

Service Provision at the Local Level – A South African Case Study

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1. Introduction

Service provision has historically been seen as the responsibility of government. As the ethos of democracy has been promoted across the world, so have ideas such as project sustainability, equal provision and environmental responsibility. Despite the indications of a stronger civil society globally, the following article captures the precarious line that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) walk in the area of service provision in South Africa, post-Apartheid.

Through field research in the Mopani District (Limpopo Province, South Africa) the paper reveals the central role still played by the state in determining who is included in decision-making, what the role of state and non-state actors are in service provision and ultimately, whose interests are served.

Despite the state playing a central role in decision-making, analysis of service delivery in the Mopani district indicates that NGO performance in service provision is significantly more sustainable than its government counterpart. This is evident when considering that the method in which NGOs implement water and sanitation projects relates to ensuring that the beneficiaries of the project (the community) are able to take ownership of the project. Studies (and experience) have found that community ownership of a service delivery project increases the probability of a project remaining functional, i.e. decreased vandalism and a greater chance of the community contributing to project maintenance.

The paper therefore, in addition to the above, considers firstly the different agents and their roles which forms part of service delivery, i.e. civil society, national and local government, and the community. A discussion of these agents also reveal an interesting concept: even though the state is setting the stage and determining the agents involved in service delivery, the state is to an extent very dependent on the expertise, experience, and insight of NGOs in order to maintain its role of dominance (and being competent) in the eyes of the community. The second aspect considered is the question of whose interests are being served by the current service provision framework. Finding an answer to this question necessitates looking at which agent is the implementing authority and how the identity of the agent influences service provision outcomes. Closely related to this is the level of political accountability practiced by the implementing authority and how political accountability guides service provision outcomes and interests.

For the purpose of contextualising the topics considered, the following paper focuses on service delivery, specifically water provision, in rural areas. This focus is important in the light of inadequate research in these areas. Research is mainly focused in metropolitan areas such as Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Bloemfontein and Durban. Although research in these metropolitan areas is highly valued, rural areas make up a large part of the South African landscape. It is therefore essential to gain accurate, relevant and enough information about these areas in order to facilitate appropriate decision-making regarding these areas and also to gain insight into such areas. Information and insight into these areas can assist in current and future socio-economic planning

and development. As such, it is essential that these areas are not side-lined during research exercises whilst rich data is being gathered in areas closer to the cities.

As mentioned, this paper aims to explore and describe the role of actors, state and non-state, which are closely involved in service delivery, specifically water provision. This section also considers the position of civil society compared with the state as a service provider/implementer of social policy. In this regard the paper refers to Friedman (2003) who argues that although civil society is an implementer of social policy, it can never replace the state as an alternative. Civil society is dependent on government in order to operate and usually implement social policy on a very small scale in comparison to government's national implementation of social policy. This paper proposes that, at present, the state needs civil society in order to roll out social policy effectively and sustainably. As such, this paper considers the two actors' (the state and civil society) interaction and dependence on each other in order to perform optimally.

Through the exploration of the role of state and non-state actors a second question is also discussed, namely, whose interests are served? In answering this question I considered the project implementation method utilised by two different water service providers (a municipal service provider and a NGO service provider). Through an understanding of each actor's implementation method I believe one is able to adequately determine whose interests are served as well as *how* it is served. In essence, the following paper discusses the role of civil society, the state and communities in the field of service delivery. This discussion takes place by incorporating previous research findings (Bezuidenhout 2009) as a means of providing context to the reader.

2. Context

2.1 Civil society

Civil society has risen in prominence over a number of years in contrast to state popularity. This is aptly explained by Kaldor (2003:5) who states that "[i]t is a paradox of the contemporary period that, at a time when more and more states all over the world have adopted democratic forms and procedures, there is decreasing trust in elected officials and politicians. This lack of trust is reflected in growing political apathy, declining membership in political parties, and low voter turnout in many elections". Civil society has, in response to this phenomenon, become associated with public morality.

As well-known, South Africa held its first free and fair elections in 1994. On 27 April 1994 all South African citizens, regardless of race, were able to participate in elections that were aimed at instituting a government representative of, and focused on, citizens' needs and interests. Despite the ability of all now to be part of a democracy, the reality of socio-economic circumstances (such as high unemployment figures, HIV/Aids, unequal service delivery and development, and more) soon became apparent and presented the government with a challenge on how to respond to these socio-economic issues. At present, South African society still reflects unhappiness and dissatisfaction with a number of social questions, seventeen years after democracy was established as the method of governance in the country. Some of these social issues include the high rate HIV/Aids infections and how government is responding to this threat; concern about water availability and quality; a high crime rate; and unsatisfactory service delivery.

