

# CITIZENSHIP CRISIS OR XENOPHOBIA? A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SERVICE DELIVERY PROTEST IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

South African local government has been synonymous with the service delivery protests since the acquiring of democratic rule in 1994. The service delivery protests have been accompanied by images of burnt tyres, looting of goods, and destruction of property, road blockades and violence against foreigners (xenophobia). Frustrated local citizens perpetrated these atrocities. This paper has identified the need to look at the underlying cause of such behaviour. The question is whether all the blame can be put on the municipal government for its failures to provide quality service delivery to its citizens or it is part of the generic problem around the world of citizenship politics where until recently most nations are faced with the problem of migration and the growing population. This paper seeks to explain the violent social service delivery protests as part of the identity or citizenship crisis emanating from South Africa's historical background. Consequently, pertinent issues such as xenophobia and the current problem of immigrants in South Africa and around the world will be explained as the discussion continues under. This research discovers that it is problematic to put together all these municipal problems under the broader rubric service delivery protest. The other explanation to the issue of service delivery protests is what the researchers of this article describe as citizenship crisis. Citizenship crisis in South Africa is explained in the instance where the country has been struggling with building its image since the acquiring of democratic rule. The late former President Nelson Mandela envisaged that South Africa is a rainbow nation. Nonetheless, the country has been faced with the non-acceptance of foreign nationals within its borders. In essence, this can be attributed to effects of the apartheid system on the mind of the people.

**Keywords:** Xenophobia, Citizenship crisis, Service delivery, Protest, Violence.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The post-apartheid South Africa was marked with the introduction of democratic rule in 1994. The ongoing service delivery protests paint a negative picture of South Africa locally and abroad. The protests leave one with an impression that government is failing to deliver basic services to the people, especially at the local government level (Seokoma, 2010). The majority of the people in South Africa anticipated a new beginning, a world filled with no violence, discrimination, equality and a nation where human rights are respected. The transition period, people fore saw themselves out of poverty and living a better life. The government of South Africa adopted a number of policies to ensure economic growth and the creation of Jobs. However, the policies remained short of meeting the people's needs. This marked the widespread protest for the provision of the services in the country. Most studies have revealed that the lack of service delivery was due to the incompetence of the local government in dealing with the services delivery issues (Mbazira, 2013; Mbecke, 2014; Zama, 2012). This is attributed to a myriad of problems in the running of the local governments. However, this research can reveal that besides the shortcomings of the local government on service delivery, they are other factors that contribute to the violence protest in South Africa. The quest of finding solution for the problem of service delivery violent protest can be found within other factors such as citizenship, xenophobia, and economic deficits. The socio-economic issues in South Africa are also fuelling the rate of protest in the country and most of them results in violence

## 2. CONTEXTUALISING SERVICE DELIVERY PROTEST WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The South African service delivery protests have been on the rise since the acquiring of the

democratic rule in South Africa. In February 2014, it was reported that nearly three thousand (3,000) protest actions occurred in a period of ninety (90) days (Patel, 2013). This has been attributed to a number of factors, this includes poor local governance, inequality and poverty have been identified as the most significant drivers of service delivery protest in South Africa. The South African Black community emerged from a background where they were oppressed and segregated by the White apartheid regime. The Government of National Unity (GNU) faced a huge responsibility in 1994 to readdress apartheid policy legacies of poverty, inequality and racial segregation of service in order to create a single, efficient public service that delivered on the basic needs of all citizens (Managa, 2012). The government was found to be too slow in its attempts to overcome infrastructure, service delivery backlogs, and protest action heightened. Political campaign manifestos have also created disquiet, as politicians make temporary promises most likely to satisfy voters during each new election campaign. In so doing, politicians raise the public's expectations, creating false perceptions that, following the election, communities will receive the services promised (Managa, 2012). There is a similarity in the election manifestos and campaigns of different political parties since 1994, made promises to address underperforming municipalities in order to deal with poor service delivery; improve basic service delivery; develop infrastructure; fight corruption and create employment for all people (Ndlovu, 2014; Managa, 2012). The anticipation for service delivery grew from the time of the transition to the time where South Africa held the first democratic election. There is a consensus that South Africans are service hungry, this has led to the unrest within the country from the protest on local municipalities to protest in main political mainstream (Managa, 2012). Furthermore, South Africans usually protest out of frustration and desperation over lack of service delivery from government. The communities tried a number of peaceful ways in engaging with authorities in expressing their frustration. However, the answers at most of the times was slow in coming due to a number of causes chiefly among them, the authorities turn a blind eye on the grievances.

