Article

Poverty alleviation and service delivery – developing a conceptual framework for South Africa's service delivery system

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Poverty alleviation is one of the means of eradicating poverty and establishing ideal sustainable livelihoods. Since most poverty alleviation programmes are delivered within the public service institutional set up, the pursuit for sustainable livelihoods can only be realized if the public service delivery system is sustainable. This article discusses poverty alleviation and service delivery in the South African context. In so doing, it draws on three major poverty surveys in South Africa the findings of which have been documented in the First Carnegie Commission's Report of 1932, the Second Carnegie Commission Report of 1984 and the 1998 Poverty and Inequality Report. Against this backdrop, a conceptual framework linking poverty alleviation to service delivery is developed. The article then provides a discussion on sustainable service delivery as a pre-requisite for successful poverty alleviation programmes and concludes with recommendations on how this could be translated into practice and the role of NGOs in this regard.

Key words: Poverty alleviation, sustainable livelihoods, sustainable service delivery, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

There have been several attempts to understand and reduce poverty in South Africa. Concerns have often centered on poverty alleviation policies, the appropriate strategies that should be adopted for poverty alleviation and the targeting mechanisms in this regard. However, there has been little attention paid towards the service delivery process for poverty alleviation. This article attempts, among other things, to formulate a conceptual framework of poverty alleviation and service delivery by analyzing the available literature on these concepts. The analysis is done mainly in the context of three inquiries conducted in South Africa over the years and the policy recommendations that have flown from each of them. The article also attempts to explore the theoretical framework informing the various recommendations with the view of developing an appropriate framework for researching and understanding issues relating to service delivery for poverty alleviation in present day rural South Africa.

THE FIRST CARNEGIE COMMISSION

The first attempt at understanding and responding to poverty in South Africa was initiated by a team of university and church people who, with the help of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, set up the Carnegie Commission on the poor-white problem. The investigation, which involved a widespread study of the natural and socio-economic conditions of the poor Whites in the country, took place between 1929 and 1930. The plight of those poor, mainly Afrikaner, Whites forced off the land and thrust unprepared into urban areas and towns attracted the attention of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which funded the survey. The Report of the Carnegie Commission (RCM) of 1932 outlined horrendous stories of abject poverty experienced by these poor whites. Wilson and Ramphele (1989:x) however, note that while the report's recommendations were useful for the poor Whites, they provided a catalyst for the further denial of human rights to black South Africans, helping to create the structural and political climate where poverty for Black South Africans became official policy.

The recommendations of the Carnegie Commission highlighted the need to uplift poor Whites in order to enable them to fit into and contribute to an economy

enable them to fit into and contribute to an economy moving towards modernization. The report for example recommended that:

"..a policy of protection by reservation of work to Europeans, should be treated as merely a measure of transition for a period during which the poor white is given the opportunity to adapt himself to new (modern) conditions in South Africa" (RCM, 1932: xx).

Furthermore, the recommendations advised that:

"..it is necessary that the nature of training given should be adapted to the requirements of the labour market and the specific needs of the industry for which the training was intended" (RCM, 1932: xxiii).

Implicit in these recommendations, is a modernization view of development, which sees development (and poverty alleviation) as a question of increasing gross levels of savings and investment (Burkey, 1996:27). Modernization has its roots in the emergence of capitalism and the advance of the industrial revolution, which gave a distinctive form of Western thinking. Cotzee (2001:30) views the modernization theory as the total transformation that takes place when traditional or pre-modern society changes to such an extent that new forms of technological, organizational or social character are required, which is exactly what happened in South Africa during this phase.

The implications of the modernist approach reflected in the recommendations of the First Carnegie Report, are visible to this day in South Africa. Labour in the traditional rural sector shifted towards the modern or urban sector for White people and subsequently for the Black people as well. This shift contributed to greater spatial inequality witnessed in present day South Africa. The elite, urban population, which was mainly White, reaped the benefits of the modernization approach. This led to a widening gap not only between the rich and poor but also between Black people and White people.

Flowing from the Report of the Carnegie Commission, the Government's effort in the reduction of White poverty consisted of three elements summed up by Abedian and Standish (1986:186) as follows:

1.   A legislative package in the labour market designed to favour Whites at the expense of Blacks.
2.   A sustained effort at increasing government services to Whites especially education, health and housing.
3.   An ambitious public works programme.

