

Expect flash-points - half of SA's metro residents are not happy with service delivery

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In a survey of 2 000 residents of South Africa's metropolitan areas conducted in February 2010, TNS Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd, South Africa's leading marketing and social insights company, announced that over a half of residents - 52% - are not happy with the service delivery they receive from their local authority or municipality.

This is a very high figure and one that indicates that violence over a lack of service delivery is a certainty. Strike negotiators say that, when 30% or more of a work force are unhappy, there will almost certainly be strike or protest action. With levels of unhappiness over service delivery exceeding half the population, the likelihood of such protest action then becoming violent becomes highly probable.

In a study conducted in 2007, dissatisfaction levels were at an already high 27%, with Gauteng at 30% reaching the critical level. That the levels of unhappiness have risen to 52% shows that the problem of service delivery is now especially acute.

In addition, 51% say that they have been waiting too long for basic service from their local authority or municipality

President Zuma's pledge

In his State of the nation address this year, the President said -

“ *"The defining feature of this administration would be that it knows where people live, understands their concerns and respond faster to their needs."* ”

This week, President Zuma paid a surprise visit to Sweetwaters informal settlement, south of Johannesburg. Afterwards, he sharply criticised the government for failing adequately to address conditions in informal settlements, describing the conditions there as "shocking. There is no decent housing, sanitation, electricity, access road or health facilities - they are living like pigs." He added, "It gets worse, when you end up with the Treasury telling you the rollovers, the money has gone back [to the Treasury] - as if we have done everything and there was change to come home with." He said the government had made "some progress," which included spending R15-million on housing subsidies and providing 220000 housing opportunities in the last financial year. He also said a guarantee fund of R1-billion had been established to provide 600000 housing units for those who do not qualify for bank credit or a subsidy. The President emphasised that housing was a major problem - the housing backlog currently stands at about 2.1million with the number of informal settlements growing to more than 2700. This compares favourably with the 2.4-million backlog announced during the 2006 Budget Speech, but is still above the 1996 level of two million.

"In three years' time, we will finish 20 years of freedom. We are likely to find it very difficult to explain why there are still people living in Sweetwaters like they do," said Zuma. "We must change the manner in which we do things."
(TimesLive.co.za, 19 May 2010).

Why this is so important (1) - human dignity and basic human rights

That people "live like pigs" is, in itself, a terrible admission 16 years into our new democracy. With local government elections due next year, service delivery, or the lack of it, will be a key election issue, especially in view of the President's pledge. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said:

“ *...too many people are living in grueling, demeaning, dehumanising poverty...South Africans are sitting on a powder keg - we really must work like mad to eradicate poverty.* ”

TNS said that the results show quite strong differences by area:

			%	
			Unhappy with service delivery	Been waiting too long for basic services
Gauteng			56	57
	Johannesburg and environs		56	57
		Johannesburg excl Soweto	47	50
		East Rand	62	61
		West Rand	66	59
		Soweto	49	59
		Vaal Triangle/South Rand	64	54
		Pretoria	57	56
Cape Town			42	41
Durban			52	49
Eastern Cape			52	48
	Port Elizabeth		42	41
	East London		75	62
Bloemfontein			40	30

From this, it is clear that all areas are well above the critical level of 30% unhappiness, with very serious flash-points likely in the East and West Rand and the Vaal Triangle/South Rand in Gauteng, and in East London. However, TNS warned that no areas are immune as dissatisfaction is high everywhere.

Other aspects of the findings

Not surprisingly, blacks, in particular, were the most unhappy with service delivery levels (54% unhappy, 58% say they have been waiting too long for basic services). But this does mean that the ANC's main constituency is the most unhappy. Amongst the unemployed, 59% are unhappy about service delivery. Amongst those in squatter camps and informal settlements, the unhappiness level rises to 65%. Also, not surprisingly, it is the poorest of the poor who are the most unhappy, with as many as 80% of these people expressing unhappiness - a powder keg indeed.

But even the most wealthy are also unhappy (49% - this is most likely due to the ongoing power outages, water problems and billing problems at the very least).

Why this is so important (1) - the link to the xenophobia powder keg

Xenophobia is not primarily about hatred towards foreigners. Ultimately, it is also about competition for scarce resources - houses, water and electricity, jobs (and even women). Hence, poor service delivery is a large component of what drives xenophobia, not helped by the fact that foreigners will accept (are exploited by) lower wages in their desperation - and are powerless to complain to authorities as many of them are here illegally.

In a metropolitan study conducted in 2008, just after the outburst of xenophobic violence, TNS Research Surveys asked people to agree or disagree with the statement "Government leadership has been good in dealing with the violence towards foreigners". Whilst 38% of metro adults agreed with this statement, almost half (47%) disagreed and 15% said "don't know".

In addition, 70% of people surveyed wanted illegal refugees living in South Africa returned to their countries of origin.

Our take-out

It is clear that there is extreme dissatisfaction with service delivery from local authorities in metro areas. Protests can be expected almost anywhere, feelings are so strong. That this will spill over into violence in many instances should not be a surprise.

Service delivery is a key issue for all communities . This puts Government under considerable pressure to address service delivery issues. It is clear that people can be expected to become restive if the process is not speeded up.

Given that people are also sensitive to the influx of illegal immigrants and that their perceptions of the handling of the xenophobia problem in 2008 are not very positive, it is also abundantly clear that the current lack of service delivery, where it turns into violent protests, is highly likely to become a backlash against foreigners living here. Government needs a plan to address both the issue of service delivery and the concomitant violence, especially against foreigners, as we are, indeed, sitting on a powder keg.

Technical note

The studies were conducted amongst a sample of 2 000 adults (1260 blacks, 385 whites, 240 coloureds and 115 Indians/Asians) in the seven major metropolitan areas: they have a margin of error of under 2.5% for the results found for the total sample. The studies were conducted by TNS Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd as part of their ongoing research into current social and political issues and were funded by TNS Research Surveys. For more details, please contact Neil Higgs on 011-778-7500 or 082-376-6312.

Website: www.tnsresearchsurveys.co.za.

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