

Portfolio Committee on Public Works means business as service delivery remains at stake

Report and images by Vusi Shabalala

In today's worldwide political arena, government and service delivery are inseparable. Similarly so, one cannot separate a service provider from delivery of a product to the satisfaction of a clientele. In South Africa, we have witnessed a range of service delivery protests which have inevitably nearly put the country's economy, social stability, good governance and international relations into disarray. For the purpose of our discussion, one needs to understand the rationale for service delivery. What service delivery means. Who is to account to service delivery? What imperatives, challenges and benefits does service delivery have in place for its recipients? What impact does service delivery leave to citizenry?

In the context and understanding of our piece, service delivery is regarded as a set of processes, tools and techniques for the rapid, reliable and continuous development and delivery of a service (it might be a product in a variety of forms). This elucidation is reflected in the context of Public Works as a government administration.



Above (centre) is Ms Dudu Fihlela Regional Manager for eThekweni Region as she briefed the guests

Public Works is by virtue of its legislative and legal mandate expected to provide set of prioritized services to its target audience – the citizens, stakeholder partners and employees alike. However, like any other government, all national, provincial and local government departments have their respective overshadow units or components, commonly known as “watchdogs” that serve the duty to monitor, assess, evaluate and provide any support or intermediate remedies to a government department that will assist in the provisioning of required services.

The KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Administration boasts the presence of the Portfolio Committees and our focus in this article is on the Portfolio Committee on the KZN Public Works chaired by the Honourable Mrs Mbali Fraser, MPL. The committee has for its duration in office to date made progressive strides through; continuous monitoring and overseeing the work and budget of the department; holding the department accountable; examine specific areas of public life and or matters of public interest; taking care domestic or provincial parliamentary issues; having the power to summon any person to appear before them in giving evidence or produce documents. There are other functions not mentioned herein. In a nutshell, they execute their functions on behalf of and in support of the citizens they serve. It against this background to witness the hard work registered by the Portfolio Committee on Public Works.



Above (left) is Mrs Asanda Nene, Senior Manager: Operations Coordination Directorate from KZN Public Works with Mrs Mbali Fraser Chairperson of the KZN Public Works Portfolio Committee on the right as she delivered her address

An official oversight visit by the Committee was witnessed on Friday the 29th of May 2015 when the team paid a visit to the Stanger Hospital project at ILembe District as scheduled. The 1st Part of the visit began with a briefing session which was held at eThekwini Regional Office in Mayville, Durban. The Committee received a warm welcome from Ms Dudu Fihlela, the Regional Manager who also introduced all her Public Works team in attendance and thereafter gave the order of proceedings for the day's programme. Representing Public Works were Mrs Asanda Nene, Senior Manager: Operations Coordination, Ms Gugu Mtshali and Mr Kiru Naidoo (both from Communications), Ms Nomcebo Mnguni for eThekwini's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), Messrs S Blose and Sifiso Buthelezi from eThekwini and iLembe District Offices respectively and Mr Brain Steenhuisen, the Public Works' Stanger Hospital Project Manager who conducted almost the entire presentations (both at Mayville and on construction site). Public Works' Portfolio Committee Chairperson, Mrs Mbali Fraser MPL was accompanied by her portfolio committee members namely. Messrs Siboniso Duma, Fortune Bhengu, Vasco Hlengwa, F Rodgers, Ms H Motala, Ms N Molefe and Ms Ntokozo Gasa all serving as Members of Parliament (MPLs) at the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature in Pietermaritzburg.

A 'questions-and-answer' session was handled with ease as Mr Steenhuisen, Ms Nene, Ms Fihlela, Mr Buthelezi, Ms Mnguni and Mr Blose managed to provide adequate answers

and explanations accordingly. On completion of 'part 1' of the programme, the entourage headed for Stanger Hospital.

The 2nd Part began when all parties arrived at the hospital. It was also during this part when the Stedone Mechanics Building T/A Elias Mechanicos Building management team led by the Principal Agent, Mr Charles Taylor also had to conduct a debriefing before an oversight tour inspection was undertaken. Stanger hospital is a hospital located in KwaDukuza Municipality in Ward 19 of the ILembe District. It is situated in the town of Stanger and equally services areas of Groutville, Ntshaweni and Stanger.

The hospital project boasts the building of a new block of a modern maternity and psychiatric facilities with additional wards designed for specific patients and health needs. The project comprises of the construction of a multi-storied maternity facility (blocks A & B) which include theatres, maternity, neonatal, anti-natal wards, doctors consulting rooms, and doctors overnight rooms, administrative facilities, personnel training facilities and boardrooms and the construction of a helipad on the rooftop of Block A for emergency cases. Block A is a completely new structure whereas Block B is an extension of the existing maternity block. This is a project that rounds up a total budget of R171, 000,000 with a contract period of 36 months since the 9th of April 2013 and the completion date set for 10th of May 2016. The physical construction progress to date stands at 58% with an expenditure to date standing at approximately R75, 961, 000.



Above left: KZN Public Works Portfolio Committee members are Honourable MPLs Messrs Bhengu and Duma and (right) Honourable MPLs Messrs Rodgers and Hlengwa

Benefits associated with the project are the labour absorption of the local community in and around Stanger areas. The Project Steering Committee (with its members based within the area) from Ward 19 facilitates the labour capacitation to the project. To date 145 employment opportunities for local skilled and unskilled labourers has been created against a target of 150. Of this figure, 69 are youth, 35 women and 35 being other categories. There are 14 National Youth Service (NYS) learners undertaking their practical training lessons in plumbing with two (2) students from Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) undertaking the in-service training on site with the contractor. Although the project is not EPWP designed, it is however being implemented in line with EPWP guidelines and EPWP Phase 2 requirements. All learners are provided with EPWP protective gear. All labourers have been inducted on Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and HIV as part of EPWP. Currently, the ratio on labour intensive is 70% local with 30% outsourced. The outsourced labour are skilled artisans from the

main contractor who transfer skills to the local labourer. The progress status of the project is well managed in that the Steering Committee convene regular meetings in this respect so as to monitor progress and other construction related matters.



Above: Mrs Asanda Nene a typical woman who leads by example as she led the MPLs and the Public Works team during the site tour

In addition to the positive spin is that most building material and other resources used on the project are sourced from local suppliers and this registers a positive benefit for the community. Sub-contracting has been part of the project and has thus far afforded for the following trades: bricklaying, plastering, screeding of floors, steel fixing and others are still to be identified as the project progresses. A full construction site tour and inspection was undertaken with Brian Steenhuisen and Mrs Asanda Nene leading the briefing. The KwaZulu-Natal Public Works' Portfolio Committee led by Honourable Mrs Mbali Fraser MPL really means business in its mandate of shadowing all work undertaken by Public Works. The oversight visits by the KZN Public Works Portfolio Committee are there to stay, as long as there are *'implied powers'* in the Constitution, public laws and the KZN Legislature rules. These oversight visits will continue to review, monitor and supervise the department's policy implementation, programs and activities with a view at improving service delivery for the betterment of peoples' lives.

In this 21st year of democracy, Public Works and the Portfolio Committee will walk *'hand-in-hand'* to building communities through construction. This means a continued business as service delivery remains at stake.