One example of a prominent issue in which civil society played (and still do) a strong role has been the high rate of HIV infections in the country. A few years ago, while many people died from Aids and others became infected with the virus (including unborn babies whose mothers were not provided with appropriate medication to prevent mother-to-child transmission) there raged a public battle about the cause of Aids (ex-president Thabo Mbeki and a number of influential people disputed the role of HIV and proposed that poverty was the real cause of Aids infections) and how best to treat it (eating beetroot, garlic and the African potato was proposed as an alternative to taking anti-retroviral medication). Civil society (especially the Treatment Action Campaign) contributed immensely to requiring that the state provide medication to people infected with HIV and also to make medication available to pregnant mothers to prevent transmission to their unborn children.

More recently, service delivery has come into the spotlight where a number of areas have held, at times, violent demonstrations against the lack/quality of service delivery in their areas (Mabuza 2007). In urban areas, service delivery involves waste removal and in-house water and sanitation services. Rural areas, and many townships, do not necessarily enjoy these services. More likely, service delivery in these areas include communal water points located every 200 metres, no waste removal and pit latrines or VIP (ventilated improved pit) toilet systems (DWAF 2002). Reasons for dissatisfaction with service delivery has included unequal service delivery between neighbourhoods, unequal service delivery between settlement areas, and little or no access to water and sanitation services in some areas.

It should be noted that many rural areas do not pay tariffs even where service delivery is implemented. As such, the cost of implementing service delivery falls on the local government (municipality) of that area which will, in turn, transfer this cost to rate payers in urban areas. This places local government in a difficult situation where their Integrated Development Plans¹ (IDPs) include aiming to improve service delivery but that implementation and maintenance will be paid by urban rate payers who are already paying municipal rates.

The two socio-economic examples provided, namely HIV/Aids and service delivery, aims to highlight that the role and influence of civil society changes with the type of socio-economic issue. Unlike the issue of HIV/Aids there has not been orchestrated action on the part of civil society to assist communities in addressing the issue of service delivery. What has been done is that organisations are involved on a smaller scale with service delivery projects. However, these organisations are operating without a central focus which is the case with HIV/Aids prevention and treatment.

2.2 Research and findings supporting this paper

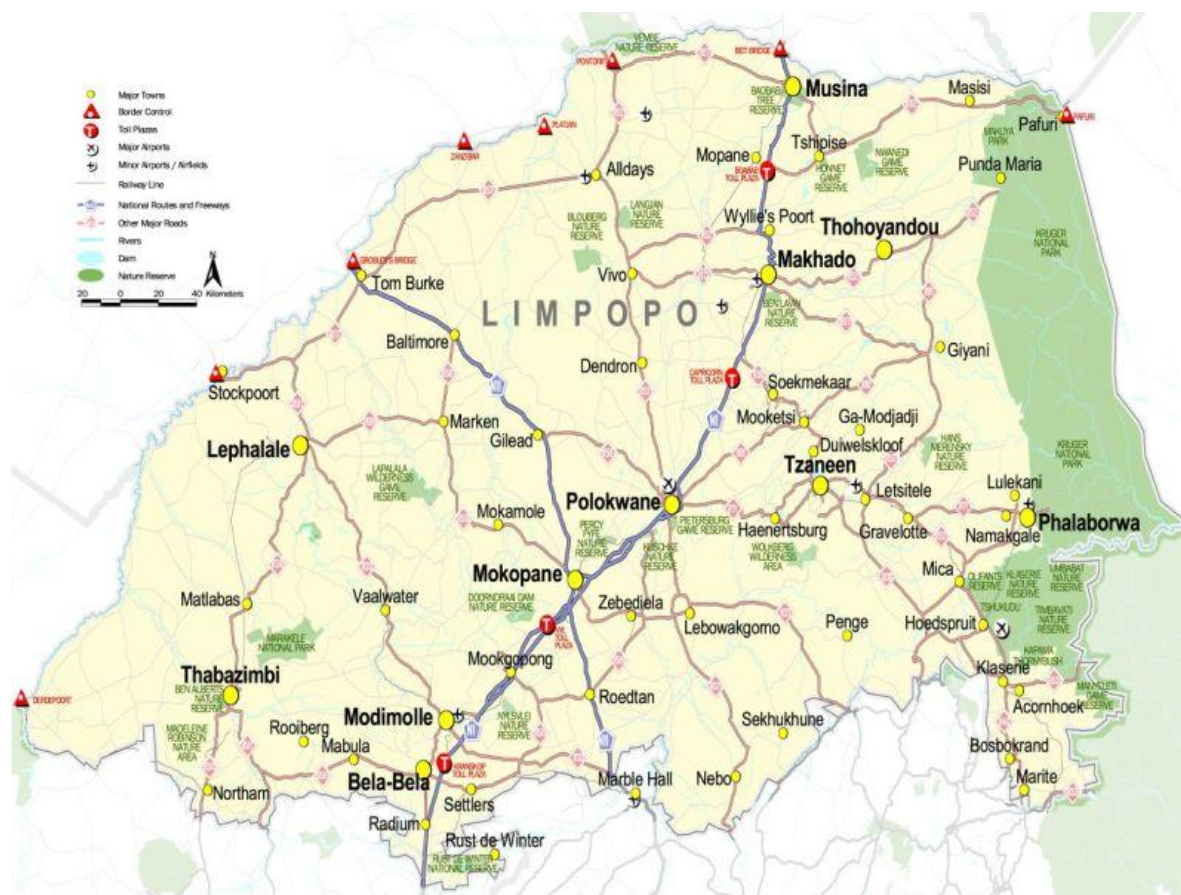
As mentioned, this paper is based on the findings of my previous research regarding political accountability in water projects in rural villages and the sustainability of these projects (Bezuidenhout 2009). For the purpose of this previous research four villages were selected to determine whether there is political accountability in the implementation of water projects, and if so, whether a high degree of political accountability contributes positively to the sustainability of

