

## Maintaining the Mandela legacy – A Public Administration Context

Prof Betty C Mubangizi  
School of Management, IT and Governance  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Presentation at the Durban City Hall on the occasion of celebrating the Mandela Legacy as  
organised by the provincial office of ANC – KZN  
16<sup>th</sup> July, 2014

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Honourable Deputy President Mr Ramaphosa, the ANC provincial chairperson and KZN Premier Mr Senzo Mchunu; ANC Executive members present here; the programme director Mr Sihle Zikalala; the Ethekewini Mayor Mr James Nxumalo; professionals present here; my students – past, present and future; ladies and gentlemen all protocol observed!

I wish first to thank the provincial office of the ANC for this opportunity to join you as we reflect on “how best we can preserve Mandela’s legacy” on this occasion leading to this year’s Annual International Mandela Day – the first in the aftermath of his passing.

A legacy is something received from a predecessor. So we ask ourselves, on this occasion – what has Mandela left us? One thing we certainly do not have is a specific manual written by Mandela on ‘how to’ assemble and craft our society. So we draw on his legacy from how he lived his life; what he did and how he did it; what he said and when he said it. The power and wisdom of the man is that he left us numerous anecdotes and opinions that speak to various aspects of our lives specifically and of our society in general. It is such opinions and insight from our predecessor that provide the framework for current efforts and a platform on which we necessarily craft our own contribution to a society that we collectively strive for. Tata Mandela had an opinion on just about every aspect of ordinary life - and literature is awash with numerous quotations of his views on Health, Welfare, Education and the like.

For example in 1996, while addressing a gathering of Public Service Commissioners in Pretoria, Mr Nelson Mandela had this to say

*“We have an immense challenge to build a state that is truly oriented towards the service of all South Africans; that is equitably representative of our society; that is guided by the broad vision of a better life for all; and that is dedicated to making efficient use of public resources.”*

As a public servant myself, who researches on public administration; and as one who trains public administrators, allow me to reflect on Mandela’s legacy by sharing with you what lessons we can draw from him with regard to public servants, civil servants, public administrators or public managers – whatever you may want to call them.

These are people who, through their day to day work activities, strive to implement the policies and vision of parliament – itself the institution through which the will of the people is exercised. Public servants are a pivotal cog in the policy implementation wheel for as the 2010 World Public Sector Report has indeed noted,

*...no progress can be made in promoting peace; development and protection of human rights unless appropriate public administration institutions are established and human resource capacities of public administrators are re-built. (UN, 2010)*

Public administration within the ambit of leadership and good governance is thus clearly pivotal to peace and development and to a better life for all. Globally and in far flung corners of the world there is increased pressure on democracies to embrace public policies which reinforce the right of citizens to hold their governments accountable. Central to this the public servant is expected to be a leader that inspires confidence in, and trust by, the citizens they serve.

This is no mean feat for it demands the public servants to pursue national interests for the common good under a tight framework of rules and regulations; it demands public servants to pursue national interests as opposed to own interests because when the public servant's interests override national interests then the public good suffers and citizens miss out on public goods and services.

Public servants are thus central to executing the will of the state and, to a great extent, determine the effectiveness with which public services are delivered. Fundamental to the service delivery process is not only the capacity of the institutional set up to mobilise, process and present the services to the recipients, but also the attitude and value public servants exhibit in the process.

With vision and deep insight, it is on this basis that the National Development Plan focuses on the public servant by dedicating the entire Chapter 13 to BUILDING A CAPABLE STATE.

In this regard, two critical areas are highlighted in the NDP – the 1<sup>st</sup> relates to the need for a competent public service; the 2<sup>nd</sup> relates to intergovernmental relations given the different capabilities between the three spheres.

How then do we develop a framework within which capable public servants can be identified, nurtured and developed so as to enable them contribute towards the 2030 vision and to a society that Nelson Mandela envisaged?

The basic principle is to realise that how we function in society is a product of social norms and rules that specify ways in which desired action can take root. This is to say that all human behaviour and actions (including those of our public servants) are determined by institutions through rules, procedures, protocols, habits and practices.