## **2.1 Causes of Service Delivery Protest in South Africa**

The following are the perceived causes of the service delivery protest in South Africa:

### **2.1.1 Slow Response to Community Problems**

The lack of response by the necessary authorities has been at the centre of the community protest in South Africa. In most cases, the community members report the problem to the relevant authorities but they take time to be responded to. This is problematic when you are dealing with communities in need of change.

### **2.1.2 Financial Mismanagement**

The lack of quality service provision, this comes, as results of municipalities are unable to pay. The government spent a lot of money into tenders because the idea is to improve services. However, tenderpreneurship and the allocation of tenders is fuelling corruption within municipalities (Mlangeni, 2015). There is no transparency in tendering processes as tenders are awarded to inexperienced companies under directorships of individuals with political connections. These are the companies that continue provide sub-standard services. The awarding of tenders to companies should be transparent and based on their ability to carry out the tender.

### **2.1.3 Lack of Public Participation**

Protesters have expressed dissatisfaction and frustration because of their exclusion from local decision-making and accountability by the municipal officials and councillors who represent them in wards (Mbuyisa, 2013). This contravenes the Local Government: Municipal Systems, Act 32 of 2000, which states that communities have the mandate to participate in any public consultation and decision-making processes in the local sphere (Managa, 2012). For example, ward committees, budget consultations, ward meetings and Integrated Development Planning (IDP) forums. Moreover, municipalities are obliged to report to and receive feedback from their communities annually regarding the objectives set out in the IDP.

## **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research paper adopts two theoretical frameworks as a way of trying to explain the causes of the violent protest in South Africa. This paper dismisses the notion that all the protest actions taking place in South Africa are caused by the lack of service delivery only or the failures of the municipalities in South Africa. However, there is a myriad of causes, which contribute to the problem of service delivery protest witnessed in South Africa today. Furthermore, it is witnessed that, although each violent protest taking place can be attributed as a consequence of service delivery protest, each protest action signifies

or is trying to convey a certain message to the government or responsible authorities. The rational choice and the social learning theory are used to delve into different scenarios, which South Africa finds itself today.

### **3.1 Rational Choice Theory**

The rational choice theory is derived from the works of Homans (1961). During the 1960s and 1970s, Blau (1964), Coleman (1973), and Cook & Emerson (1977) extended and enlarged his framework, and they helped to develop more formal, mathematical models of rational action. According to this theory xenophobia and racism stem from an intensive rivalry between migrant and indigenous groups; jobs and cheap housing are especially scarce in times of economic crisis, and from the perspective of established inhabitants the migrants compete for residential space and working opportunities. This theory helps to dismiss the notion that xenophobia and violent protest emerge from lack of service delivery. However, it has to do with how the government handles the issue of migrants pouring into the country and may question the South African government's policy in ensuring the integration of foreigners within South African communities. This is a situation well documented in South Africa where foreigners are perceived as taking the Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP) houses through bribery means. Further foreigners in South Africa are perceived to take all the spaza shops in the neighbourhood through their entrepreneurship skills, which the local people are lacking. The theoretical core of this argument is often a model of rational decision-making (Banton 1983; Hechter, 1986). The research thus takes the xenophobic vision of a wave of job-seeking foreigners at par value –which does not mean that it would therefore already be implausible. The government of South Africa tries to limit the foreigners entering South Africa by granting the permanent citizenship to the foreigners with critical skills. However, there is still a large amount of foreigners pouring into South Africa without enough papers (illegal immigrants) and those who manage to acquire the refugee status. This still leaves the government of South Africa with a large number of people to cater for through service delivery. Consequently, the majority of the people in different communities in South Africa have responded to this situation differently, for instance some have resorted to xenophobia as a way of protesting the government policies in dealing with the foreigners, on the other hand some are eager to

exert xenophobic attacks on foreigners as a way of protesting the lack of service delivery which caters for all people including the foreigners.