¹ The Integrated Development Plan of a municipality guides its actions and decisions in manners pertaining to its responsibility towards the public residing in its area of jurisdiction.

water projects². As mentioned above, determining project sustainability is imperative in the South African context where a large number of people are still without adequate access to service delivery. It is essential that where projects are implemented these projects remain functional over a long period of time (and that project implementation does not become synonymous with tremendous expenditure without concrete benefits, i.e. service delivery to communities).

During this research, four villages formed part of the field research: Bellevue, Mamogolo, Nwamitwa and Tours.

Map of Limpopo Province. Projects forming part of this paper was found in the Tzaneen and Gyani area



Map from Google Images

All four villages are defined as rural settlements. The villages source their water from a variety of sources (boreholes, springs, dams, or other). At the time of my initial research (2007-2008) all four villages had a large percentage of people who were without adequate access to a safe water source. An added feature was that the villages did not have appropriate sanitation services which contributed to a potential health risk but more generally to existing water sources being contaminated.

As part of national government's strategy to provide services to all people, including rural settlements, the projects in all four villages involved constructing communal water standpipes/taps

² Please refer to (provide hyperlink) for the full-text document of this study, its methodology and also final findings and recommendations.

every 200 metres. This means that a person can collect water at a communal standpipe that is supposed to be no more than 200 metres from his/her home.

Table 1 The four villages and summary of water access (as determined in late 2008)

	Operational standpipe every 200m	Water access	Project still functioning
Bellevue	Yes	Every day	Yes
Mamogolo	Yes	Every day	Yes
Nwamitwa	Not everywhere	Less than two day/week	Partly
Tours	No	Access is unpredictable	3 standpipes are working

In Bellevue and Mamogolo standpipes met this basic requirement (and more) and were still functioning effectively after the project had been established for some time. Standpipes in Nwamitwa were sometimes further than the required 200 metres and at other times standpipes were not functioning. In Tours it was found that standpipes were mainly planned for lower lying villages although standpipes were constructed in Tours as well. Of these standpipes only three were still functioning in 2008 forcing some people to collect water directly from a nearby river. In both Nwamitwa and Tours it was general for standpipes to be functional only between 1-4 days per week and not 7 days per week as it is in Bellevue and Mamogolo³.

At a community level, all the communities were allowed to voice their opinions in meetings regarding the project. The NGO project implementer took the involvement of the community a step further by involving the community in the actual implementation of the project, e.g. digging trenches for the water pipes and/or deciding where drinking troughs for livestock should be (which formed part of some projects). The NGO implementer's rationale is that by involving the community in the actual implementation of the project community ownership of the project is fostered among community members. This ownership contributes to the community taking care to maintain the project (because they have contributed to the establishment of it) and also being more likely to apprehend vandals or report vandals to the relevant authorities.

