5 *The state of the public service*

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Introduction

The transformation of the public service in South Africa is an all-encompassing project corresponding to the complexities of wider political and socio-economic change. Despite these complexities, there appear to be interrelated yet discernible dimensions in the post-apartheid evolution of the public service, which require comment. One dimension emphasises practical-administrative capacity for improving the processes of executing public policy. Another dimension emphasises historical-political factors of culture change, which forces a consideration of the normative basis of transformation itself, and the influence of such factors on evaluating the effectiveness of measures to enhance practical administrative capacity.

It often appears that, in urgently responding to severe socio-economic disparities and deprivation, calls to strengthen practical-administrative capacity risk sterility in underplaying historical-political factors associated with wider public service transformation. This chapter follows from this observation, and debates the substance of practical administrative improvement in the public service, referred to in recent presidential 'State of the Nation' speeches, against the background of historical and political factors inherited from the pre-liberation period.

Public service transformation and the apartheid environment

Dynamism and flux have characterised the South African public service since the country's first democratic elections in 1994. The public service, officially comprising national departments and provincial administrations (excluding municipal government) under the Public Service Act (No. 103 of 1994), has

undergone a major structural overhaul, reflecting the political negotiations prior to the 1994 elections. The principal aim of this transition has emphasised integration, which, in the case of the public service, has involved the amalgamation of a scattered pre-1994 system comprising 15 administrations serving 11 different governments, including four 'independent' states and six self-governing territories (Adler 2000). Integration has also necessitated a more appropriately weighted representation of the country's population in the public service to redress a historically unequal distribution of decision-making power based on race preference. The role of the public service in policy development and implementation has also had to adapt to the demands of inclusiveness and transparency within the democratic process. Finally, the progressive shift to inclusive and socially-geared legislation after 1994 also places greater demands on public servants to utilise discretion, flexibility, interpretation and adeptness in the implementation of corresponding public policy.

Setting aside the scale of these structural changes for the moment, the true measure of growth in the post-apartheid public service will be less about how effectively the new machinery functions, and more about the kind of ethos supplanting that which existed prior to 1994 in relation to rehabilitating what Mokgoro refers to as its 'dual accountability' (1996:268) to the public and to political office-bearers. The complexity of evaluating public service accountability from this viewpoint is further compounded by its administrative structure which, Mokgoro (2000) reminds us, comprises a complex system composed of many interdependent and interrelated sub-systems. Analysis therefore cannot divorce the administrative responsibility of the public service from the impact of politics and policy orientations of political office-bearers. Assessments of the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service therefore must go beyond technical explanations, to include the historical, political and philosophical foundations underpinning this.

It should be noted that the apartheid and post-apartheid governments both articulated with conviction and clarity, philosophically-laden visions of the make-up of society, and the state's role in bringing this about. For pre-liberation governments, this comprised a gradually more complex and interventionist agenda, based on an authoritarian and unrepresentative unevenness and inequity in the administration and regulation of services and, in effect, of people, grounded in a racial classification framework articulated

on the basis of ethnic self-determination.[1] Moreover, although the interplay between state power and public accountability was, in principle, democratic for a minority of the population – prompting van den Berghe to characterise South Africa as a '*herrenvolk* democracy'[2] (quoted in Marger 1994:402) – it in fact represented a negation of the freedom even for apartheid's intended beneficiaries, due to the restrictive and authoritarian measures taken by the state to maintain separate development.

The structure and accountability of the public service during the apartheid years was therefore closely entwined and dependent on the capacity of the ruling National Party (NP) to implement policy measures through the creation of a state that was sufficiently large, powerful and centrally co-ordinated to manage and police race relations in the country (Posel 2000). Seegers (1994) infuses this view through her analysis of disaggregated statistics on the growth of the public service as a whole between 1920 and 1980, and in particular, accelerated growth from about 1950. It should be noted from her analysis that central authority departments comprised the largest segment of the total, as compared with provincial authorities, a situation that has been reversed in the democratic period. The rationale for this earlier configuration appears consistent then with the imperative under apartheid of reinforcing central co-ordination in order to maintain control over the government's separate development programme.[3]