### **3.2 Social Learning Theory**

According to the premises of Social Learning Theory, behaviours are learned through interactions with the variety of socializing agents to which one is exposed (Burdick, 2014). It is through these interactions where behaviours are either adapted or extinguished. Similarly, McHale, Dotterer and Ji-Yeon (2009). Moreover, children learn from their environments everyday as they do their daily activities. Burdick (2014) notes that it is the daily activities that influence their identity, development, social relationships and abilities. It is during these activities where children begin to see and develop their own abilities and begin to identify with the leaders of the activities. These assumptions can be applied to the South African Scenario where the Black community had to endure violence under the apartheid regime. The public protest against the state was organised in townships where people were enduring hardships. This is evidenced by the 1976 Soweto uprisings where students took upon themselves to demonstrate against the apartheid government. These are the stories, which the current generation has grown being taught. Margolin and Gordis (2004) children learn from the aggressive models in their environments. Additionally, victimization may compromise children's ability to regulate their emotions, and as a result, they may act out aggressively. South Africa since the acquiring of the democratic rule in 1994 has seen an increase in violence and crimes, which involve the use of violence weapons. It undermines the bases of this history, which has made the current generation fearless and aggravates violence.

## **4. MYRIAD FACTORS EXPLAINING SERVICE DELIVERY PROTEST IN SOUTH AFRICA**

There are several factors linked to service delivery protests and are discussed below:

### **4.1 Xenophobia and Service Delivery Protest**

The xenophobic attacks have been at the centre of South African and world media attention in recent years. The attacks have been witnessed in 2008 and 2015, however, there is evidence of

spaced xenophobic attacks against the foreigners and their property continues but varying in terms of intensity. A number of scholarly works have pointed out that xenophobic attacks were a sheer expression of the locals protesting service delivery in South Africa (Naidoo, Hadland, Pillay, Mohlakoana, & Barolsky 2015; Desai, 2015). However, this paper questions the authenticity of the argument, instead of assuming that xenophobic attacks are caused by the lack of service delivery. This paper can reveal that this may be other motives behind xenophobic attacks other than failures of service delivery by the local municipalities.

Karamoko and Jain (2011) concurs with the arguments noted above, when they state that the "extent to which foreigners or their property have been targeted during service delivery protests are difficult to objectively measure. While the occurrence of a protest itself or the use of violent force during a protest is fairly overt acts, determining whether foreigners were specifically targeted during protests is harder to gauge." They are those instances where the community members do indeed attack the foreigners and loot their goods, however, it not conclusive to state that the destruction had a xenophobic motivation, as indiscriminate destruction of property is often cited as an expression of unrest. There is a tendency of people turning violent when they protest, in this instance can be attributed to the culture of violence, anti-foreigners' sentiment within the community as well as the high crime rates. Service delivery protest cannot be used to explain the xenophobic attacks or the looting of the shops owned by the foreigners. However, due to failure to come up with an explanation for xenophobia, all the protests, which involve the attack on the foreigners and looting of their goods, have been cited as service delivery protest. The cause of xenophobia can be however, be explained by the factors cited below:

## **4.2 Citizenship Crisis**

The concept of citizenship implies a contract between an individual and the state –a reciprocal agreement which includes both rights as well as duties in the goal of affirming the dignity of the individual as well as guaranteeing the common good of all citizens (Kabeer, 2002). Citizenship crisis in South Africa is explained in the instance where the country has been struggling with building its image since the acquiring of democratic rule. The late former President Nelson Mandela envisaged that South Africa is a rainbow nation. Nonetheless, the country

has been faced with the non-acceptance of foreign nationals within its borders. Since the acquiring the democratic rule, the government of South Africa has been faced the problems of immigrants pouring into its country. At most, of times the foreigners would migrate with anticipation to get employment and better lives. However, they are consequences, which are associated with this inflow. This included a heavy burden on South Africa's service delivery service sector. The assimilation had various effects on the South African community. The government of South Africa had to deal with the inflow of the new migrants by regulating the movements of people through giving various permits to ensure that the number of people settling in South Africa is accounted for (Tati, 2008). Secondly, the ordinary citizens of South Africa had to deal with a new group of people coming in to share the fruits of their democratic dispensation. This resulted in the following events happening:

