



# Responsive Public Management

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## South Africa's National Development Plan for 2030

Sixteen years after Nelson Mandela's "Batho Pele"<sup>1</sup> initiative to improve public services, the South African government has decided to relaunch the programme, renaming it the National Development Plan (NDP) for 2030.

The decision to do so came as a result of persistent criticism from various quarters of poor-quality government services. The NDP calls for "well-run and effectively coordinated state institutions with skilled public servants who are committed to the public good and capable of delivering consistently high quality services".

### A public service out of step with citizens' needs

The Batho Pele initiative called for eight guiding principles for the provision of public services to be put in place<sup>2</sup> with an eye to increasing its effectiveness, quality, transparency and continuity. In reality, sixteen years after Nelson Mandela's speech on 1 October 1997, little progress has been made. The widespread rejection of the civil service acts as a sort of weathervane of the state of advancement of the initiative.

The largest source of complaints concerns government red tape. Many South Africans dread the moment that they have to visit a government office, fearing that it will be "a time-consuming experience"<sup>3</sup> and unsatisfactory with respect to the service they are given.

The public service's poor performance record today is partly due to the negative legacy of apartheid, which only officially ended in 1991. South Africa's black population held very few positions of responsibility and were poorly trained. Today, this gap is one of the public service's key problems.

### A public service that fulfils citizens' expectations and meets the needs of the country

On 15 March 2013, President Jacob Zuma stated that, "If citizens continue to complain about poor services it will mean we are not getting value for our money."<sup>4</sup> Although the government acknowledges that much remains to be accomplished, it points out that some improvements have been made. This is the point made by Phumla Williams, acting CEO of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) in a blog post dated

<sup>1</sup> A Sesotho term meaning "People First". Sesotho is one of the official languages of South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> [www.etu.org.za/toolbox/docs/govern/bathopele.html](http://www.etu.org.za/toolbox/docs/govern/bathopele.html)

<sup>3</sup> [www.info.gov.za/blogs/2013/publicservice\\_130403.html](http://www.info.gov.za/blogs/2013/publicservice_130403.html)

<sup>4</sup> [m.timeslive.co.za/politics/?articleId=84314743](http://m.timeslive.co.za/politics/?articleId=84314743)

3 April 2013. Williams distinguishes between a negative perception of public service and the reality of the situation – a gap that can be attributed to two main factors: on the one hand, a problem of access to information, particularly outside of urban areas, and on the other hand, citizens' lack of understanding of what they have a right to expect from the public service.

Over and beyond meeting the public's expectations, Trevor Manuel, Minister in the Presidency for National Planning, underscored the importance of a high-functioning public service to the country's development. He stated, "If we don't get these things right (...) everything else will not work [and] we will fail as a nation<sup>5</sup>."

## **Accessibility, neutrality and greater consistency**

Improving the quality of public services is one thing, but making sure it has an effective presence is another. Referring to the vision underlying the implementation of the NDP, Free State Premier Ace Magashule emphasises the importance of an accessible and neutral public service: "In this coming financial year we will pay particular attention to ensure that all Free State residents, regardless of their social status, can easily obtain information about government services and are able to access available resources and opportunities<sup>6</sup>."

For its part, the government of Pretoria announced that the goal of the NDP was to introduce effective government through a standardised public administration system, but that, contrary to received ideas, it was not intending to centralise public administration.

## **Improved ethics**

Batho Pele should also be reflected in a shift in attitude by civil servants, so that they feel that they are carrying out the mission of public service, which would reduce the risks of wrongdoing and corruption.

As Lindiwe Sisulu, Minister of Public Service and Administration, explained, "A norm and standard is intended to guide employers and employees in the public administration and to set parameters for important procedures."

To change behaviours, all new civil servants will have to attend an initial training session to make sure they understand the specificities and values involved in providing high-quality public service. In the words of Phumla Williams, "We want to make sure that all public servants embody the values of Batho Pele."

**Antoine Sevestre**

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[http://www.info.gov.za/blogs/2013/publicservice\\_130403.html](http://www.info.gov.za/blogs/2013/publicservice_130403.html)

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<http://www.thenewage.co.za/mobi/Detail.aspx?NewsID=88004&CatID=1008>