The first two villages (Bellevue and Mamogolo) formed part of Tsogang's (NGO service provider) service delivery project implementation whereas Nwamitwa and Tours received municipal (local government) service delivery project implementation. Analysis of the four projects involved individually analysing each project to determine the level of political accountability and project sustainability evident. After this individual analysis, each project was compared to the other three projects. Through this process I was able to determine that the method of project implementation as practiced by the NGO project implementer reflects more political accountability than its government counterpart AND that the NGO projects were more sustainable, i.e. providing water to

³ In Mamogolo water can be pumped every day but needs diesel for this purpose. At the time of research, diesel was provided on a monthly basis by the local municipality but was only enough to pump water three times a week. For the additional days, the community has to use their own money to purchase diesel.

the community on a reliable and sufficient basis. In effect, more political accountability in a project resulted in increased project sustainability. Overall analysis indicated that there were significant differences between the two actors (NGO and municipality) with regards to the type and amount of information made available to the community, the level of inclusion of the community in the project, the sustainability of the project, and political accountability in the project. The NGO performed better than its government counterpart on these four topics.

3. Conceptualisation - Civil society, the state and communities

The context has provided the reader with background and insight into the environment in which civil society and the government operates in relation to service delivery. The following section defines the concepts civil society, the state, and communities as it is utilised in this paper.

3.1 Civil Society

When civil society is used in this paper, the concept refers to two versions of the concept: activist and neo-liberal (Kaldor 2003). The 'activist' version of civil society is concerned with democratising the state and redistributing power. These individuals and groups operate outside the area of political parties and are not focused on capturing power but focus instead on "problem-solving discourses of general interest inside the framework of organised public spheres" (Kaldor 2003:8,9; Habermas in Kaldor 2003). It should be noted that the NGO involved in service delivery in the Mopani District has not been structured to act as a formal activist organisation. However, the organisation believes strongly in democratic principles and considers it essential to implement and promote good governance in its operations.

The neo-liberal version encapsulates organisations which are not controlled by the state or the market but can perform some of the functions of these two actors. These organisations can "substitute for the state, in providing social services, for example; they can check abuses of the state and poor governmental practises; and they can call corporations to account" (Kaldor 2003:9). It should be noted that these individuals and groups can be local, regional and/or international.

Civil society is further defined as organisations, groups and movements which interact through debate and negotiation about the rules governing society. Civil society stretches across borders and it interacts with governments, companies and international organisations (Kaldor 2003:10-12). Through this interaction people are given a 'voice' in expressing their viewpoints and concerns. This process also allows groups to influence decision-makers. The concept also incorporate associations which "are independent of the state, engage with it but do not seek to take it over" (Chazan in Friedman 2003:9). In this sense, those who do not belong to associations are therefore not part of civil society (Friedman 2003:8). Friedman (2003:9) adds that this definition implies that civil society is an area where freedom of association (according to the South African Constitution of 1996) can be pursued, making this area a "site of difference, conflict and unequal capacity". It is argued that "civil society will only exist in a context where there is an inclusive legal constitutional framework, inclusive legal citizenship, a culture of rights and duties, inclusive representative democracy, a culture of political tolerance, formal legal equality of all individuals, and a legitimate government and state" (Reitzes 1995 in Allison 2003:170).

It is considered that part of civil society's purpose is to strengthen democracy. This is accomplished by providing citizens with a way in which to participate in public life. Friedman (2003:9,10) argues that "participation...fosters democratic norms by inculcating the practice of civic responsibility, democratic procedure and mutual trust". Civil society associations also act as a check on the power of the state – people gain power through participating in civil society associations where this power is not dependent on the state (Friedman 2003:9,10).

Civil society has been placed into four categories: social movements, NGOs, social organisations, and nationalist and religious groups (Kaldor 2003:12). This paper discusses civil society in the context of NGO involvement in service delivery. As such, reference might be made to the other actors forming part of civil society but the overall discussion will consider the role of organisations (and to an extent the role of the community) in service delivery.

3.2 The State

According to Heywood (2002:87) the "state is a political association that establishes sovereign jurisdiction within defined territorial borders, and exercises authority through a set of permanent institutions. These institutions are those that are recognizably 'public' in that they are responsible for the collective organisation of communal life, and are funded at the public's expense. The state thus embraces the various institutions of government, but it also extends to the courts, nationalised industries, social-security system and so forth; it can be identified with the entire 'body politic'. For the German sociologist Max Weber, the state was defined by its monopoly of the means of 'legitimate violence'".