The public works programme was the most successful of the three strategies. This was not only due to the concerted government efforts to increase services to Whites, but also, to the availability of substantial funding dedicated to these schemes. Cawker and Whiteford (1993:97) point out that overall government spending on

unemployment relief measures increased from less than 1% of the government budget in 1920 to nearly 10% by 1934. The Carnegie Commission however, cautioned that "great circumspection should be used in opening temporary relief works." This was after the Commission observed that the poor left their farms and were often unable to return to their former means of livelihoods when the programmes stopped. Such a situation would mean that the poor were left worse off than they had been before the temporary work.

They would then degenerate into a pauperized and destitute state, thus increasing the burden the nation had to bear. Regrettably, the Commission did not advice on any measures the State would take while the poor were in such relief work or any post employment support measures that would ensure that a state of destitution was avoided after the programme. It was therefore not until the economic expansions of 1933, 1938 and from 1945 onwards which created considerable employment in the private sector, that Whites were drawn from the relief schemes into permanent positions. The relief schemes were eventually discontinued because of a shortage of poor Whites (Cawker and Whiteford, 1993:97).

The possibility, however remote that the poor can become worse off than they were before an employment scheme, is of great concern and it is imperative that supportive strategies to avoid such a scenario constitute an important component of the planning and implementation of all public works programmes designed to provide temporary employment relief. As will be seen later, this is an important component of present day public works programmes.

The Carnegie Commission was not oblivious to the practical fact that poverty alleviation measures needed to be implemented within a well-structured and coordinated process of service delivery. It noted that with regard to rural areas, there was a lack of "advice regarding employment possibilities and a lack of structures to effectively coordinate charity programmes" (RCM, 1932). It also noted that there was a lack of local investigation into social conditions and into various forms and grades of destitution. To this end, the Commission recommended that local committees consisting of persons willing to serve the cause, be formed. Noting the important role of the State, it was recommended that such committees enjoy the support of the state and carry out their tasks in close cooperation with public authorities (RCM, 1932: xiii).

SECOND CARNEGIE COMMISSION

In 1984, the Second Carnegie Conference on Poverty was convened to address the imbalances identified and shortcomings implicit in the First Carnegie Commission. It focused its attention on Southern Africa and included all those people that fell in a broadly defined category of human deprivation and poverty. Wilson and Ramphel (1989)

Table 1. Rural urban distribution.

Location	Population share (%)	Poverty share (%)	Poverty rate (%)
Rural	50.4	71.6	70.9
Urban	49.6	28.4	28.5
All	100	100	49.9

Adapted from May (1999:30).

summarized the conclusions of this Report, based on the findings of the Second Carnegie Commission, in their book Uprooting Poverty.

The report took, as its starting point, an investigation into the causes of poverty and the conviction that understanding the root causes of poverty would assist in the making of future public policy choices. This Second Carnegie Commission stressed the need to uncover the roots of a system that continued, despite rapid economic growth during a hundred years of industrial revolution, to impoverish millions of people. This need was premised on the fact that the prevailing situation had grown out of the past and so, "if the future is to be different it is essential to understand the way in which the present has been formed, in order that we may overcome the past and, hence reshape the future" (Wilson and Ramphele 1989:190).

The Report pointed out that poverty, like illness, manifested itself in many different ways in different historical situations and that it had diverse causes. The Report also stressed that the roots of South Africa's poverty "lay deep in the history of the region's political economy which includes not only apartheid as it evolved after 1948, but also the pattern of racial capitalism that grew during the centuries before that (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:4).

Wilson and Ramphele (1989:267) were concerned with the demand for a fundamental redistribution of power. They argued that power lay at the heart of the problem of poverty in South Africa. Without it, those who were poor remained vulnerable to an ongoing process of impoverishment. Uprooting Poverty explicitly deferred from the partisan political question of how to effect the transfer of power in order to draw attention to complementary interim strategies aimed at poverty that could exploit and widen space for more overt political action. In their book, Wilson and Ramphele (1994:157) emphasized that "underlying all strategies against poverty must be clear recognition of the necessity for a fundamental redistribution of power".

This concern for radical transformation was very much in line with the thinking of various authors at the time. Practitioners of development in the 1970's through to the 1980's were beginning to see a need for changes in existing social and political structures if development was to benefit the poor (Burkey, 1993:33). For instance, Savenhagen in Pearse and Stiefel (1979:3) argue that effective social and economic development can only occur if accompanied by profound transformations in the political and social structures. Hettne (1982:6) concurs with this view when he asserts that development (and poverty alleviation) necessarily involves structural transformation, which implies not only political but also social and economic change.