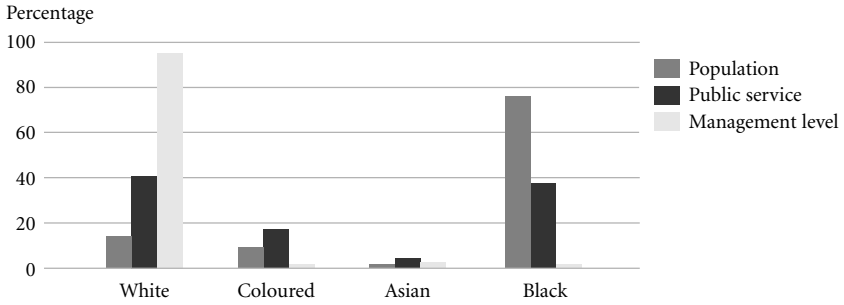
Table 5.1 *Public service growth in personnel (including apartheid period)*

Year	Total state employment	Central	Provincial	Local	Homeland
1920	150 718				
1930	227 408	140 042			
1940	321 403	177 392			
1950	481 518	280 310			
1960	798 545	454 692	130 477	151 459	
1975		509 424	220 248	232 000	132 926
1970	1 105 295	549 865	185 361	191 294	
1980	1 601 158	665 965	248 703	244 600	191 309

Source: Adapted from statistics presented in Seegers 1994:40–43

An analysis of the growth of the public service during apartheid also reveals the marginalisation of black public servants from senior decision-making roles, for example Cloete's (1995) reference to the central public service using the most recent data available to him at the time (see Figure 5.1). One should add to this picture arguments that, despite the Public Services Act of 1957 barring public servants from participating in party politics, the law was completely ignored in practice and that a tacit affirmative action policy represented a strategy of patronage by the NP, resulting in tremendous pressure being exerted on public servants to comply and conform with political objectives (Posel 2000).

Figure 5.1 *Comparative racial representation within central public service*



Source: Adapted from Cloete 1995:194

Evans (1997) provides an insider's view of the impact of apartheid within the public service by his discussion of the gradual expansion of the authority of the Department of Native Affairs. He observes that apartheid authoritarianism was not just about the general circumscription of liberties for blacks, but also favoured a particular concentration of authority within the state itself, and in particular towards state entities whose business was most tightly connected to the suppression and regulation of blacks.

Pines (1979) gives an account of the lack of success of many development initiatives managed by the apartheid public service in black homeland territories, arguing that the most prominent feature of community development was its 'system-maintaining' (1979:5) properties, which resulted in

government officials, by initiating self-help schemes, being unlikely to promote social-political processes outside of, but parallel to, the established political structure.[4] Jeppe and van Baalen (1995) further add that an economic growth approach to development under bureaucratic direction and control characterised the development policies in homeland territories, through a project method that was subjected, as Moerdijk points out, to the discretion of racial politics:

> The new development corporations … are all headed by Afrikaner members of the Afrikaner establishment … The same can be said for the entire senior management … The few token 'homeland' representatives wield no real power … They are called upon to develop peripheral regions of a centralised economic system, and not national economic entities. (1981:87)

Community development therefore had a peculiar meaning prior to 1994. Moreover, this meaning must take into consideration the limitations exerted on it by an overriding agenda to maintain strict political and social boundaries, as well as how this agenda shaped and influenced the economic possibilities for black development considering the comparative environment in which it took place (see Table 5.2).

The credibility of community development initiatives is also questionable, given evidence that homelands were housing the greatest concentration of South Africa's poor[5] (Reynolds cited in Muller 1984), coupled with the observation that they were also not generating sustained development opportunities, while white urban areas inside the Republic of South Africa had a high absorption demand for black labour[6] (cited in Morast 1975).

The objective of this cursory review of the pressures exerted on the public service during apartheid is to establish the relevant backdrop for evaluating public sector transformation after 1994. It also illustrates the utility of examining public service transformation from a 'cultural-institutional' theoretical approach, inquiring into the gradual production of informal norms and values growing out of what remains a formal institutional framework, which surely then must take into account historical and sociological factors (Christensen 2003). This framework can be useful in providing a more nuanced complexion to evaluating otherwise technical measures to improve efficiency and effectiveness, as well as providing greater insight into

Table 5.2 *Comparative economic figures for white areas and black homelands, 1985*

Region	Area (000 km²)	Arable land (hectares)	Population[a] (000s)	Absent workers[b] (000s)	GDP (Rm)	GNP (Rm)
Bophuthatswana	40.5	400	1 721	362	1 163	2 640
Ciskei	7.8	75	750	108	397	825
Gazankulu	6.6	65	620	75	230	530
KaNgwane	3.8	36	448	109	108	485
KwaNdebele	0.9	24	286	92	52	411
KwaZulu	31.0	565	4 382	770	1 062	4 044
Lebowa	21.8	347	2 157	283	540	1 604
Qwaqwa	0.6	7	209	60	110	363
Transkei	42.0	754	3 000	412	1 359	2 909
Venda	6.9	65	460	51	245	446
Total homelands	**161.9**	**2 338**	**14 033**	**2 322**	**5 266**	**14 257**
White areas	10 059.2	12 260	19 477		104 338	89 992
South Africa	**1 221.1**	**14 598**	**33 510**		**109 604**	**104 249**