According to Heywood (2002:85) the state is involved in almost every human activity, public and private. The "state shapes and controls, and where it does not shape or control it regulates, supervises, authorises or proscribes" (Heywood 2002:85). This institution is involved "[f]rom education to economic management, from social welfare to sanitation, and from domestic order to external defence".

The state is an institution that continues even though the government of the day may change. In recent years it has been argued that the state, as an entity, is in decline when compared to the rising influence of multi-national corporations. However, at present, this institution still operates as the overarching institution of a country. In other words, a state can be described as democratic or autocratic but at the end of the day this institution remains the reference point from which all governments operate.

3.3 Communities

Heywood (2002:172) defines a community as a group of people who resides in a given location, be it a village, town, city or country. When the term is used in a social or political context, a community is defined as "a social group that possesses a strong collective identity based on the bonds of comradeship, loyalty and duty" (Heywood 2002:172).

This paper defines a community as a group of people living in the same area and sharing a common public interest or need, e.g. water access.

4. The role of civil society, the state and communities in service delivery

With more clarity regarding what is meant when this paper discusses the three different actors participating in service delivery and also the context in which these actors operate, this section now moves into discussing the role of each actor in service delivery. Table 2 provides a summary of the most obvious roles that each actor plays in service delivery. The section thereafter provides explanation for this table.

Table 2 Specific roles of civil society, the state and communities in service delivery

	Role	Characteristics
NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emancipation of the poor and excluded • Development and humanitarian relief (limited to smaller areas) • Protection and promotion of interests • Interaction with government (required for operation in country's legislative framework; useful for contracts; necessary when handing project over to government) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-maker and implementer of projects • Financial and political accountability in projects • Community inclusion in projects
State/government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emancipation of the poor and excluded (required by Constitution and political commitments) • Development and humanitarian relief (required by Constitution and has national focus) • Protection and promotion of interests (required by Constitution) • Interaction with other role-players (not required but useful when contracting projects out or when expertise is needed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government/municipality is usually only the project implementer (and not decision-maker). This means that decisions are taken by a higher government structure • Financial accountability is seen as a priority but rarely any other kind of accountability • Communities are included to a limited extent (inclusion is sometimes viewed as slowing down the completion of a project)
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project beneficiaries • Has role of bringing to the attention of relevant decision-makers the need for improved service delivery in an area • Able to provide input in project (type and amount dependent on the project implementer) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be viewed as passive recipient in most projects unless the project implementer is committed to community involvement

With regards to civil society, this actor can be described in the neo-liberal context as explained by Kaldor's (2003) versions of civil society. In other words, civil society is concerned with providing

social services. This version argues that organisations (which form part of civil society) are “not controlled by the state or the market but can perform some of the functions of these two actors” (Kaldor 2003). However, Friedman’s argument remains relevant which states that civil society cannot operate in isolation from the state but is to a certain extent dependent on this institution’s legal framework.

Kaldor (2003:12) has divided civil society actors into four categories: social movements, NGOs, social organisations, and nationalist and religious groups. These categories describe civil society’s roles in societies. These roles include, respectively, (a) the “emancipation of the poor and excluded”, (b) development and humanitarian relief, (c) “protection and promotion of members’ interests” and/or (d) “empowerment of national and religious groups” (Kaldor 2003:12). These roles are all guided by a state’s legal framework but can operate with more freedom than within a state structure (as is the case with municipal service delivery departments). The only role that is not relevant in the context of service delivery as discussed in this paper is the role relating to the empowerment of national and religious groups.

Service delivery NGOs have been active in the field of water delivery in areas classified as poorer areas. At the same time Tsogang has been involved in the promotion of communities’ interests as far as it is in the organisation’s ability. However, the main area in which NGOs (civil society) are active in the Mopani District is development and humanitarian relief. As part of organisations’ operation they interact with the government on a regular basis. In the case of Tsogang, this is to determine sites where projects can be implemented but also to finalise requirements when the completed project is handed over to the relevant municipality (which will then act as the caretaker and contact institution with regards to the project). Interaction with the government has little to do with educating the government on good governance.

