

MEDIA RELEASE	Service delivery: The other side of the coin
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Confidence in our country's Public Service is being seriously eroded from all directions. Apart from widespread public outcry and even violent protests about the State's failure to provide basic services to citizens, coupled with corruption, public servants are becoming increasingly demoralized.

So serious is this confidence crisis that public servants themselves no longer trust the system they serve. When nurses working in public hospitals rather take their families to private hospitals and teachers at public schools fork out for private schooling for their own children, the alarms are ringing. From health to education, safety and security to transportation, only those who cannot afford better still wait in long queues for services from state institutions.

During the recent Public Sector Summit in Durban, it was once again highlighted that the public service is being crippled by serious weaknesses relating professionalism, insufficient human resource capacity, a lack of highly-specialised skills, planning and managerial shortcomings in rolling out programs and in implementing projects. Whilst the public is up in arms and voicing their anger in many ways, public servants have, however, for many years been expected to suffer in silence the abuse by their employer for many years or face the risk of their loyalty being questioned by all.

The Public Servants Association (PSA), a trade union representing more than 211 000 public servants, stands witness on a daily basis to public servants being left to the mercy of shocking human resource abuses. "Based on the PSA's experience, the state has unfortunately earned itself a reputation as a bad employer. Employees are primarily working to earn a living, followed by the need to have fulfilling careers. Fulfillment, however, does not pay the bills. The commitment of the state to the wellbeing of its employees is indeed questionable when basic duties are grossly neglected. The PSA has countless records of employees being involved in lengthy and costly battles to rectify salaries, receiving applicable allowances, recognition for services rendered, clumsy disciplinary actions, etc. If, in addition, physical working conditions leave much to be desired, loyalty will suffer. A loyal employee will work hard, share expertise and walk the extra mile. Loyalty, however, has to come from both sides of the relationship, otherwise the relationship is doomed," said PSA Deputy General Manager, Manie de Clercq.

"Government has the responsibility to ensure that the work environment is conducive to making its workers feel the need to work harder and adopt positive attitudes. It requires a management approach that promotes optimal performance among employees and performance management systems should be geared towards rewarding performers and troubling the conscience of non-performers," said De Clercq.

“South Africa is aspiring to a developmental state, where the state promotes and facilitates both economic growth and social development. In such a state, the public service propels state machinery. We must channel efforts towards strengthening the capacity of the state to deliver service. But this cannot be done without human and material resources. We tend to over-emphasise material resources without paying the same attention to the critical importance of human resources. Money, without human beings, cannot build and run hospitals, construct roads, provide clean, running water or teach children at school. Human resources are the most critical drivers of development. South Africa’s developmental aspirations will depend on the extent to which the public service is capacitated and motivated, accompanied by a culture of hard work and an acute consciousness of social responsibility. To achieve a people-driven public service, our country’s public service should embody a new person - a reflection of a selfless individual, driven by a deeper social consciousness that induces a desire to serve which can only be brought about when there is loyalty and commitment from the employer towards its own human resources,” said De Clercq .

The PSA is willing to participate and make proposals to address the multi-faceted service-delivery challenge. “Restoring public confidence in the public service is dependent on the recognition that all those employed in the public service have individual and collective responsibilities as ambassadors of the system and caregivers in society. At the same time they also deserve respectful treatment from their employer. We do, however, understand our responsibility towards society, which is why we advocate for a balance between workers’ rights and the rights of the poor and, indeed, of all citizens of this country. The protection of labour rights should not leave the rights of other citizens compromised. It is a matter of balancing workers’ rights with the rights of the people they serve,” said De Clercq.

As South Africans continue to yearn for the provision of quality services, public servants continue to long for an efficient, loyal employer. “Those in our society who are entrusted with the authority to make decisions must do everything in their power to deal with the serious weaknesses in the public service – particularly those that relate to inadequacies in dealing with human resources. Unless this happens, service delivery is doomed to remain an albatross around the neck of government,” said De Clercq.

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