### ***4.2.1 Mistrust of the Foreigners***

The government has increasingly enacted policies that create a zero-sum environment where citizens have rights and foreigners have none, sending a message of mistrust (Campbell, 2015). These rules misguidedly create an expectation that citizen rights trump human rights. New visa regulations make it harder for foreigners to obtain a general work visa by forcing employers to not only explain why a citizen or permanent resident could not fill the position but offer proof of its efforts to do so, and even target foreign families, forcing them to carry copies of unabridged birth certificates. Further, the government motioned new land bill, which bars foreigners from owning agricultural land in South Africa. These are some of the laws that give super treatment to the locals by ensuring that citizens come first in everything.

### ***4.2.2 Harassment of Foreigners by Police and State Agents***

Migrants to South Africa face serious problems as soon as they enter the country. The police force is corrupt and prone to extorting money from migrants, documented or not, on the threat of arrest and deportation (Pithouse, 2008). There are many cases where South Africans have also been arrested and deported to countries they have never previously visited because they could not speak Zulu well, did not have the 'right' inoculation marks or were 'too black' (Pithouse, 2008). This problem is resulting from some of the local citizens who regard themselves as better than the other. These particular citizens who also detect should be regarded as a true

South African. Hence, why some of the minority groups in Limpopo province are regarded as not South African due to their dark skin colour which is more common in foreigners than local majority black people. Ojedokun (2015) concurs with the assumption above when he reveals that fellow South Africans also viewed members of smaller ethnic groups in South Africa as foreigners.

#### **4.2.3 Looting of foreign owned goods**

Most protests which have occurred in South Africa, whether service, delivery, or some other motive, have resulted in the looting of foreign owned goods. Some of allegations which were posed against the foreigners include the following fact: The locals argue that businesses of these foreigners are not registered and they do not pay taxes; Foreign nationals sell products at prices below those that local business owners conclude are feasible and are therefore receiving illegal support; Foreign nationals receive unfair privileges from wholesale companies due to shared religious beliefs (Madlala, 2016); Foreign nationals intentionally open spaza shops within close proximity to locally-owned businesses, thereby capturing some of the locals' markets; Foreign-owned businesses sell fake goods or non-South African products; Foreign businesses owners operate their shops for nearly 24 hours every day and even have workers sleeping there (Madlala, 2016; Hans, 2016). These are the factors which local people consider unfair to them. The factors pointed above can be explained as the lack of business acumen on the part of the local people. However, some felt being a South African citizen by right gives them the power to take what they believed to be theirs and drive foreigners back to their country.

#### **4.2.4 Blame on Foreign Governments**

In as much as xenophobic attacks are associated with the poor service delivery, the solution to the issue migration does not lie with the local government. President Jacob Zuma noted, "As much as we have a problem that is alleged to be xenophobic, our sister countries contribute to this. Why are their citizens not in their countries?" (Hunter, 2015). This is more of a diplomatic issue, which can be solved at regional level (Southern African Development Committee SADC), thus why the president uttered this statement. The issue of xenophobic attacks can be a reflection to both sides on what should be done. It is a reflection of poor service delivery on the part of the sending countries yet it also signifies that South Africa is offering good service delivery, hence the choice of foreigners to come in large numbers. However, the

question, which will arise, is what the government of South Africa doing in order to ensure integration and co-existence between foreigners and the local people.