During field research in Limpopo Province, it was found there are a number of villages (mostly rural settlements) which do not have a stable water supply or any water supply. Where there *is* water supply, water access can range from one day per week to three or four days water access per week. In this context, a number of NGOs and non-state actors have stepped in to assist with service delivery back-logs. In this sense, organisations have been established around a common theme: service provision. In other cases, community unhappiness about the state of service delivery in an area (for instance, Khutsong and Phiri) has highlighted a community’s needs on a wider scale (through the media), leading to increased NGO (and government) involvement in that area. The media has also played a role ensuring that issues affecting communities are pursued. Civil society’s role in this situation, therefore, includes bringing to the front issues affecting communities but also pursuing means by which to address these issues. This is especially pertinent in societies where government roll-out of services is slower than expected, where community unhappiness with regard to this issue already possesses the potential for violence, or where it appears that sectors of society are side-lined in service delivery.

Tsogang was established with the aim to provide water and sanitation services to communities in the northern part of South Africa which did not have access to these services. Part of its aim is also to empower communities with skills gained during the project process, such as project maintenance. Tsogang is able to act as the decision-maker as well as implementer of its water and sanitation

projects. This NGO views accountability (financial as well as political) in service delivery as essential as it influences the sustainability of service delivery projects in communities (Tsogang 2008).

As part of the functioning of Tsogang, this organisation has also structured its entire programme according to good governance principles. One of these principles is to be accountable. Accountability usually refers to financial accountability (being able to give adequate account of money spent). However, Tsogang also demands accountability in the implementation of each project. This means that when the NGO sets out to achieve certain objectives (which are discussed with the relevant community), these objectives are achieved. In my previous study it was also found that the method which this NGO uses to implement projects promotes accountability. The end result is that projects are sustainable and that the community forms part of the project in name and deed. Therefore, this NGOs role has been extended to promoting good governance principles through the manner in which it implements projects (and not necessarily by pursuing an activist agenda).

The role of the state in service delivery is a bit different from what NGOs are capable of. As argued by Friedman (2003:3-5,8) civil society is not an alternative to the state. Civil society usually operates in the legal framework as provided by the state. Civil society also rarely operates in the social policy field at a large scale (i.e. nationally), whereas the state provides service delivery at this scale. The state's role, on the other hand, includes being a facilitating actor: determining roles, functions, responsibilities and also the areas where other actors can operate. It is also argued that "[w]hile the case for civil society's role in democracy is strong, its ability to sustain it in the absence of a functioning and effective state is less so" (Friedman 2003:5). The state, therefore, remains a major actor in most aspects of everyday life, including service delivery. This role is maintained by Constitutional requirements where the state is to ensure service delivery to everyone on an equal basis.

According to the South African Constitution (RSA 1996, section 152), the government is obligated to provide service to communities in a sustainable manner. The Constitution also highlights that everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water (RSA 1996, section 27(1)(b)). The Constitution provides the government with an option to fulfil this obligation through its own departments or it can award a tender to an outside entity which is then contracted to fulfil this responsibility. The contractor remains accountable to the level of government (national, provincial, district, or local) which appointed it.

Communities, in general, do not possess a role of decision-making during service delivery. Service delivery usually follows along these lines: a community will approach their ward councillor (municipal representative) and lodge an application for service delivery in an area. Sometimes communities will also resort to more violent means in order to speed up the process of deciding when, where and how services will be implemented in an area. The project implementer (government, contractor, or NGO) will hold public meetings with the community to communicate what will happen in the service delivery project and by what time the project would be finished. Community members are provided an opportunity to lodge complaints or make suggestions during these meetings. It was mentioned by one village that these meetings were not satisfactory because it neglected to take into account that community members might be good information sources as to where water lines could ideally be constructed. Throughout a project the project implementer,

usually, holds these public meetings to keep the community informed about what is happening. These meetings are the extent to which the community is usually involved in service delivery. Tsogang's approach takes a different route whereby the community is involved in the actual implementation of the project. This has been beneficial for involvement as well as informative purposes but has essentially benefited project sustainability. It is therefore clear that community involvement in service delivery is more related to bringing to the attention the need for service delivery in an area to the relevant decision-makers than to being involved in the actual implementation and outcome of a project.

5. The relationship between civil society, the state and communities

Friedman (2003:8) states that "[c]ivil society is a realm of difference and competition [so] the state must (a) enjoy the capacity to arbitrate between competing demands within it (and to represent the interests of those who do not belong to associations and are therefore not part of civil society) and (b) be capacitated to implement demands made upon it". The author continues by arguing that the government-civil society relationship can be viewed as one of "supply and demand in which beneficial outcomes are possible only if both elements of the equation are capacitated" (Friedman 2003:8). In order for civil society to continue in its role as an articulator of social demands, state capacity has to be maintained (Friedman 2003:8).