The most recent and acclaimed support for political transformation as a prerequisite for poverty alleviation is that of Amartya Sen in his Nobel winning book Development as Freedom. Sen (1984) looks at poverty eradication as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy (1999:4). He argues that political liberty and civil freedoms are important for people to enjoy favourable economic circumstances.

Wilson and Ramphele (1989:267) warned however, that a change in political power structures in itself would not be enough to have an impact on poverty levels. They emphasized the need to "infuse this by a value system which would ensure that the process of transformation and creation of a new society is of real benefit to those who live in it. In particular, Wilson and Ramphele were concerned that the high degree of corruption in the public sector bred by apartheid was a major obstacle to delivery in the process of transformation. (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989: 271).

A range of recommendations including the creation of organizations for change, rural development and provision of housing were advanced and no doubt served to provoke thoughts on public policy in the fight against poverty and social discontent at the time. However, in a review of Wilson and Ramphele's work, Bonbright (1989:7) criticises the "soft and diffused character of its recommendations pointing out, in particular, that no blue print for a concerted official attack on poverty was advanced".

Apart from this omission, the Second Carnegie Commission overlooked the complexity of administering and managing the various recommendations in a transformed public administration whose fundamentals would still bear the brunt of apartheid out of which they were formed. Consequently, there was not much attempt to bolster administrative capacity in such a way as to prepare it for a new political structure that was to evolve in the South African society.

Yet it must be recalled that it was impossible to fathom a democratic South Africa at the time of the inquiry. It was even more difficult to realize the complexities of a public administration system that would incorporate the various public services of homelands into a single,

Table 2. Access to basic services, by rural-urban classification.

Services	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Running water inside dwellings	16.8	74.1
Flush toilets	10.9	65.5
Electricity in house	21.1	82.4
Telephone in dwelling/cellular	7.7	48.4

Adapted from May (1999:30).

representative one, committed to reducing poverty for all the citizenry of the country. It is not surprising, therefore, that the public administration aspect and service delivery mechanism for poverty eradication was not given much attention by the Second Carnegie Report.

THE POVERTY AND INEQUALITY REPORT

Another significant endeavour undertaken in an attempt to understand and therefore alleviate poverty in South Africa was the Poverty and Inequality Survey commissioned by the Office of the Deputy President in 1997 and presented as the Poverty and Inequality Report (PIR) in 1998.

The PIR represents the most comprehensive documentation and analysis that has been undertaken in South Africa since the 1984 Second Carnegie inquiry. Apart from examining the extent and nature of poverty and inequality in South Africa, the PIR assessed the prevailing policy framework for the elimination of both poverty and inequality and provided guidelines on the formulation and implementation of suitable policy. In particular, the PIR catered for the absence of credible and comprehensive social indicator data necessary for appropriate policy formulation.

Of relevance to this discussion is the fact that the PIR established that most poor people live in rural areas (May, 1999:30). The Report also established that the poverty share of rural areas is 70% and the poverty rate in rural areas is 70% compared with 30% in urban areas. These figures are reflected in the Table 1.

Furthermore, the disparities in living standards between rural and urban areas were apparent without appealing to a consumption based poverty measure. The vast differences in access to basic services are shown in Table 2.

The Poverty and Inequality Report (May, 2000:52) pointed out the importance of creating an environment for economic growth as a prime requisite for poverty eradication. It highlighted the challenge of not only creating a large number of jobs but also ensuring that better quality jobs were maintained (May, 2000: 72). This is not to say that the PIR was against short-term employment schemes of public works programmes, but rather that, the use of public works programmes for poverty alleviation should be carried out within a wider framework of support

for agricultural and rural stimulation, the strengthening of human resources and the building up and maintenance of productive resources (May, 2000:80). The PIR noted the link between infrastructure and alleviation of poverty and examined issues relating to the efficient and affordable delivery of services of water, sanitation, energy, transport and communication, which, as Table 2 indicates, are particularly lacking in the rural areas of the country. A three-pronged approach was suggested as a way in which the impact of government spending on infrastructure could be maximized (May, 2000:170).

