

# Accountability as One of the Basic Values and Principles Governing Public Administration in South Africa

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to analyse the importance of accountability in execution of government functions. Accountability refers to the willingness of a person or organisation to clarify the use of all resources received from stakeholders and is one of the aspects of good governance. Section 195 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 provides for the basic values and principles that govern public administration in South Africa. Accountability is one of these basic values and principles provided by section 195 (1) (f) of the Constitution. The administrators in government departments are accountable for allocated budgets, programmes, projects and other public functions to legislatures and they should avoid silo approaches in the execution of their public responsibilities. This is a conceptual paper and it argues that the involvement of various stakeholders in execution of government functions hampers service delivery and catalyses lack of accountability. This paper concludes that an accountability tool is required to assist the citizens to hold public servants and government service providers accountable for their own actions.

**Keywords:** Accountability, Citizen report card model, Citizens, Democracy, Good governance, Public participation

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## 1. Introduction

Accountability is to openly take responsibility for own actions, accept consequences, learn from them (consequences) and improve (Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia 2017:12). It is one of the mechanisms that promote democracy (Olum, 2014:37). Generally, democracy also implies that citizens have the right to voice their opinions regarding issues that are of concern to them. However, voicing of issues cannot happen in a vacuum, Fernandez & Scheneirov (2014:1) are of the opinion that citizens should be involved in the development of policies that will meet their needs. This assertion justifies public participation as one of the requirements of democracy in order to promote democracy (Olum, 2014:24). Public participation will enable communities to hold government officials accountable for their own actions. Due to the fact that the involvement of various stakeholders in execution of government functions hampers service delivery and catalyses lack of accountability, an accountable tool is needed to hold government officials and government services providers accountable. One of the accountable tools that can be used is the Citizen Report Card (hereafter referred to as CRC). This model can also alleviate the high rate of service delivery protests which is a major problem in South Africa (Thorn, 2017:10).

## 2. Accountability and Good Governance

Public servants play an important role in government affairs and, thus, their quality and also their capacity to meet the demands of their jobs directly determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the government's performance. Governance development activities are executed through the public administration. As a field of practice, public administration is concerned with the implementation of government policies so as to enable the government of the day to function effectively and efficiently (Hanyane, 2011:26). Public functioning in the South African context implies that activities are performed by the national, provincial and local government spheres in order to meet the community needs which have been identified (Robson, 2006:1).

Accountability is one of the aspects of relation-building in government. In democratic countries, accountability requires: (a) transparency, (b) clear lines of accountability, (c) allocation of functions to ensure areas of appropriate responsibilities and (d) intergovernmental arrangements that emphasise the values of openness, accountability, responsiveness, collaboration and legality (Alber & Palermo, 2015:37-38). Randa & Tangke (2015:665) define accountability as the ability and willingness of a person or an organisation to clarify what the person

or organisation receives from all the stakeholders or the principals. They regard accountability as one of the aspects of good governance (GG). These aspects include the transparency and fairness which must always be maintained, especially by local governments, in order to gain the trust and support of all stakeholders. Citizens play a critical role in democratic countries (Barcson, 2015:152). Thus, it is incumbent on government to ensure that: (a) the needs of people are understood and met and (b) to strive constantly to become more developmental in their service delivery approaches in order to reduce inequalities and uplift poor citizens from their poverty (Slack, 2015:5 & 9).

One of the fundamental aspects of a democratic state is the right of citizens to participate in the decision-making processes (United Nations Development Programme UNDP) (2012:4). Bevir (2011:8) is of the view that democracy implies participation and accountability. Democracy should go hand in hand with good government, transparency and accountability (Ibrahim in Haugen & Musser, 2012:27). As stated by Ramonyai, Segage & Tsheola (2014:396), communities are often surprised during the implementation of activities that bear little or no relation to the decisions they sought through their public participation in the service delivery planning processes. However, it is worth noting that in addition to performance monitoring and evaluation, one of the functions of the Portfolio Committee on Public Service and Administration is to promote public participation and engage citizens regularly with the aim of: (a) strengthening service delivery and (b) overseeing and reviewing all matters of public interest relating to the public sector (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2013:1). By promoting public participation, it will be easy for citizens to be in par with the functions of government that are executed by public servants and government service providers. By so doing, the citizens will be able to hold public servants and government service providers accountable for their own actions.