Notes: a Migrant workers are included in total for white areas. Other citizens of the homelands permanently resident in white areas are included in the figures for white areas rather than for homelands. Absent workers are the sum of migrant workers in white areas and those who live in the homelands and commute daily or weekly to white areas for employment.

b The Bureau for Economic Research (1976:72) illustrated the economic importance of absentee worker income contributions to homelands by noting that it represented on average the largest proportion of homeland gross national income.

Source: Lewis 1990:43

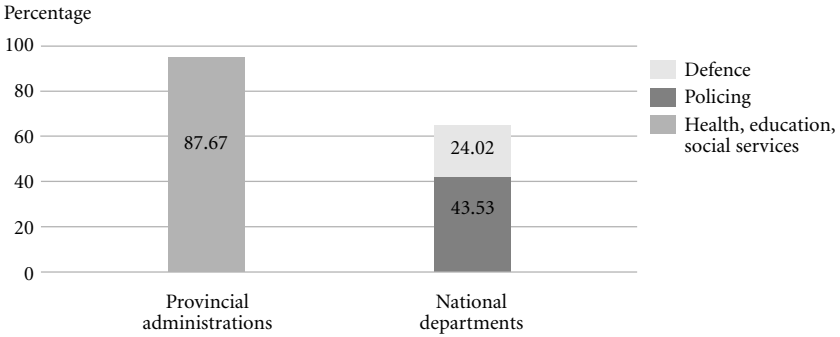
the factors that facilitate or constrain the dual accountability role of the public service that Mokgoro introduced earlier.

Developments in the public service since 1994

The immediate task following democratic transition in 1994 was to dismantle the administrative framework for separate development and adapt the knowledge and systems housed within this framework to the new political geography defined by a single public service comprising central departments and nine provincial administrations. According to the Department of Public Service and Administration's (DPSA 1999) *Report on service and skills audits*,

the public service as a whole contracted between 1994 and 1999 (150 000 positions or 13 per cent). Currently the public service employs just over a million people (PSC 2004). Job losses were greatest amongst less-skilled and part-time workers and defence force members. Job losses in these categories were, however, partly offset by substantial growth in relatively skilled occupations, such as educators and nurses (DPSA 1999). Figure 5.2, for example, illustrates the retention of emphasis from the apartheid period on education and health personnel in provincial administrations (the smaller yet no less important social development/welfare services have also been added), with the important footnote that these are no longer distinguished by a racialisation of services rendered – especially white education versus bantu education and so on (see Standish 1984).

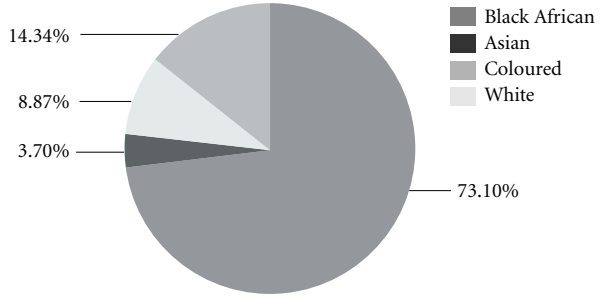
Figure 5.2 *Profile of public service, 2003*



Source: Modified from absolute numbers presented in PSC 2004

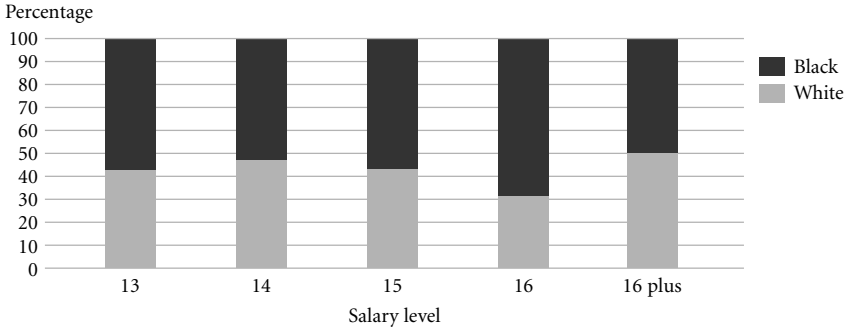
Figure 5.3 illustrates the current racial composition of the South African public service, which needs to be read along with Figure 5.4, depicting the more significant shift in the distribution of senior posts. Although the ratio of white to black senior management demonstrates a sizeable shift in reversing senior management marginalisation of black public servants under apartheid, the problem of management capacity remains. The DPSA's *Policy statement on the establishment of a senior management service in the public service* revealed persistent problems in management capacity, including poor levels of performance and skills among some senior staff, underdevelopment of core