The first approach suggests a revision of the way in which institutions relate to existing government structures in the delivery of services, as this would ensure that inequality is addressed through facilitating access and delivery to all who can afford the service. The second comprises focused interventions in each sector, designed to relieve the plight of the poor and ensure delivery to the members of this group. The third argues in favour of the need for a prioritized agenda in which those programmes with the greatest impact in poverty alleviation are prioritized.

Cognisance is taken of the institutional framework within which the recommendations would be implemented. Underlying this three-pronged approach, as the PIR recommends, is the need to ensure integrated development rather than isolated sectoral development. The Report further pointed out that significant institutional transformation was necessary to ensure that institutions of delivery had capacity, resources, political will and transparency to ensure policy implementation. This recommendation was of great significance for the planning and management of programmes that fight poverty in view of the fact that service provision still bore the mark of apartheid which saw delivery being implemented along racial lines. The PIR further noted that the success of development initiatives greatly depended on strengths and weaknesses of the underlying institutional environment (May, 2000:176). State institutions impact on poverty and inequality by setting out the legal, policy and administrative framework in which other actors and institutions operate and by targeting groups in the provision of services. State institutions also impact on poverty to the extent that they set an environment or framework in which the various spheres of government as well as the various departments within and between these spheres of government coordinate development

initiatives for poverty alleviation. As such, the role played by the State through its institutions cannot be over emphasized.

The institutional set up of the State is structured around sector departments. Poverty, however, being a multi sector issue, requires a multi-sectoral approach and calls for coordination of activities of various departments. Presently in South Africa, there is no central agency at the national level tasked with policy design or oversight of poverty related programmes. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) had the potential to perform this function prior to its closure in 1996. The RDP was seen as the principle mechanism of change and poverty alleviation (Fitzgerald, 1997:59). It took the character of the flagship innovative institutional progress and was seen as having greater freedom of manoeuvre compared with other ministries (departments), which had inherited existing portfolios and bureaucratic cultural operating norms.

Although RDP programmes were transferred to line ministries, closure of the RDP Offices, meant that the institutional basis for addressing poverty in a cross sectoral manner was extremely weakened. In particular, the institutional linkages between the different spheres of government were either weak or underdeveloped.

The PIR pointed out the need for institutional reform. It hailed the constitutional devolution of power and its potential to make progress in such areas as human development and coherent policy implementation. However, the PIR did not provide a strategic vision for the attainment of coordinated efforts between the various department sectors for public service delivery that is efficient and effective in alleviating poverty. It nevertheless provided a basis for development planners to apply their minds in developing a vision for such strategies. Recommendations 12 and 13 in the PIR alluded to this vision in the following terms:

"As an immediate priority, a high level committee should take responsibility for the coordination of the many activities relating to reducing poverty and inequality, as well as assessment of progress in this regard…To do this, an immediate priority system and procedures for monitoring the impact of government policy on poverty and inequality should be established and adequately resourced'.

The PIR was silent on the complexities of incorporating various public service systems and the implications of these for service delivery. Thus, whereas it pointed out important policy recommendations, there was no con-sideration for the coordination mechanisms or indeed the delivery process this should follow. The PIR did indicate however, that the "delivery of services and infrastructure need not be done by government itself" (May, 2000:171). A lack of such a coordination mechanism makes the poor vulnerable to other role players in the development process notably the private sector, under the guise of Public Private Partnerships (PPP).

THE "CAPABILITIES APPROACH" OF THE POVERTY AND INEQUALITY REPORT

The Poverty and Inequality Report adopted the "capabilities approach". This approach examines the factors that shape the ability of people to realize their full human potential over time (May, 2000:8). Although ec-nomic growth is a necessary condition for the alleviation of poverty, it is not a sufficient condition. Enlarging what South Africans can do, or can be, should be the primary objective of government's actions. In the capabilities approach, the core role of governments as well as development actors is to endow citizens with the required conditions for actualizing central human functioning; in other words, to provide them with necessary capacities and opportunities (Gasper and Claire, 2001:4).

It is the expansion of capabilities that forms the cornerstone of the approach adopted by the Poverty and Inequality Report. Drawing on Sen's analysis, the PIR point out elements that are important in the expansion of the individual, household and community capability. Sen (1984:509 -10) outlines these as:

1. Assets and resources available to the poor.
2. Activities that can be undertaken to generate a sustainable livelihood.
3. Commodities and services required by people for an acceptable standard of living.