Constitutionally, good governance is vested with the Public Service Commission (hereafter referred to as PSC) as provided by section 196 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. This is because the PSC is mandated to promote the basic values and principles of public administration, as stipulated in section 195(1) (a-i) of the Constitution of South Africa, 1996 within the three

government spheres. Access to service delivery information on the part of citizens may contribute to improved quality of services by helping to ensure that policy makers and service providers are held accountable for their actions (Hollar, Koziol, Ringold & Srinivason, 2012:1-2). Grizzle & Sloan (2016:399) advice that questions regarding accountability to whom and for what should be addressed when accountability issues are dealt with. Due to the high rate of corruption in South Africa that overrun government, Mkhabela (2018:3), questions the constitutional role of the PSC since it has constitutional powers to investigate, monitor and evaluate organisation, administration and practices of the public service personnel. Should the PSC has an accurate information for this question, government officials can be hold accountable for their actions by their government leaders and the citizens.

### **3. The Importance of Accountability in Execution of Government Functions by Public Servants**

The fundamental purpose of government departments is to provide public services to the citizens. The provided services should satisfy the public service needs of the citizens. This is because the public service is the primary public service delivery arm of the government of the day more special in democratic countries and it should provide public services effectively and efficiently (Dorasamy, 2010:056). Access to service delivery information on the part of citizens may contribute to improved quality of services by helping to ensure that policy makers and service providers are held accountable for their actions (Hollar, Koziol, Ringold & Srinivason, 2012:1-2). Numerous authors arguably mentioned that South Africa adopted a democratic system that lacks accountability and are not responsiveness to community needs. Government institutions are assigned with responsibilities of executing different government functions (Ejere, 2012:955). Accountability: (a) is necessary due to abuse of public power by government officials which results in betrayal of public trust; (b) ensures responsible and transparent exercise of public power; (c) is a basis for enforcing responsibility; (d) promotes good governance by making the government and its officials more responsive to the needs of the people; (e) helps to focus public officials on common good and commit them towards caring for the citizens; (f) if underpinned by openness and transparency,

helps to reduce if not completely, eliminates the opportunities for corruption; (g) ensures that the society gets value for its money and that the public resources are not diverted to private use (Ejere, 2012:959)

Government reporting to citizens is an important way of keeping government accountable and transparent. Much on government performance is known through annual reports but little is known on the perspective of the citizens on government performance (Grosso & Van Ryzin, 2011:235,247). The CRC is deemed as an advocacy tool to improve the quality of public services and rate the perception of citizens on government performance. This is because it involves the citizens (Herguner, 2015:875). This is asserted by Bauhoff, Rabinovich & Mayer (2017:2) who state that citizen report card had been identified as a potential means to increase citizens' engagement, provide accountability and performance reporting. This potential means increases the accountability and performance of service providers. The adoption of the New Public Management (hereafter referred to as NPM) theory by the South African democratic government with the aim of improving service delivery through public private partnership (hereafter referred to as PPP) produced outsourcing of different government functions.

The adoption of the growth, employment and redistribution (hereafter referred to as GEAR) strategy as a macroeconomic policy in 1996 by the South African democratic government and which was aimed at reducing government spending resulted in the outsourcing of public services. However, PPPs should be able to provide cost effective and efficient public services to citizens and, thus, improve service delivery. Van Wyk (2011:1340) is of the view that the outsourcing public services through PPPs create significant opportunities for corruption, fraud and lack of accountability. The NPM approach is based on the idea that outsourcers of government functions act on behalf of the citizens as customers to ensure that the outsourced service providers meet citizens' needs well (Dwyer, Boulton, Lavoie, Tenbenschel & Cumming, 2014:1107). NPM is adopted by democratic countries in most instances to democratise public administration and promote good governance (Dipholo & Gumede, 2014:49). However, outsourcing of government functions involves various government service providers which blur accountability.