Put differently, the type of public servant we have is shaped by regulatory frameworks in place, norms and values in place as well as the sociocultural processes from which they emerge. Thus building a capable state will require that we draw not only on the regulatory framework but, more importantly, that we draw on our norms and cultural values – let me elaborate on each of these three.

**Firstly we build a capable state through policy and legislation:**

Efficient and effective functioning of the public service has its roots in the Constitution wherein it is stated that public administration shall be efficient, effective and representative of the Country's demographics. The entire Chapter 10 of the constitution is dedicated to an outline of the values expected of the public service.

These are further elaborated in the White Paper of Transforming of Public Service Delivery which, among other things, mandates public agencies to craft out service standards in a manner that is transparent and understandable by all beneficiaries of the public service.

In addition to the Constitution there is the Public Service Act of 1994 amended in 2007 and the Public Administrative Justice Act of 2000.

Most recently, the PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MANAGEMENT Bill introduced to Parliament last year. Fundamentally the Bill seeks to;

To promote the basic values and principles governing the public administration referred to in section 195(1) of the Constitution – and a whole lot of specifics to empower the Minister to make regulations and to provide for related matters which cumulatively should improve the capacity of public servants.

As a learning nation more legislation will no doubt evolve as and when necessary. For now, one can confidently say that on the regulatory front, we have sufficient legislation to draw upon in shaping a capable public servant.

### **Secondly, we can build a capable state through norms and standards**

Norms and standards specify practice. They also define appropriate means to achieve desired and valued ends. Public institutions are social organisations which are constantly reconstructed in terms of social norms and of membership.

For example professional bodies like SAICA (for Accountants) and HPCSA (for health care workers) play a pivotal role in the training and practicing of those professionals. Professionalising the public service (through training and establishment of a professional body) would go a long way in building a capable state and boost the capacity public servants.

As part of the measures to professionalise the public service, efforts are underway to setting up a school of government. This is highly commendable as a starting point. Beyond this however, in professionalising the public service, three interrelated issues ought to be realised;

- Professional public servants must have a level of specialised knowledge obtained through education and training from credible institutions;
- Professional public servants must subscribed to principles, practices and values dictated by a code of ethics of their profession;
- Lastly, each professional public servant should hold some level of stature consequent from its association and admission to a network of similarly attuned professionals. It is such a network of professionals that provides prestige and a recognised means to protect and develop its members by setting boundaries of procedure.

Professionalising South Africa's public service thus requires an integration of efforts from institutions of higher learning, public service institutions as well as well-established professional bodies to provide guidance and support in that regard.

### **Lastly we can build a capable state by drawing on cultural values and their awareness:**

There is no doubt that culture provides patterns of thinking, feeling and acting. Cultural frameworks shape our individual beliefs from which we attach meaning and interpretation of our work. Meanings that are socially created through communication and interaction, over time, gradually become habitualised.

When work becomes a habit due to long established cultural frameworks compliance to the work culture occurs and routines are followed because they are taken for granted as standard practice.

The concept of *Ubuntu*, for example, emphasizes the quality of relationships in human endeavours. It suggests that when people act upon a deeply felt sense of being connected to others through common humanity, and when they cherish human dignity, their behaviour and actions are raised to a higher level. This way, the ethical behaviour of accountability and caring are enhanced.

Thus, in building a capable state, a paradigm shift in which cultural values are internalised and rendered practical through education and training and through making them conversational issues should be advocated. Forums like this one are a case in point for, through them, continuous interaction and communication of desired values gradually become an established work culture to guide our public servants.

**Lastly, we should build a capable state by community involvement and valuing our public servants**

Nelson Mandela took every opportunity to assure civil servants that they were valued and that their work was appreciated. Sadly we often hear through the media of cases where public servants have not lived to their expectations.

It is rare, if ever, that we hear of the excellent service and the extra mile that many of our public servants go in creating a caring nation. Yet giving credit where it is due would, in fact, serve to encourage pride in their work and high standards of performance.

In conclusion ladies and gentlemen let us be vigilant in nurturing our public servants for they are the key to Vision 2030. However, while a large responsibility for operationalising the National development Plan lies with public administrators and policy makers, it is important that the Plan be seen as a lasting vision for all South Africans. It is a plan for everyone. Giving effect to it is therefore every citizen's responsibility.

I THANK YOU!