### **4.3 Citizens' Economic Entitlement**

The protest for service delivery is not mainly directed towards the local municipalities but it is due to economic failures, which forces people to protest. The South African economic policies have been found wanting in most cases for instance in making jobs available, reducing poverty and ensuring that the gap between the rich and the poor is reduced. These are the problems, which the municipalities have no control over. President Jacob Zuma makes a very incredible observation:

"The municipalities are the first door that our people knock on when they need assistance from government. When people are frustrated with the slow movement of the wheels of government they engage municipalities before other spheres. Citizens also blame municipalities for functions that they have no direct control over." (Mathoho, 2010)

They are issues which the local municipalities are able to tackle because the fall under the bracket of the municipal responsibilities. The South African government since, the democratic rule adopted the micro economic policies, which have resulted in both positive and negative outcomes: For instance, the poverty rates since 1994 have actually increased Pretorius (2016) notes that about 63% of young South African children are living in poverty. Further, Stats SA (2014) reveals that about 45,5% of the South Africans were living in poverty. Furthermore, the unemployment rates as of 2016 stood at 26,7% (Trading economics, 2016). The unemployment rates have increased over the course of time for instance, unemployment was 22% in 1994 and increased to 25,5% in 2014 (Stats SA, 2014). These are economic problems, which pile on people's minds as they engage in protest. The South Africans feel entitled to certain services and opportunities because of what the constitution says about them. The citizens have the right to employment and to quality life. The essence is the fact that the government has to meet half way with the public.

The origin of government policies in a democratic society is the public opinion, which comes from the local people and political visions, which are drawn from political party manifesto for voter support. Once the party is elected to power, these statements

may be adapted and translated to become national policy, subsequently requiring further adaptation for national and local implementation. Therefore, when governments provide services to the people they are fulfilling economic and moral responsibility as promised in the manifestos (Gaster & Squires, 2003).

#### 4.4 Migration and Violent Service Delivery Protest

Migration has become a global problem affecting many countries and South Africa is not an exception. The issue of migrants has become a matter of concern for both the government and citizens alike. In Europe and United States of America, soon after the September 9/11 attacks changed the way these countries see foreigners or regard them. South Africa exhibits some of the consequences of migration, which have resulted in some crucial decisions about foreign policy. For instance, in United Kingdom (UK), the country pulled out of Europe through the Brexit referendum. Tilford (2016) notes that due to huge immigrants' flow into UK, the British workers' real wages fell sharply between 2008 and 2014 and this resulted in those with lowest earning jobs suffering a lot. Secondly, housing is another factor; UK has lagged behind demand for 35 years. Britain is still building a third less houses than it was in 2007. This resulted in the problem of housing becoming acute. Immigrants were also blamed for pressure on National Health Services (NHS) and education. The status of white working class, the group is the worst educated and the children of emigrants continue to go to universities. Consequently, it resulted in Britain withdrawing from Europe.

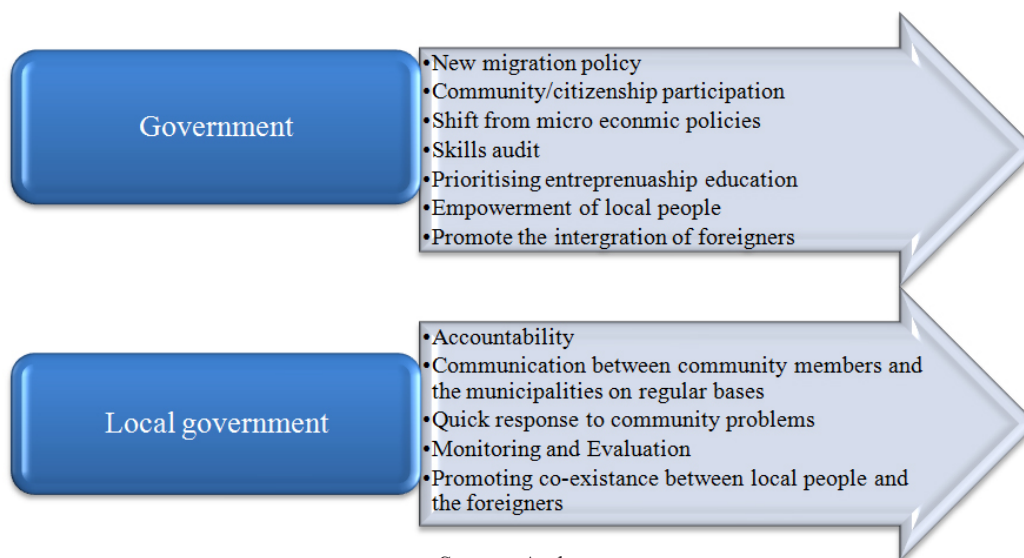
Authors of this paper withdraw lessons from this case scenario, of UK where the inflow of foreign immigrants has resulted in the increased competition for low-income jobs, perceived corruption by official in selling RDP houses to foreigners and accusations of that foreigners are stealing local women. Further, the government went on to restrict foreigners from owning agricultural land. The UK scenario did not result in violent service delivery protest. However, the government of UK empowered the people to make a choice. The situation in South Africa is a bit different; the government has been struggling to deal with the matter of illegal immigrants, large influx of foreign immigrants.