## 4. The Origin of the Citizen Report Card (CRC)

Rendered services must satisfy the clients in order for them to be regarded as a quality service. If clients are satisfied about a rendered service, it implies that it (rendered service) was successful (Batool, Hussain & Khan, 2015:1038-1040). The CRC model is originated in Bangalore, India, in 1993. It was emerged after a group of residents, who were displeased about the poor services in the city, conducted a CRC survey to determine the level of satisfaction with the quality of the public services provided. Various names are used by different countries for this model. These names include CRC survey, consultative citizen report card and report card systems. Other countries had adopted this model since its origins and use it for different reasons. The citizen report card model is a tool that can be used for several purposes, for example, it may be used for: (a) diagnostic purposes to obtain information about performance standards and gaps in service delivery; (b) accountability purposes to reveal areas where the institutions or service providers, responsible for providing a particular service, did not achieve the mandated, expected service standards. The findings should then be used to identify and demand specific improvements in the service rendered; (c) benchmarking purposes to track changes in service quality over time and; (d) revealing hidden costs in order to expose extra costs beyond the mandated fees for using public funds and bribes for poor services (Asian Development Bank and Asian Development Bank Institution, 2007:4-5). For example, Rwanda conducted the citizen report card survey as a tool to measure the level of satisfaction with the services rendered to citizens. The aim was to obtain feedback from beneficiaries on the quality and accuracy of the services rendered to them in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery as one of the pillars of Rwanda's Vision 2020 (Kayigire, Nshutiraguma, & Usengumukiza, 2015:xvii). A CRC study conducted in Karachi in 2010 assisted the Karachi government with five (5) strategic inputs. These five (5) strategic inputs are discussed below.

### 4.1 Benchmarking with Regard to Access to Adequacy and Quality of Public Services as Experienced by Citizens

The CRC provided the ability to compare other services across different domains of the same

service in order to initiate strategic actions (Zehra, 2010:17-18). For example, for a house to be declared adequate, basic housing services such as purified water and electricity must be provided. Another example, purified water cannot be provided without water pipes.

#### **4.2 Feedback from Citizens Revealed their Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction About a Provided Service**

The feedback obtained from the citizens assisted the government officials to measure the satisfaction or dissatisfaction level about the provided service. The measurement results were compared. The outcome of the comparison assisted the government to prioritize corrective actions (Zehra, 2010:18).

#### **4.3 Identification of Specific Interaction Aspects Between Service Providers and Citizens**

The results assisted in identification of specific interaction aspects between service providers and citizens. The identified aspects revealed the causes of dissatisfaction which were related to the quality of the rendered services. For example, water users complained about the difficulties which were encountered due to unreliability of water suppliers (Zehra, 2010:18).

#### **4.4 Suggesting Reliable Estimates of Hidden Costs and Forced Investments**

The CRC results provided reliable estimates on extra legal costs, spent amounts and forced investments. For forced investment, the government bought water purifiers and installed water storage tanks in order to alleviate or cope with the unreliable and poor quality of the provided water services (Zehra 2010:18).