Figure 5.3 *Racial composition of the South African public service, 2003*



Source: Modified from absolute numbers presented in PSC 2004

Figure 5.4 *Senior managers by race and salary level*



Source: Modified from DPSA 2000

leadership/managerial competencies and little horizontal mobility due to rigidities in the employment framework (DPSA 2000).

These difficulties should not, however, be overemphasised in a post-apartheid context if we consider Posel's (2000) observation that a bloated state, increasingly ambitious in its social engineering efforts, coupled with prolonged and chronic staff shortages (particularly from 1944–68), had devastating effects on labour productivity and efficiency during apartheid. This appeared to have

exacerbated a pre-existing problem with insufficient training of new recruits. Although this led some to question the quality of new public service recruits, the bigger problem appeared more ironic as Posel describes:

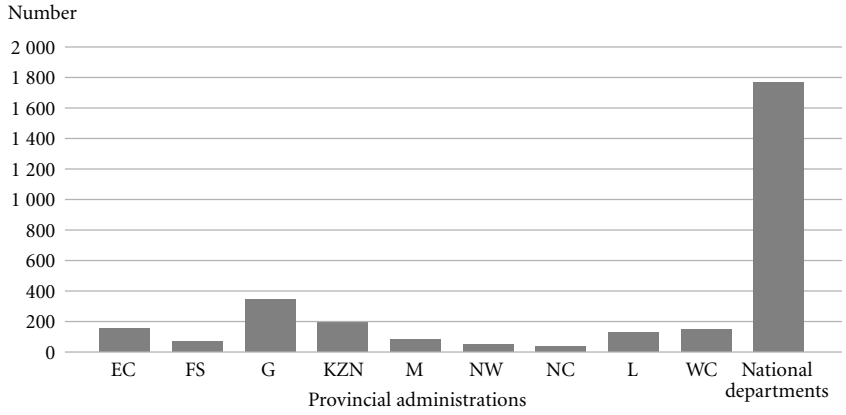
> Whites were streaming into better paying jobs in the private sector with little competition from blacks. Yet the very same job reservation policies prevented the state from training black people in sufficiently large numbers for the civil service positions which the available white labour supply was too small to fill. (2000:47–48)

The problem of management capacity in the post-1994 public service, which, although not a new phenomenon, is in danger of being worsened by a dearth of senior management in provincial administrations as compared to the comparatively smaller-staffed national departments (DPSA 2000) (see Figure 5.5). This is particularly problematic for provinces that have incorporated former homeland administrations in being able to provide general management coordination and oversight to an administrative agenda composed primarily of policy implementation (DPSA 1999). Furthermore, skills in strategic and change management would be considered vital for these provinces where, according to the DPSA (1999), provinces that inherited homeland administrations were characterised, amongst other things, as having low employment in high-level planning and administrative functions (finance, economic affairs and planning). Finally, Moerdijk's (1981) earlier point regarding Afrikaner senior management control over homeland development corporations must also be factored into this discussion, as it relates to the character of development planning.

The context for evaluating contemporary expectations of the public service

Recent presidential 'State of the Nation' addresses (2002–04) have referred to the public service primarily in practical language, including references to improving skills levels, professional competency and efficiency for enhancing the quality of service delivery. In the most recent address in 2004, these improvements were linked to the public service having a 'clear understanding of the developmental tasks of a democratic state'. While this is clearly pertinent to post-apartheid public service accountability, it nonetheless requires constant scrutiny of the extent

Figure 5.5 *Senior managers by provincial administration and national departments*



Source: Modified from DPSA (2000)

Note: Eastern Cape (EC), Free State (FS), Gauteng (G), KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), Limpopo (L), Mpumalanga (M), North West (NW), Northern Cape (NC), Western Cape (WC)

to which there is consistency with the expectations of democracy and development among political elites, public servants, and the citizenry.

