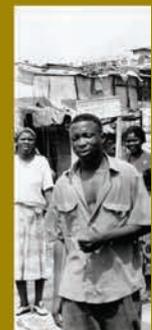


Patronage Politics Divides Us



**A Study of
Poverty,
Patronage and
Inequality in
South Africa**



Mcebisi Ndletyana, Pholoana Oupa Makhalemele and Ralph Mathekga

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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FOREWORD

Democracy in South Africa's local communities has been nurtured over some 17 years. At the formal level, this has entailed the establishment of democratic local government structures and systems of accountability, processes of demarcation and re-demarcation, and the establishment of new administrations. As democratic local government matures, so have informal relationships between citizens and this sphere of government congealed – ranging from informal recruitment and employment practices, conduct of the councillors and municipal employees, and practices to garner political support and reward such, to local community protests.

The new local government structures are in large measure an antithesis of the illegitimate apartheid local authorities, which were fiercely resisted by the population. To this extent, they are also an extension of alternative expressions of people's power that started to manifest during the last decade of the apartheid system.

Nineteen years into democratic South Africa, however, it is apparent that this sphere of government is facing strain in many areas of the country. Numerous surveys, over different periods, indicate that local government is the least trusted of all spheres of government. Local protests over poor delivery of social services have become a recurrent feature in many communities. Structures and systems of accountability, such as ward committees and processes to develop integrated development plans (IDP), seem largely not to have delivered the initial promise.

It is against this backdrop that the Mapungubwe Institute (MISTRA) initiated research on Poverty, Inequality and Patronage as part of its first suite of eight Priority Research Projects. Through this research, MISTRA sought to gain insight into how patronage politics contributes to some of the problems being experienced; and further, how poverty and inequality articulate with such

patronage.

In interrogating this correlation, the study does not seek to imply unique causality between poverty and inequality on the one hand and patronage politics on the other. Rather, it studies the concrete articulation among these dynamics as experienced by local communities. In pursuit of this objective, five diverse case studies were conducted in localities spread across four provinces. Researchers interviewed a number of individuals and interest groups, attended public meetings, and generally got a sense of life in these communities. The research was undertaken over a period of two years, about eight months of which were taken up by the fieldwork.

The process entailed numerous other activities including a series of colloquia with experts and recognised scholars in the field, and a peer review process.

The report goes beyond answering the primary questions of the study. It is a profile of socio-economic life in South Africa's various communities as experienced not only by locals, but also by foreign-born residents. The findings also show the relationship between councillors, business interests and local party organisations. While these issues are studied from the perspective of experiences in poor local communities, this does not necessarily imply the absence of patronage politics in areas where the well-off reside. The latter requires a separate study.

And so, what survivalist strategies do the poor adopt to manoeuvre the patronage minefield? How do they conduct themselves in relation to the often selective enforcement of municipal by-laws, which itself creates fertile ground for patronage and corruption? Where local residents come into conflict with foreign-born nationals or even with migrants from other parts of the country – is this reflective of a shared grievance

among the majority? How do political parties discourage or entrench patronage politics and, in turn, what effect is this having on the parties themselves?

Communities' lived experiences, summarised in this report, do offer some answers to these questions. They contain many insights that suggest policy measures that can be undertaken by political parties and government structures to remedy the situation. The study distils these measures in the form of recommendations for consideration by policy makers. These range from internal party democracy in processes to select candidates for municipal elections, to the vexed question about the insidious impact of the current system of party political funding.

MISTRA is the first to acknowledge that this report does not drill deep enough into the core and related questions. We offer this study as part of a contribution to the necessary discussion that we should have about how to eliminate the negative effects of patronage politics, and thus strengthen South Africa's democracy.

We wish to extend our gratitude to the research team, including the field workers who, for extended periods, located themselves in these communities and trawled through masses of documentation arising from their interactions. We thank, too, the participants in workshops and colloquia, the peer reviewers and the donors for making this work possible.