#### **4.5 Indicating Mechanisms that May be Used to Explore Alternatives for Public Service Improvements**

The feedback which was provided by citizens revealed the existed real situations of services experienced by citizens. However, different options of tackling various encountered service deliver problems were also revealed. The revealed options were to tackle the encountered problems individual and jointly depending on the quality of the provided service. For

example, some citizens indicated that they were able to pay for the provided water services while other citizens opted to be part of the water service providers and be involved in their water service delivery actions (Zehra, 2010:18). Accountability mechanisms are crucial, especially in decentralised countries such as South Africa where most government services are provided by contracted government service providers (Olum, 2014:37). The citizen report card model may also be used to communicate citizens' needs to the three government spheres. Furthermore, Zama (2012) argued that CRC may be used to provide feedback from citizens regarding the: (a) availability, reliability and quality of rendered services; (b) responsiveness of service providers; (c) accessibility to services and the degree of satisfaction with the services provided; (d) willingness and affordability to pay for services; (e) quality of the citizens' life and; (f) hidden costs, if any, to avoid corrupt activities (Zama, 2012:5). The CRC is also regarded as an effective evaluation tool that empowers citizens to interact with government. It also assists citizens to use surveys to evaluate the quality and efficiency of services rendered to them. In order to prevent future service delivery protests and demonstrations, government should, (a) strengthen communication with providing services and the reasons for these delays (Zama, 2013:187,193).

### **5. Stages in Development of the CRC**

The development of the CRC survey involves various stages depending on the main purpose of its development. According to Balakrishnan (2011:3,10), the development of the CRC involves seven (7) stages. During the first stage the situation is assessed and score of the assessment results is defined while the second stage involves preparations and collecting feedback from the citizens. During the third stage, the services must be rated. The fourth stage involves responses from the government service providers (implementers) while, during the fifth stage, citizens are engaged in reform. Periodic benchmarking and public reviews are conducted during stage six and report writing during the seventh stage. The World Bank (2004:1) regards the CRC as part of science and art. This is because, scientifically, the CRC may be seen as an aspect of running an efficient and credible survey while, as art, it may be used as a strategy that fosters debate and generate results. The Asian Development Bank and Asian Development Bank Institution (2007:1) developed six (6) key stages in the CRC process discussed below.

### 5.1 Assessment of Local Conditions

Evaluate local conditions to determine suitability as regards the CRC implementation. Assess the skills of the proposed members of the community structure in respect of conducting the survey. It should be noted that the effectiveness of the CRC survey depends on the conditions in the locations and staff capacity. Knowledge of the village is required.

### 5.2 Pre-Survey Groundwork

Identify the scope of the CRC, formulate preliminary implementation plans and design the survey questionnaire, including the sampling process. They should have knowledge in budgeting, fund raising, service provision and research methodology.

### 5.3 Conducting the Survey

Conduct the survey. Coordination and interview skills are required. Language proficiency of the villagers who will be surveyed is also required.

### 5.4 Post Survey Analysis

Determine the key findings regarding satisfaction and the quality of the service provided. Analysis skills are needed to accurately analyse the conducted survey.

### 5.5 Dissemination of Findings

Disseminate the findings to key stakeholders including the surveyed villagers. Communication skill is required to communicate the findings and how they (findings) will be used to improve service delivery.

### 5.6 Improving Services

Use CRC findings to bring about improvements in service delivery. This requires coordination skill in order to initiate cooperation of all various stakeholders involved in rendering of the concerned service. The above mentioned stages of CRC involve various stakeholders. One of the programmes that was introduced by the former President of South Africa Mr Jacob Zuma in 2014 which involves various stakeholders is the Back-to-Basics (hereafter referred to as B2B). Various stakeholders are involved in executing service delivery functions and the issue of accountability is a challenge as stated in section 1 of this paper. The author is of the view that this

programme requires citizens to hold service providers accountable in order to alleviate the high service delivery protests and demonstrations and deems it fit to discuss it (B2B programme).

## 6. The Back-to-Basics (B2B) Programme as a Service Delivery Tool that Justifies the Usage of an Accountability Model

In 2014, the former President of South Africa, Mr Jacob Zuma, launched the Back-to-Basics (hereafter referred to as B2B) programme with the aim of improving service delivery in the local government sphere. It is largely known that the local government sphere is the closest to the community and it is largely used by the government to provide services to its people. The former President launched the B2B programme with the aim of improving service delivery in the local government sphere. Local government is required by the B2B programme to respond directly to service delivery problems which are reported by citizens (Gauteng Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs, 2015:7). The launched B2B programme places the emphasis on integrated sustainable development. One of the elements of sustainable development is social sustainability which encompasses: (a) user participation in the development of programmes in order to promote accountability among other things and (b) improved quality of life for future generation (Ciravoğlu & Taştan, 2016:206).