Let us first consider the message of service delivery in the post-apartheid period – the prevailing circumstances clearly require public servants to actively contribute to the public's material and psychological development, where needs are both wider in scope (as compared with neglected or differential services under apartheid) and depth (in many cases dealing with previously underserviced areas). Although *service delivery* has become the most pressing issue on the public service agenda, the present cadre of public servants are in reality expected to do more than deliver services efficiently and effectively. They are expected to continuously examine and respond to circumstances that constrain the utilisation of and access to services. This goes beyond simply redressing material imbalances. In effect it involves a kind of psychological rehabilitation of the relationship between the public service and the public, progressively retarded by years of alienation climaxing in apartheid. The demands of this therefore require going beyond a minimalist provision of services where black takes preference over white.

Latib (1995) reminds us of the dynamics of public service accountability under apartheid, where he argues that performance was evaluated within

tightly controlled hierarchical and secretive public policy decision-making between bureaucrats reporting to their political heads. The task therefore was highly prescriptive, regulatory, and geared towards what Latib calls 'procedural accountability', to the exclusion of 'ethical values and standards' (1995:11–13). Since then, accountability (in form) under democracy has become more transparent and diversified, including extra-governmental processes comprising such provisions as a broad-based Bill of Rights, a constitutionally mandated group of government oversight institutions including the Public Protector, a reoriented Public Service Commission (PSC), the South African Human Rights Commission, legislation such as the Promotion of Access to Information Act (No. 2 of 2000), and specific provisions in the *White Paper on the transformation of service delivery* (1997) prescribing public consultation to determine service standards and the subsequent publication of these standards.

Although these gains in formal democratic procedures represent a broadening of the space for accountability, they do not in themselves guarantee a corresponding shift in the behaviour of the public service. The various accountability mechanisms outlined above are formal, procedural in their compliance, and represent expectations and responsibilities externally directed at the bureaucracy. Within this context, these are subject to certain limitations such as the willingness of public service entities to co-operate, how these responsibilities are interpreted and formulated by entities to the satisfaction of external parties involved in the democratic process – Parliament, judiciary, oversight institutions – and the extent of information shared and the quality thereof.

Something that has not changed since apartheid is that the public service remains an institution separate from the public, to whom it is responsible for providing a range of administrative and regulatory services. Regardless of how one characterises the balance between procedural accountability and ethical values and standards, it cannot be assumed that new slate of legislation, strategies and mechanisms will itself prompt a corresponding response from the public service.

Interestingly, the subject of political influence on the bureaucracy appears undecided nearly a decade after political liberation. Johnson, for example, argues that the Mbeki administration 'restricts civil society organisations' role

to that of mobilization and implementing directives from above' (2002:9), the latter formulated by government and governing party experts. Oldfield makes a more measured and analytical, yet no less critical point, recognising that 'the state is a product of political compromise, and a site and agent in post-apartheid struggles for resources and power, its relationships with organs of civil society are complex and uneven' (2000:35).

She further adds that state structures encompass multiple sites of power (and contestation) at various levels, and that the level of determination and co-ordination of priorities, as well as perspectives, of recipients impacts on the shape, pace and implementation of initiatives. Mokgoro illustrates this complexity by pointing out that we should 'consider the fact that each province has about 11 departments, which in turn means that there are about 90 approaches to management in government' (2000:2). Although these observations do not constitute satisfactory explanations concerning the extent of the accountability shift of the politico-bureaucratic complex, they do at least outline its size and complexity, which must be taken into account when evaluating technical performance.

Mokgoro (2000:3–5) provides insight into the complexity of interpreting public service 'capacity', describing as 'inadequate' a limited emphasis on training initiatives alone. He advocates for a greater focus on the process of public servants steering themselves through the complex of structures and relationships defining the public service, which both he and Oldfield have described earlier. Van der Waldt (2001) suggests an interesting administrative construct that attempts to address the shortfall in a narrower conception of capacity, through a 'management by projects' approach. The approach advocates for public servants having a wider departmental conscientiousness in the execution of their designated responsibilities. Given the scale and enormity of the public service mandate, it is necessary for public service entities to have clearly defined, demarcated, and specialised units. It is also necessary that these more confined responsibility designations do not limit the scope and ability of public servants to understand, respond and contribute to public policy issues that may not fall strictly within the ambit of their designated areas.