At the same time, civil society provides a check on the power of the state. Friedman (2003:10) states that "[b]ecause engagement between civil society and the state must occur within mutually acknowledged rules, civil society's interaction with the state reinforces democracy by encouraging and entrenching the pursuit of sectional interest through generally agreed norms".

When applying the above to the context in which service delivery takes place in the Mopani District, the following is found. Tsogang (water and sanitation NGO) operates within a government framework and do not seek to displace government, specifically local government, as a service provider. This organisation evaluates where there are gaps in service delivery and would subsequently make an offer to local government and/or apply for a tender to implement water and sanitation projects in areas affected by the back-log in service delivery. This process is complemented by community input with regards to water and sanitation projects and projects' success and sustainability.

After completion of a water and/or sanitation project, Tsogang hands over the project to local government. Tsogang therefore assists local government in achieving municipal development objectives. During the planning and implementation of a project, community members are also included in the project process, enabling community members with skills to assist with maintenance after the project has been completed. Through this, the community is empowered to complete minor maintenance tasks without relying on government personnel (or sub-contractors) and municipal levies to keep up maintenance of a water and/or sanitation project. Community members are provided with the contact details of their ward councillor (government representative) and can also contact Tsogang after project completion. Usually, communities are encouraged by local government to direct all queries regarding services and projects to the ward councillor and not directly to the municipality (local government). Tsogang's method of operation and its goals are focused on complementing government duties and not replacing local government as an alternative.

The relationship between NGOs and the government in the service delivery field can be characterised as a relationship where the state is the controlling authority (legislation, requirements, and decisions regarding tender applications and service delivery focus areas). The position of civil society in relation to the state is more of a supporting actor than a peer. However, despite the appearance of civil society as a minor actor in service delivery, this actor has the potential to become “competition” for local government in the sustainability of its service delivery projects. Tsogang’s focus on accountability in the implementation of its projects also has the added effect that community members are able to see “in practice” that accountability is possible and that it has a positive effect (sustainable projects/water access). It may be possible that NGOs behaviour can act as an influence on electoral outcomes by providing community members with a “visual” example of what it means to be representative and accountable to citizens.

6. Whose interests are served?

When discussing the interests of actors in service delivery, the most obvious hope is that the water project beneficiaries’ interests are met. This would mean that community members have access to a clean and reliable water source after the completion of a project. It also implies that the project would remain functional for a long period of time (excluding minor maintenance work which would need to be done periodically). However, from the above discussion it becomes apparent that it is not necessarily that a community would have adequate access to a water source after the completion of a project. Although not stated previously, the most common reason for a project to stop working is as a result of the project implementer (or its overseeing body) and the manner in which a project has been completed. Issues that came to the fore from my research (Bezuidenhout 2009) is that project implementers are working according to a time schedule. When things are going wrong in a specific project a project implementer has to make up time to still complete the project according to this time-frame. This can result in “sloppy” work or important things being overlooked in the pursuit of finishing the project on time. Another issue in the government projects were that oversight of contractors were not adequate. In one case this resulted in a contractor receiving payment for the project even though the water lines were not properly tested to determine whether there would be water supply to the specific community. In late 2008 this community was without water even though a project had just been completed.

The above leads one to question the motives of actors in the implementation of service delivery projects. What is the benefit when a municipality awards a contract to a company to implement a project in an area but the project does not provide water when completed? A few options come to mind: (a) the municipality does not provide proper oversight of contractor and is negligent in one of its Constitutional responsibilities, (b) the municipality awarded a contract to person without the required experience and expertise and is, once again negligent in its duties, or (c) a contract has been awarded to a specific company in order for a person, or persons, in government to benefit financially from the project and there is therefore a case of corruption.

It should also be noted that in South Africa, the local government is under extreme pressure to provide service delivery at an immense pace. National government has emphasised that it is aware of service delivery back-logs and that it is doing everything in its power to deliver services to everyone in South Africa (hence the pressure on local government to deliver services). Because the local government is “closer” to the general populace, this structure of government has been tasked

with service delivery. Local government is to be assisted by the district and provincial governments. However, these two higher structures of government provide mainly oversight and also provide the local government with area-names which are deemed a priority for service delivery. One does have sympathy with the local government in project implementation when it is realised that this actor is considered a Service Provider whereas the district municipality (which is above the local government) is the Service Authority. Service Authorities supervise Service Providers (of which municipalities form part) which are responsible for service delivery implementation. A Service Provider has to operate according to the Service Authority's business plan for a specific service delivery project. This means that although a Service Provider may have alternative ideas and/or identify other priorities in a project, the Service Provider has to operate according to the business plan of the Service Authority. By going against this business plan to incorporate new/better ideas results in red tape (slowing down the pace of service delivery). From this it appears that although the local government would take into account the interests of the community, this structure of government is also very much involved with staying ahead of implementing projects at the pace that it is expected (and handed out) by higher structures of government.

