and resource-sharing models; Shared vision and culture of social transformation across development mandates; Goal-oriented capacity building for a 21 <sup>st</sup> century development paradigm; Zero tolerance for corruption. |
| Access to government counters to reduce infrastructure and services poverty.                               | Integrated service delivery across relevant institutions at the three spheres of government, based on the particular area of infrastructure or the particular service. | Integrated service delivery platforms and front offices; Shared vision and culture of service delivery; Common norms and standards for services; Interoperability of ICT for heightened information flow with respect to citizens’ needs; Enabling legislation.  |

| Goals  | Reforms   | Mechanisms  |
|--|---|---|
| Improvements in the capacities and quality of the education system to produce future generations of highly skilled and knowledgeable people. | Service-wide institutional and culture change management with respect to the education service, and supporting activities from the health and social development services at provincial and municipal levels. | Effective administration, governance and accountability; Introducing e-learning as a supporting technology for generating knowledge and creativity across the education system; Facilitating change management across the educational system.                               |
| Future generations of public servants working for deep social transformation.  | Service-wide institutional and culture change management.   | Acculturation to development goals of reducing income, infrastructure and service inequality, MDGs; Training for the 21 <sup>st</sup> century SA public service; Measures to encourage mobility across spheres, municipalities and the urban-urban and urban-rural divides. |

A final item for review: Clarity of purpose in public sector reform is important, confusion must be eliminated and the public servants who are the only agents of such reform should be clear about it. The broad service delivery mandate of government (beyond the mandate of the DPSA) needs more than a single public service approach to achieve the goals of a developmental state. Executing the large scale change project involved in realising an SPS capable of substantive integrated service delivery poses a considerable challenge. The most important breakthrough for future development effectiveness may lie in the nascent work of spatial mapping of citizens' and communities' needs, as the basis for responsive governance – extended to the public service as a whole. A programmatic approach with specific short-, medium- and long-term milestones would seem to be required.

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