Van der Waldt appears then to be stressing management as a skill, and not just that attached to specific task designations, implying (or one could say

requiring) effective general management (Stacey 1993 cited in van der Waldt 2001:301). This perspective is all the more persuasive considering the multiplicity of tasks expected of today's development-minded public servant, which include, among others, programme and project management, involvement in the design of new activities, negotiating the terms and use of resources with partners, and ensuring that activities that contribute to wider entity objectives and goals are planned and implemented.

Van der Waldt effectively raises our expectations of public servants as transcending their ability to implement a project, or two or three. An aspect of his paper that requires further elaboration is his recommendation of a project-based management structure, which outlines a preferred management by project operational set-up. In short, van der Waldt suggests teaming up specifically designated officials into project teams where officials collaborate on a specific cross-functional project or activity, thereby bringing together a wider mix and sharing of experiences and expertise to a particular problem. An advantage of this approach is that it forces public servants to think beyond the limitations of their designated areas of responsibility.

Although van der Waldt's proposal is to be commended for constructing a model whose intent is to promote collaboration among designated officials, we ought to be careful that this does not end up as project management in a larger form. This is a cautionary note with policy implications stemming from Kotzé's criticism of the limited confines of the project method configuration containing 'strains' (2004:23) of the self-help schemes Pines referred to under apartheid. She further argues that, in essence, this has translated into an expectation that the poor take greater responsibility for uplifting themselves in a situation marked by minimal social expenditure.

Structurally, Kotzé's concern remains as relevant today as it has been in our repudiations of apartheid 'development' methodologies, insofar as the project framework for development interventions continues to dominate development discourse in South Africa. Although the development-co-operation regime has been legitimised post-1994, comprising public servants, donor agencies, consultants, researchers and non-governmental organisations, questions remain about the relative effectiveness of the project and empowerment (self-help) framework significantly reducing social and economic disparities. In particular, it is debatable to what extent this framework

structurally limits and constrains development thinking to interventions that are not dealing more directly with the underlying causes of poverty and inequality (Kotzé 2004).

At one level Kotzé's critique relates to the appropriateness and orientation of social and economic policy, which defines the agenda of what is possible for even the most efficient of projects to respond to social and economic upliftment. At another level, that of project planning and implementation, her critique forces us to re-examine the ability of these interventions to operate according to a sharing of support and responsibility that dispenses with past approaches. Contemporary problems towards this end could include the beneficiaries of development projects trying to interpret public accountability to the public servant versus that to a service provider under project implementation strategies, the consistency of expectations between beneficiaries and members of the project regime with regards to the appropriate design of the intervention, and the subjectification of project beneficiaries as participant subjects (in participatory methods), where this might end up merely justifying project technique. Finally, there is concern with the character and depth of engagement with beneficiaries being pre-empted by project managers and intermediaries objectifying development as an intervention rather than viewing the intervention itself as a means to understand development as a condition.

Public service accountability and intergovernmental relations

The 2003 'State of the Nation' presidential address introduced the idea of deploying community development workers to improve the government's interaction with the public. However, what does this proposed deployment imply about the effectiveness of existing modes of interaction between the government and the public? The much anticipated *Towards a ten year review: Synthesis report on implementation of government programmes* (PCAS 2003) observed that, although the government had put in place many inter-organisational forums to enhance the effectiveness of policy formulation and service delivery, greater involvement by the recipients of these services was needed. It specifically cited research showing that the poor in particular lacked 'formal organisational power' to engage and that where civil society organisations participated 'more fully', service-delivery gaps were better identified

(PCAS 2003:14). It would, however, be unfair to say that the poor simply lack 'formal organisational power', given the plethora of small-scale, informal community-based organisations in South Africa.[7]

What seems more appropriate is to question the quality and effectiveness of government engagement with the poor, and indeed with all members of the public, through the public service. Moreover, it ought not be taken for granted that the existence of inter-organisational and indeed *inter-governmental* structures and forums represents sufficient indicators of accountability between the public service and the citizenry.

Although not afforded as much prominence in previous presidential 'State of the Nation' addresses, intergovernmental relations, it must be noted, are pivotal factor in the movement away from authoritarian and overly centralised decision-making processes. This is not, however, simply a matter of decentralising administration closer to the public, but the extent to which the reconfiguration of the system promotes a two-way democratic conversation that moves away from the ineffectual development approaches of the past.

A key intergovernmental structural challenge confronting post-apartheid governments is that the public service does not officially incorporate local or municipal government as per the Public Service Act (No. 103 of 1994). This legislative technicality is constitutionally catered for by the expectation that national and provincial governments provide capacity support to local government.[8] The government's ten year review report in fact remarked on capacity shortages in provincial and local governments, which have constrained delivery and forced the national sphere to consider intervening (PCAS 2003).