Against this backdrop, Sen (1984:509-10) draws four broad categories of assets and resources. He identifies these as:

I. Human capabilities.
II. Natural resources.
III. Social and institutional resources.
IV. Human-made assets.

He then argues that it is the inability of individuals and societies to maintain or enhance these different assets that leads to and perpetuates poverty. In this way, the capability framework adopted by the PIR provides a framework in which policy options can be distinguished. It points out how various elements interact to impact on asset levels and on livelihood activities that the poor can engage in to uplift their capabilities and in effect reduce poverty and inequality. For instance, policies that promote access to and control over land as a productive resource can lead to the poor adopting farming activities from which an income is derived to establish man-made assets. Further, such income would enable the poor to access health and education services, which in turn improve and widen their capabilities and contribute to reduction in their poverty levels.

It must be pointed out however, that a focus on capabilities
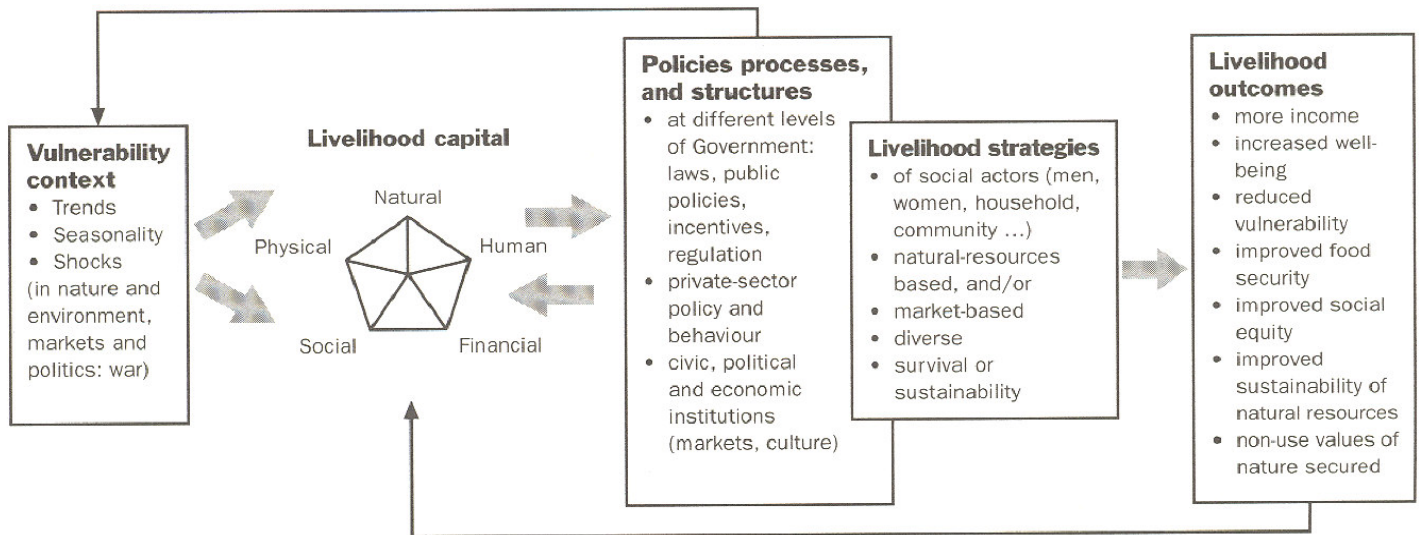
Figure 1. The sustainable livelihoods framework. Adapted from DIFID (www.livelihoods.org).

capabilities alone may detract public planners and development managers from the means through which such capabilities can be enhanced. This is because, the capability approach focuses on the ends and not on the management process or the delivery process that leads to provision of these capabilities. A policy which advocates enhancing access to and control over land as a resource, for example and which fails to take cognizance of the institutional arrangement for the delivery of the policy, is likely to meet with implementation problems and fail to reduce the poverty levels of a society. It is submitted that concerted effort to reduce poverty should take cognizance of the public administration system and the delivery process flowing from it, which in turn is dependent on the institutional arrangement of a society.

The role of institutions in poverty alleviation is increasingly being recognized. There is a realization that certain institutional arrangements are more supportive to pro-poor policies. For instance, Mobugunje (1995:6) notes that development requires the nurturing of institutions. Dia (1996) and Mamdani (1996) also note the importance of institutions by pointing out that the root of development crisis is the poor articulation of new and modern institutions and governance structures. In Voices of the Poor (Narayan et al., 2000:180 - 184) the poor make a passionate plea for responsive, accountable, fair and effective institutions as important pre-requisites for any level of poverty alleviation.