Civil society is obviously also not without a tarnish on its name as a service delivery implementer. It can be argued that organisations can also be unaccountable in its actions as well as its finances. However, Tsogang seriously promotes facilitating and encouraging training programmes in communities in order to assist the implementation of a water project. These training programmes include teaching community members to maintain water infrastructure. Because of the relatively small size of Tsogang, it is important that each and every project it implements is successful. Without a 100 percent success rate it is questionable whether this organisation would be able to continue operating. The organisation is also accountable to its funders for how and where it spends finances. Although this organisation operates on a smaller scale than the local government, it is considered useful that the local government adapt some of this organisation's practices in order to promote the sustainability of governmental water projects in the Mopani district. A last point is that all projects completed by Tsogang are handed over to the local government as the "caretaker" of the project. However, because of the organisation's method of also training community members in maintenance of the project it rarely happens that the municipality would be contacted to come out to the site to fix a minor problem. In effect what happens is that the municipality can claim on its IDPs and in communities that it has successfully completed projects. This is despite the fact that these projects were completed by Tsogang and handed over to the municipality. In this manner, the municipality promotes its status as a successful service delivery implementer.

7. Conclusion

The introduction highlighted that civil society walks a precarious line in the South African context at present. Currently I am involved in visiting villages in the Mopani District on a regular basis as part of a children's project. In the course of visiting all these different sites I also enquire, for interest sake, what the current state is of service delivery in these areas. It is disconcerting to know that even after my initial findings (and forwarding this information to relevant stakeholders and decision-makers in 2009) and a number of years of democratic rule, many of the villages remain without adequate access to water. Instead, they continue to rely on residents who have access to boreholes in order to purchase water (in contrast to the government's resolution to provide a certain amount of water free-of-charge to all South Africans).

It has also been noticed that some residents do not have water because, for example, a water pump is not working properly. When I hear something like this I immediately think how unlikely it would be that someone would be unable to fix such a problem were Tsogang involved in the project implementation. In the case where the water pump is broken, this site has been without water since the beginning of the year. This leads one to the other side of the coin: if you are without water, how long would it take you to finally say “enough is enough, I want a solution for this problem”? The solution might be to fund-raise money to pay someone to fix the pump or to put tremendous pressure on your ward councillor to send someone from the municipality to fix the pump or you try to fix the pump yourself. The point that I am trying to emphasise is that if something is completely unacceptable to you, you would put an effort into getting the problem fixed or fixing it yourself. This has not been the case at this site, and many other areas where there are maintenance issues. With this point, the question of civil society’s role in service delivery comes back full circle: it was argued that civil society contributes to democracy. Democracy is seen as public participation in all issues governing that public life. From this last example of an area being without water since the beginning of the year there has not been public participation to such a degree that this participation has forced a change in the behaviour of those in a position to provide service delivery to this area. When only considering civil society’s role as a means of promoting public participation it appears that civil society is either in a state of stagnation or it is in decline. However, when considering the roles that civil society are fulfilling in the Mopani district, i.e. developmental and humanitarian relief, it is encouraging to see that organisations like Tsogang are very successful in their aims.

The above paper has highlighted that the roles of civil society, the community and the state differ although some civil society and state roles are very close to each other. The difference between these last two actors is the scale at which they operate. Civil society generally operates on a much smaller scale than its government counterpart, especially in the service delivery field. What has become evident is that both these actors are actually in positions where they are supposed to assist communities. As mentioned in the section discussing the interests of the different actors and whether these interests are met, it became apparent that the interests of communities are not necessarily always one of the main priorities. It was also seen that the government sometimes make use of civil society in service delivery projects in order to give the appearance of successful service delivery projects. Despite civil society, in general, seeming to play a much smaller role in contemporary South Africa, it is clear that this actor remains an entity which possesses much experience and expertise in social issues, such as service delivery. It remains to be seen whether the government recognises the potential of this actor in order to speed up service delivery on a sustainable basis.

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