

## Service Delivery Protests Signal Warning To Govt

Written by Rudi Prinsloo  
Wednesday, 22 July 2009 10:59 -

---



A wave of service delivery protests in recent weeks shows a government still treading water in the race to keep democracy afloat, analysts say.

Anger against inadequate municipal services boiled over after President Jacob Zuma's administration was elected in April, under pressure to deliver on election promises.

"This is a warning sign to everyone that the effectiveness of the government is not what it should be," said businessman and Dinokeng participant Rick Menell.

He was one of 35 prominent South Africans who created the Dinokeng Scenarios which sketches three different scenarios for South Africa's future.

Disgruntled residents have taken to the streets in no fewer than 20 towns in the past four weeks, according to police reports.

"I imagine that we could see a peak in protests this year," said economist Karen Heese, of Municipal IQ, which monitors municipal service delivery hot spots.

Menell said although the Dinokeng Scenarios encouraged public pressure on the government to run the country effectively, violence was not the answer.

"Protesting is probably the least constructive [tactic] but it's a sign of frustration and sense of disempowerment," said Menell.

"The government must spread its net as wide as possible to build and maintain institutions."

The African National Congress government has been frank about the situation, acknowledging the importance of dealing with the protesters' concerns.

"Communities have been raising issues up to the provincial level, no one attended to them and now communities have bottled up and exploded," Co-operative Governance Minister Sicelo Shiceka said.

"We cannot deny it, they have genuine concerns about corruption and nepotism... they saw it happening and became aggrieved," he said after violent protests in Mpumalanga.

According to Heese, service delivery protests in the first half of this year already account for 13 percent of all major service delivery protests since 2004.

In the past weeks, the police reported on dozens of violent protests against poor service delivery, where angry crowds burnt tyres and hurled stones at the police and passers-by.

In many cases, law enforcement officials had to use gas canisters and rubber bullets to quell

## Service Delivery Protests Signal Warning To Govt

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

Wednesday, 22 July 2009 10:59 -

---

the protests in areas such as Diepsloot, Piet Retief, Rustenburg, Zeerust, Milnerton and Khayelitsha.

Heese said since Municipal IQ started its monitoring, 2005 recorded the highest number of service delivery protests -- 35.

"But up until the end of June we've already had 16, and by now, we are probably up to 21 already."

The three Dinokeng Scenarios all talk of scenarios where citizens are angry about unemployment and tired of grappling with socio-economic problems.

It says the key to a sustainable democracy is how the government deals with these problems.

"If we fail to recognise the severity of our challenges, and if we fail to address them, we will experience rapid disintegration and decline," the Dinokeng group said.

Menell said in the best-case scenario, different sectors of society become involved in helping the government solve its problems.

"We need to help our government, whether it wants it or not," said Menell.

Citizens could get involved in many ways, including by volunteering to do community work.

In that sense, the call for South Africans to commit to 67 minutes of voluntary community work to celebrate anti-apartheid icon Nelson Mandela's birthday on July 18, is a good start, said Menell.

"It's a very strong message from Dinokeng... this is absolutely critical to society, people really have to give their time and their resources to common problems... Mandela Day is a wonderful call."

On the service delivery front, a trade union has already indicated its willingness to become part of the solution. The Federation of Unions of SA was asked by one of its affiliates to offer its help to Shiceka to keep track of service delivery complaints.

"Dissatisfaction with poor service delivery or the complete lack thereof at municipal level, is now spreading like a veldfire throughout South Africa," said the United Association of SA (Uasa) CEO Koos Bezuidenhout.

"It is our contention that our national federation, Fedusa, should be seen to make a positive and constructive contribution towards assisting government to improve service delivery as expressed by President Jacob Zuma in his budget vote speech."

But perhaps a protester from Bothaville in the Free State summarised the situation best in an interview with The Weekend Post.

## Service Delivery Protests Signal Warning To Govt

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

Wednesday, 22 July 2009 10:59 -

---

"The people are sick and tired. That is why they are taking the law into their own hands," said Lester Witbooi.

A glance at numbers released by the SA Institute of Race Relations in June this year, reveals some reasons for Witbooi's frustration.

"It is evident that people living in more rural provinces still receive the worst delivery of services," the Fast Facts June 2009 report states.

The worst-hit provinces were the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga, where the proportion of households with access to water was 73 percent, 83 percent and 89 percent.

Turning to electricity services, in the Eastern Cape only 66 percent of households used electricity for lighting, with a respective 81 percent and 82 percent in Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

Nationally, housing delivery by the government had dropped by 8.2 percent between April 2007 and March 2008, compared to the same period the previous year.

Source : Sapa /fg/gj/jog

Date : 20 Jul 2009 11:00