In order to understand the institutional arrangement and processes as well as their implications for poverty alleviation, the sustainable livelihoods framework will be examined as a tool of analysis. This is because the sustainable livelihood framework goes beyond capabilities implicit in the capabilities approach, to examine institutions and processes that enable the poor

to convert their capabilities for strategies that ensure not only poverty alleviation but also sustainable livelihoods. In doing so, the framework enables development managers to prepare for such eventualities as shocks and stresses to which the poor are most vulnerable. It is to a discussion of this framework that we now turn our attention.

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS FRAMEWORK

The sustainable livelihoods framework as expressed in Figure 1 below is essentially people centered and aims to explain the relationships between people, their livelihoods, resource endowments, policies and institutions. The framework contains feedback arrows that suggest flows between categories of the framework.

Livelihood outcomes will usually have a strong influence not only on how resources are built up, but also on how they are substituted for one another. It is important to note that livelihood strategies have been made to overlap with policies, processes and structures indicating an intimate and direct relationship between people's strategies, social and public institutions and public policies. The feedback arrows from policies, processes and structures to vulnerability context (as shown in the illustration) suggest that whereas people cannot directly influence this context, some inroads can be made through policy change and the collective actions of government and other role players in respect to non-natural trends and shocks.

The framework is a useful tool for planning projects and programmes. It starts with a clear portrayal of poor people's objectives as desirable livelihood outcomes (Carney, 1998:8-10). As such, the sustainable livelihoods

theory focuses on three main components for strategic action. These are discussed below.

Improving capital assets at the field level

The sustainable livelihood theory deals with five kinds of capital or assets (Carney, 1998:8), which are:

1. Human capital which refers to the skills and knowledge base that people possess.
2. Social capital which refers to the social networks and social groups that people belongs to.
3. Financial capital which refers to money that people have access and control over.
4. Physical capital which refers to the physical infrastructure and physical resources that are available to the people like roads, schools or farming implements.
5. Natural capital, which refers to natural resources that communities are endowed with like water, minerals and land.

The livelihoods theory advances that assets should ideally be nurtured in a manner that maximizes their potential and their convertibility into other kinds of capital assets. Social and human capital, in particular, has the potential to improve livelihoods in innovative ways in that it improves the skills base and nurtures a social support system which can mobilize physical resources and use natural capital to increase the financial assets in a community.

Protecting people's livelihoods against shocks, trends and seasonal stresses

The vulnerability context includes shocks, trends or seasonal issues that have a negative impact on the poor. Shocks include illness, floods, earthquakes, sudden shifts in prices, war and other violent disputes, as well as crop and livestock diseases. Trends are, for instance, increasing population pressure, declining commodity prices, the disappearance of markets or the rise of new ones, soil erosion, deforestation, increasing government accountability and more efficient production techniques (Carney, 1998:8). Within such a context, pro-poor extension could select and provide support in some of these areas as part of making poor people's lives more secure.

Transforming structures and processes

Both public and private organizations are examples of structures. Processes pertain to "how things are done" (Carney, 1998:10). They are to be observed in the policy papers, laws and cultural and institutional procedures that perpetually determine how people interact. Policy and practice within pro-poor extension must be coherent and mutually complementary; they should be designed to help the poor achieve their objectives.

Much as it provides a useful tool for examining a particular development issue, the sustainable livelihoods framework has been criticized on the grounds that it makes people appear invisible; that it requires more recognition of socio-economic, historical and cultural factors; that it is insufficiently flexible and that the overall concept is ethnocentric and not easily transferable (DFID/FAO, 2000). In addition and specific to this discussion, the framework does not capture the internal dynamics of institutions and how they enable or impede planning for coordination of activities in policy implementation.

THE SERVICE DELIVERY PROCESS AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

So far in this article, the point has been made that studies in poverty alleviation in South Africa have largely concentrated on causes and subsequent policy issues to counteract these causes. Very little has been done in terms of looking at the delivery process and how the various actors in the fight against poverty can best coordinate programmes to fight poverty. Yet the way the delivery process of any poverty alleviation programme is structured, greatly influences its impact on the welfare of the poor.