The challenge of co-ordinating the various administrations representing the state is often remarked upon. This includes the PSC's submission to Parliament's Public Services and Administration Portfolio Committee on the release of its *State of the public service report 2002*. In this submission the PSC described the making and implementing of policy as being hampered by a lack of 'unison' between national and provincial governments and the public service, where the link between these agents was 'difficult to understand'. The PSC added that co-ordination and integration of service delivery efforts was also problematic (PMG 2003). Inadequate co-ordination and integration are

frequently cited as challenges by public servants, which is understandable given the complex organisational system Mokgoro referred to earlier. The problem can also be interpreted in at least two ways. The first relates to the PSC's statement to the Portfolio Committee that there is 'uneven alignment' of policymakers and implementers, which could be read as primarily a technical issue requiring logistical and organisational consistency in executing policy positions. Secondly, there are also situations where policy approaches may differ according to the fiscal and strategic circumstances of provincial administrations. This may have less to do with the misalignment of policy and implementation and more to do with how priorities are planned.

Because the structure of intergovernmental administration is complex, the corresponding challenge of co-operative government could be said to largely follow suit. The solution then tends to be simpler than one can imagine, where this could entail simply improving communication and ultimately co-ordination. The deployment of community development workers needs to be reflected on within this context. Do they represent necessary supplementary resources reaching areas and depths not able to be penetrated by existing public servants, or is their deployment simply papering over the neglect in public servant outreach, depth of engagement and communication with the public?

This is an important question to ponder if we fall back on problems of co-ordination and alignment disrupting the reach and depth of administrative services, because we may be in danger of playing to a public perception not far removed from apartheid experience. Moerdijk (1981), for example, pointed to the administrative complexity of the structure governing homelands, including a mix of homeland, central government and agency entities, with specific powers flowing to each, all falling under the ultimate authority of the then Prime Minister and Cabinet of the Republic of South Africa. The post-1994 government system has continued with a decentralised unitary political structure with a great deal of authority residing in the President and Cabinet.[9] This system has also suffered setbacks, including: imprecision about the sharing of powers and functions between the three spheres of government, which is being dealt with now; occasions where severe provincial underperformance (Eastern Cape provincial administration) has resulted in direct central government intervention; and finally, instances of poor administrative engagement with the public that have even been compared by members of the public with apartheid-period treatment.[10]

The point is not that decentralisation and complexity are necessarily negative. Rather, it rests on the extent to which the decentralisation and complexity of the post-apartheid government reaches and engages with people in a fundamentally different way than in the past. Clearly the allegiance of the post-1994 administrative dispensation is to a non-racial democratic society. However, to what degree will neglect on the part of administrative entities to consistently reach and communicate with the public in a radically different way result in significantly increasing the public's confidence that a democratic government is not simply the same old complex structures, but only this time with blacks and women replacing whites (Mokgoro 1996).

Some could then question the reconstitution of the public service, as described in the PSC's submission to Parliament, as a:

> network of delivery-oriented public service providers, each responsible for their own management according to national norms and standards, rather than the standardised rigid procedures that characterised the previous system. This has created a foundation for success, although major challenges remain in the areas of implementation, co-ordination and integration of services to end-users. (PMG 2003)

Is the reconstitution of the public service as a network of delivery-oriented service providers sufficient? In expediting delivery to the public in response to historical neglect and pressing socio-economic needs, are public servants failing to fashion their responses more carefully and widely to also take into account those factors that can impinge on the public's utilisation of these services? For example, the public service is composed of sector-oriented bureaux conducting regulatory, dispensary, and facilitation services. These are designated by a variety of posts and job descriptions, with varying degrees and types of interaction with the public. In some cases, such as with dispensary services (for example, the Department of Home Affairs' processing of identity-related documentation, and the Department of Social Development's processing of social assistance applications), interaction with the public is subject to greater standardisation and governed by a set of strict procedures. In other cases, such as with facilitation-type services including the design, implementation and monitoring of programmes, projects, and ad hoc initiatives, there is a variety of less 'routine' and more flexible forms of interacting

with the public. These may include dealing with disasters, instituting and evolving various types of state support to promote economic development, assisting the poor, improving public health and so on.