The difficulties in dealing with the foreigners resulted in the xenophobic attacks on foreigners. Some Scholars have associated xenophobic attacks with service delivery protest (Naidoo, Hadland, Pillay, Mohlakoana, & Barolsky, 2015; Desai, 2015). However, this study can reveal that lack of citizenship participation on how to deal with the issue of migration can indeed result in citizens taking issues into their own hands. The idea is the fact that the citizens can notice that despite the government efforts to improve service delivery, millions of foreigners coming into South Africa are creating a strain. Hence, there is a need for the government to tackle the problem of migration head on.

#### 5. WAY FORWARD

Based on the engagements presented in this paper, the authors recommend the model below to solve the xenophobic and service delivery protests.

**FIGURE 1: Proposed model to end violent service delivery protest in South Africa.**



Source: Authors

Figure 1 on the previous page shows various ways in which the government and the local government can intervene to ensure there is an end to the problem of violent service delivery as well as ending the issue of service delivery problems. There is a clear cut in the roles performed by the two, although at its best, they complement one another. This is a top down approach where the government takes the responsibility of framing the policies that have a significant impact on people's lives. Some of these actions listed above cannot be achieved at local government level for instance; microeconomic policies have negative impact as well as positive on the wider society. However, it has been twenty years since the government adopted this approach. This would address issues such as inequality, unemployment, empowerment and improvisation of the services. The policies such as these have an impact on how the local government works. The other pertinent role of the government is to ensure that regular skills audit from the national government department, entities and the local government. This will ensure that there are right people with necessary skills to undertake or meet the job requirements. This will ensure efficiency in the response to the community problems.

Furthermore, a consultative migration policy should include input of the neighbouring countries in SADC, in order to ensure enforcement of this law to the foreign citizens. This is necessitated by the fact that xenophobic attacks are more of a regional problem than a South African problem. These reflect the economic incompetence of the countries experiencing outward migration. South Africa's regional and African counterparts have a deficient or rotten service delivery system. South Africa needs to enlighten the regional community and South Africans on its standing with regard to migration. This will also enable the community members to help the government in integrating the foreigners within the community. The government can use media houses in sending a message across whereas the local government can also use community media outlets, education system to transfer a message of co-existence.

In addition, the local government can help a lot by monitoring and evaluation a number of its services to the community. This can prevent service delivery protest in the long term. This can be complimented by having respective members of local government municipalities visiting the communities getting feedback from the people.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper has revealed the shortcomings of the local government municipalities. However, it has debunked the notion that all the violent service delivery protest is caused by the frailties of the local government. This research can reveal that behind every single protest happening in South Africa, there is a motive behind which need to be investigated before making conclusive remarks. Some the factors mentioned include: lack of integration of foreigners within the South African communities, poorly enforced migration policy, wider economic problems and citizenship crisis. The South African citizens have a feeling that they are entitled some certain service by the government and lack of thereof is the eminent cause of service delivery protest. This has led to the alienation of the foreign emigrants coming into South Africa. There is poor integration process within the community because government has not well explained to its citizens the importance of foreigners in the country. This research contributes to the wider audience in that it opens the insight of the policy makers and the government of South Africa to seek the alternative solution to end the culture of violent protest rather than categorising it under the rubric term service delivery protest. Further, it ensures objectivity and open mindedness when approaching the issue of protest in South Africa.

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