Concerned about the failure of schemes meant to alleviate poverty in rural India, Maheshwari (1985:3) critically reviewed the schemes from a public policy perspective. He concluded that the bureaucratic system put in charge of rural development was incapable of producing results (1985:221). This, according to Maheshwari (1985:221), was because of an "excessively bureaucratized administrative machinery and complicated procedures of work". Although Maheshwari did not lay down concrete recommendations, he made a strong case for developing a separate administrative structure, which would exclusively deal with rural poverty alleviation.

Mathur (1986:7) attributes the failure of development and poverty alleviation programmes to the "inefficiency of the administrative system". He points out that while a great deal of work has been done in an attempt to perfect policies and programmes designed for development and poverty alleviation, the administrative dimension remains largely neglected. Other authors concur with this observation. For example, referring to public works programmes as an anti-poverty measure, Abedian and Standish (1986: 184 - 185) quoting Lewis point out that public works programmes often fail because of institutional and organizational infirmities coupled with inappropriate administrative arrangements within the public sector. They further indicate that the imbalance between centralization and community level administrative

involvement accounts for much of the failure in PWP's. Other authors concur with this observation. Braathen and Palmero (Wilson et al., 2001:272) have argued that poverty should not be seen as a problem in itself. Instead, they advocate for a focus on administration, accountability and budget management in the public sector as crucial considerations for development outcomes and poverty alleviation, in particular.

Grindle (1980:96) stresses the need to thoroughly consider problems of policy implementation such as organizational variables like administrative culture and traditions, which tend to influence the behaviour of both individuals and institutions and consequently the achievements of anti-poverty programmes. Grindle (1980:96) further argues that while cultural, traditional and institutional patterns may be difficult to alter, it is nevertheless possible to become aware of these variables and to try and establish practices and methods of avoiding or minimizing them for purposes of implementing policies of fighting poverty.

SUSTAINABLE SERVICE DELIVERY FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The discussion above suggests that poverty alleviation programmes, can be judged to be successful if they promote sustainable livelihoods. If the public sector plays a pivotal role in ensuring the delivery of services for poverty alleviation as emphasized, then it follows that the success of antipoverty efforts are greatly dependent on the prevailing service delivery system. For sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation to be effective, service delivery must be sustainable. The object of sustainability in this sense is to achieve a self-sustaining improvement in medium to long-term life quality. According to Cloete (2000:11), this implies a coherent systemic integration of development initiatives, resulting in structural, functional and cultural consolidation of a new way of life and the creation of a development culture in society.

The concept of sustainability is based on the original idea of sustainable use of environmental socio-economic resources first put forward by the Brundtland Commission of 1982 (Samad, 1995:3). The term, however, has an additional meaning in the paradigm of public service delivery for poverty alleviation. Here, sustainability refers to institutional and functional durability of public i-stitutions, organizations or offices in the implementation of public policy including poverty alleviation programmes. Cloete (2000:12) extends this concept when he talks of sustainable service delivery as referring to durability of services of a required magnitude and at a required level of quality over an extended period.

Sustainability in this sense of public service delivery not only means the availability of sufficient finances or other socio-economic resources to provide the services needed (Peterson 1997: a and b), but more comprehensively it refers to the overall capacity of the organization to deliver such services, adapt to changing circumstances over an extended period of time, thereby maintaining or preferably improving the services concerned. In public service delivery therefore, sustainability includes the notions of flexibility and resilience despite setbacks. Cloete (2000:12) sees sustainability in service delivery as the overall capacity of the institution (public or private) to deliver needed services and adapt to changing circum-stances over an extended period of time, maintaining or preferably improving the service concerned. Such a situation would require that sustainable public service delivery be conceptualized holistically, to include also political, institutional, managerial and social dimensions as outlined below:

1. Political sustainability refers to durable, effective political commitment and support founded on legitimate, democratic processes (Goldsmith, 1992:586).
2. Institutional sustainability refers to the establishment of durable, effective and efficient institutions which have a good record of achieving strategic policy objectives and of learning from past failures and successes (Brown, 1998:55; Goldsmith, 1992:586).
3. Managerial sustainability refers to strong and committed leadership, clear and unambiguous policy objectives, a broad based consensus about these objectives, effective strategic and operational policy implementation, coordination, monitoring, assessment, review and redesign processes (Goldsmith 1992:586).
4. Social sustainability refers to durable patterns of social interaction and ways of life in society that result from political institutional, managerial, economic and environmental sustainability (Goldsmith, 1992:586).