The five (5) pillars of the B2B programme are: (a) putting people first and engaging communities; (b) delivery of basic services; (c) good governance; (d) sound financial management and; (e) building institutional capability (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2016:1,11). The delegates at the B2B launched summit included National Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Premiers of the provinces, the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Members of the Executive Councils (MECs) for Local Government, the Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), Chairpersons of Parliamentary Committees, Chairpersons of the National House of Traditional Leaders and of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), respectively, mayors, members of Traditional Councils, municipal managers, chief financial officers and technical directors. The majority of these delegates served in various cooperative government and intergovernmental relations

structures within the three government spheres. The stakeholders in attendance included the business sector, organised labour, several professional and research bodies, the donor community and the media (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2015:30). For this programme to be successful, government officials within the three government spheres and all contracted government service providers must be held accountable for their actions. The CRC accountable model can be used in this regard. In view of the fact that various stakeholders attended the launched programme, the application of this accountable model (CRC) might improve service delivery not only at the local government but within the three government spheres.

Other stakeholders from other sectors in attendance during the launching of the B2B programme might also assist citizens to hold government service providers accountable. In addition, public servants must always have borne in mind that section 195 (1)(g) of the constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 requires them (public servants) to foster transparency by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information. Should this value be adhered to by public servants; accountability can be promoted as constitutional requirement. Furthermore, as stated in the abstract section of this paper that legislatures must not operate in silos, legislative authorities are obliged to explain fully and fairly to the public the way in which funded responsibilities are carried out by departmental administrators (Madue, 2014:863). The Portfolio Committee on Public Service and Administration is one of the legislative authorities as mentioned in section 2 of this paper and its other function is to promote public participation and engage citizens regularly with the aim of: (a) strengthening service delivery; (b) overseeing and reviewing all matters of public interest relating to the public sector and; (c) ensuring accountability (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2013:1).

## 7. Conclusion

Accountability is one of the basic values and principles governing public administration in South Africa. The PSC is constitutional mandated to promote the basic values and principles governing public administration in South Africa. Due to lack of service delivery, service delivery protests are reported almost daily more special in the media. Government functions involve various stakeholders, therefore

accountability tools or measures are needed to hold public servants and government service providers accountable. Public participation should always be encouraged so that the citizens can be able to hold public servants accountable. One of the accountable models that can be used as a tool to hold public servants accountable is the citizen report card. Various countries are using this accountable model for different reasons. In order to prevent future service delivery protests and demonstrations, the government of the day should: (a) strengthen communication with citizens; (b) inform citizens of its achievements and; (c) inform citizens of delays in providing services if any and the reasons for these delays (Zama, 2013:187,193).

## 8. Recommendations

Legislative authorities should be able to explain fully how funded government responsibilities are executed to ensure that public administrators are answerable to the citizens for accountability purposes. Accountable mechanisms are urgently needed in South Africa so that the high rate of service delivery protests and demonstrations which are reported almost daily can be alleviated. Government managers should ensure that public servants are answerable to their own actions. Citizens should be encouraged to participate in the execution of government functions so that they can hold public servants and contracted government service providers accountable. The CRC model can be used by the citizens to hold government employees accountable. Should the citizens be able to hold government employees and government service providers accountable for their own actions, service delivery can improve. Public servants should ensure that citizens are provided with timely, accessible and accurate information in order to promote transparency as required by the constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. In most instances, citizens develop surveys when using the CRC model as tools to hold government service providers accountable for their own government actions. In view of this, citizens who intend using this model need to have research knowledge in order to conduct the surveys effectively.

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