There is no fundamental difference in the various ways the public service responds to its diverse mandate – be it at the dispensary level or at the facilitation level, the task is still based on service to the public. Although this is not the sole responsibility of less-developed countries, but most certainly more greatly felt in these, it ought to go beyond a minimalist technocratic understanding of the task to a kind of postmodern view of how formal bureaucratic institutions discourse with those whom they represent (Fox & Miller 1995). For example, is not the dispensing of identity documents more than just a routine paper-based transaction, when at the counter-level the purpose and utilities of this document ought to be explained and clarified to its recipient? The dispensing of social assistance also cannot be reduced to the efficiency of a paper-based service, when it could be said to also include constant monitoring (and related advisory services) of the conditions and extent of public need. For example, is there not a need to assist the public by explaining other instruments of support that they may not be aware of, as well as advising them on how they can otherwise improve their socio-economic conditions? If financial and technical planning were determined on the basis of these actions, it may produce greater credibility for development.

It should be reiterated that post-apartheid public servants are in reality expected to do more than deliver services efficiently and effectively. They are expected to continuously examine and respond to circumstances that constrain the utilisation of and access to services. This represents a fundamental break with the notion of accountability experienced in the past and could engender real credibility amongst the public about transformation. Finally, this issue is relevant to Adler's discussion of the sensitivity around debates about 'right-sizing' or rationalising the public service whilst taking into account 'service delivery requirements' (2000:19). The issue here is not that the negotiation between the government and public servant representatives simply agree to a quantifiably acceptable compromise (in terms of job retentions, retrenchments and redeployments), but is fundamentally about the extent and content of the normative discussion underpinning how service delivery requirements are defined, including what public service actors think

the public requires versus what the public thinks, which will ultimately influence how service delivery is shaped and resourced.

Conclusion

Public service transformation has much to reflect and learn from apartheid-period public administration. This is precisely because the process of transformation by definition incorporates a pre-existing system requiring multi-dimensional analysis. Despite the gains made in restructuring the public service since, there is still a great deal of inherited complexity that requires greater reflection before reducing and narrowing the emphasis to practical efficiency and effectiveness. Perhaps in this vein we should not be too quick to criticise the performance of the current public service without more insight and serious reflection on the system that was inherited. However, we also need to be mindful of the public service having not just repudiated the structures of the old system, but whether it is succeeding in substantially rehabilitating its credibility amongst the public.

Notes

1 Speaking during the introduction of the Bantu Self-Government Bill in 1959, Minister de Wet Nel stated: 'It is our deep conviction that the personal and national ideals of every ethnic group can be best developed within its own national community … This is the philosophical basis of the policy of apartheid.' See No Sizwe (Neville Alexander) (1979) *One Azania, one nation: The national question in South Africa*. London: Zed:12.

2 Refers to a state that provides most democratic features of political rule to whites, while ruling blacks dictatorially.

3 The NP government also presided over an increase in the number of central authority departments from 26 to between 38 and 41 by 1970 (the figure of 38 is quoted in Seegers 1994:40; the figure of 41 indicated by Roux is quoted in Posel 2000:43).

4 Pines referred to such organs of government as the Department of Community Development, established in 1964, and the Department of Plural Relations and Development. He pointed out that in establishing the former, the Prime Minister of South Africa stated as its responsibilities: providing for and assisting in the proper

settlement and housing of all population groups, the development of 'sound' communities, and the removal of poor conditions impeding proper community development. The latter department's more technical descriptions of its tasks included to support planning and co-ordination of community development in 'black states' and urban areas, the training of blacks and whites in the theory and practice of community development, guidance in the implementation of community development, project evaluation, co-ordination for development and research. As much as one can criticise the overriding state of unequal access to resources that characterised South African-homeland relations, and more precisely white-black relations, one cannot ignore or disregard the fact that development planning and implementation was carried out by apartheid-era administrations.

5 Reynolds estimated that 71 per cent of absolutely poor people in South Africa resided in homelands.

6 Morast pointed to research by the University of Stellenbosch's Bureau of Economic Research (BER) that showed 150 000 Africans entering the South African labour market annually, while only 89 000 jobs had been created in 'decentralised' or homeland areas between 1960 and 1973.

7 According to a 1999 Johns Hopkins University study (Swilling & Russel 2002:20) 53 per cent of the over 98 000 non-profit organisations in South Africa were classified as informal and community-based.

8 See Section 154 (1), The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, and in particular the general principle of 'co-operative government'.

9 The Department of Provincial and Local Government recently commissioned a study reviewing the powers and functions shared between provincial and local government in South Africa (2003).

10 Referring to the reported manner in which the removal of Alexandra township residents was carried out in 2001 (*Mail & Guardian* 22.06.01).

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