Evidently, a balanced and integrated programme incorporating the above-mentioned dimensions is a prerequisite if a public delivery system is to function and fulfill its objectives. This raises concerns for a society like South Africa, where the public services, in many respects, continue to operate as a classical bureaucracy. The South African public service was modeled on the principles of and methods of Weberian, "ideal-type" bureaucracy and scientific management (Schutte in Fitzgerald 1997:298). This is to say that the workplace must be managed via regulation and a highly complex set of rules and procedures. Although regulation and control are important aspects of any functioning democracy, it is imperative to avoid a situation where adherence to rules rather than outputs becomes the yardstick by which performance in service delivery is measured. What is needed is a bureaucracy that is pro-poor, delivery oriented, participatory and representative.

Since the shift to democracy in South Africa in 1995, every aspect of social service provision has come under critical scrutiny and led to policy revision through a process of consultation and stakeholder participation.

Public service provision is no exception, with the presentation of the White Paper on Transformation of Public Service of 1997 early on in the transformation process. This policy paper was promulgated to change the way South Africa delivered its services. The White Paper introduces private sector market principles into the public service and shifts the focus to administrative efficiency, effectiveness and cost cutting - a result of which has been the privatization of essential services, such as energy, water and sewerage infrastructure.

South Africa's historical legacies which had sub-systems for the independent homelands, self-governing territories and several government departments, based on the various population groupings (Whites, Coloureds, Asians and Blacks) created duplication in the public service. Under the unified government however, a single public service was ushered incorporating all the sub-systems that had hitherto prevailed. Of significance to poverty alleviation is whether the attitude and culture inherited by the new public service is responsive and able to coordinate activities in such a manner that positively impacts on the livelihoods of the poor. There is still uncertainty over the precise responsibilities of the different levels of administrative echelons of the various spheres of government (Levy and Tapscott, 2001:2). There is also uncertainty regarding the extent to which this might affect the capacity of the government to deliver services for poverty alleviation and to address the inequities of the past.

The 1998 Presidential Review Commission on the reform of the public service highlighted this concern. It noted that, "…the relationship between and within different spheres of government emerged as an issue of concern." The Commission reported that "weaknesses in the structures and practices of inter-governmental relations led to poor coordination within and between different departments and spheres of government creating an incapacity to implement national programmes and a consequent failure to deliver basic services" (PRC, 1998:35). It is essential therefore, that role players in poverty alleviation programmes analyse the form and functioning of intergovernmental relations in contemporary South Africa. Only then will there be an un-derstanding of the nature of opportunities and challenges these pose to service delivery in the fight against poverty. The Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act of 2005 is an attempt to provide guidelines in this regard.

CONCLUSION

In developing a conceptual framework for service delivery and poverty alleviation for South Africa, the discussion has been placed in a historical context based on inquiries that have been undertaken to address poverty in South Africa over the years. The theoretical framework informing the various responses to poverty have been analyzed and, against this backdrop, a sustainable service delivery model, informed by the sustainable livelihoods framework proposed. The main observations that emerge from the discussion are as follows:

Firstly, poverty was historically seen in the context of the white people, little regard was given to other races. Accordingly, the public service delivery system was aimed at alleviating the plight of the whites. Realigning this system to provide an all-embracing public service system catering for the needs of all South Africans is not exactly problem-free. It requires a radical shift in the way public servants identify and respond to the poor. Most importantly it requires an understanding of the circumstances in which the poor live. The use of community workers as a link between communities and the public service is one way this can be done.

Secondly, while emphasizing the need for a radical power shift in South Africa, there was emphasis that this alone would not alleviate poverty unless antipoverty measures were formulated from the point of view of the poor and unless "agents of change" other than the state were given space to play a role. What this means in the present time is a realization of other role players within poverty alleviation programmes. Coordination of anti-poverty activities with other agents of change, notably NGO's and the private sector will not only prevent duplication of services but also provide the public service institutions with a more profound understanding of their impact on poor people's livelihoods.

Thirdly, in the fight against poverty, attention should increasingly be focused on the institutional issues. There is realization that good policies do not automatically deliver themselves. Policy and process need to be combined within a holistic framework aimed at bolstering sustainable service delivery for sustainable livelihoods.

Lastly and with regard to the above, it is recommended that public servants whose responsibility it is to design and implement anti-poverty programmes develop a competent conceptual understanding of the sustainable livelihoods framework. This will enable comprehension of the importance of poor households' multiple livelihood strategies and what supportive environment can be engendered to this effect. The role of NGO's cannot be overemphasized in this regard.

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