Joel Netshitenzhe — Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

Patronage politics has proven itself not only to be a persistent challenge, of a toxic kind. It is widespread, manifesting itself in the various sectors of our society, both public and private, as well as in various forms of organisation. Private companies are reportedly recipients of tenders awarded un-procedurally by politicians in exchange for a kickback. Some of the supposedly reputable business people become prominent donors to political parties, with implied conditionalities about benefits in return. Both the ruling party and the official opposition party, which is also a ruling party in some spheres of government, albeit ferociously disagreeing on numerous other issues, are congenially unanimous on non-disclosure of the identity of private donors to their respective parties.

Within the public sector, local government seems to be most inflicted by patronage politics. The Auditor General's audit report for the year 2010–2011, for instance, reveals a gloomy picture. Contracts worth R3.274 million were awarded to councillors and family members. Not only did councillors use their positions for self-enrichment, but a substantial number of people were employed into positions for which they were not qualified .

The consequent damage is reflected in the audit performance of the municipalities. Only 5% of the municipal entities received a clean audit. While 17% of the auditees improved on their performance from the last financial year, 13% regressed. None of the municipalities in five provinces – Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, Northern Cape, and North-West – received any clean audit report. And, 10% of all municipalities have received a disclaimer or an adverse opinion for six years in succession.

Indeed, government's own municipal audits identified patronage politics as being at the core of municipal problems. The African National Congress (ANC), which controls more than two-thirds of the municipalities, has repeatedly lamented similar problems.

For instance, the document titled, 'Leadership renewal, discipline and organisational culture', discussed at the party's 2010 National General Council (NGC) notes that as early as 1997, at the Mafikeng Conference, the organisational report warned against leadership in the ANC being 'seen as a stepping stone to positions of power and material reward in government and business'. The 2000 NGC remarked on 'disturbing trends of careerism, corruption and opportunism' creeping into the organisation. The 2002 Stellenbosch Conference 'raised concerns about members and branches being used as voting cattle and the tendency to have recruitment and active structures mainly for the purpose of elective conferences' (ANC, 'Leadership Renewal', 2002).

Patronage politics is not only a serious problem; it is also persistent. Consequently, community protests have not only been a frequent sight in our communities, but have also been violent. For instance, the second quarter of 2012 alone registered more service delivery protests, at 60, than 2011 (19) in the same period . That was the highest number of protests registered within a quarter since 2004.

Accordingly, the study examined patronage politics within the context of local government. Local government provides an apt setting. It is both a direct implementer of government programmes as well as the nearest point of government contact with the citizenry. This sphere of governance allows for both a reasonable measurement of government impact on the lives of people and discerns the nature and impact of government-citizenry interactions.

This study thus has sought not only to gain deeper insight into the causes, manifestation and impact of patronage politics, but also to examine how official measures at curbing the phenomenon have fared. In other words, the aims are to understand the specific nature and various forms of patronage politics; the conditions under which it thrives (or

disappears); and its specific impact on the structures of governance, political culture, and the citizenry.

Specifically, the study examined how patronage politics articulates with conditions of poverty. While not assuming causality between poverty and patronage in either direction, the study examines whether the prevalence of patronage in specific communities had anything to do with the fact that poor people are less organised or unable to access state services independent of the corrupt intermediary of public officials? If indeed it was so, the study then set out to probe how poor people could best respond to these challenges.

METHODOLOGY: CASE STUDIES

The study was pursued through qualitative methodology. Specifically, researchers conducted interviews with individuals and groups of individuals, and also engaged focus groups. Moreover, a case study approach was used, selecting five research sites, spread out over four of South Africa's provinces, namely the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Free State. Fieldwork was conducted over a period of approximately 18 months beginning around October 2010 and ending in July 2012. Focus group interviews followed in the last half of 2012.

In the entire fieldwork experience, gaining access to people for interview has not been difficult when it comes to individual community members or lobby groups such as NGOs. In most cases, difficulty arose in gaining access to local government officials and to some extent councillors. Our field survey could not stray off the usual trust issue at local government level. Due to lack of trust, it has been difficult for communities to gain access to local government information, and to officials. In some cases, even access to information such as IDPs (which should be publicly available in any case) was not easy to obtain.

Interviewees' availability to participate in interviews was also driven by self-interest in the sense that most intended to inform outsiders about their local conditions, so their issues could be propelled to national importance. This motive of course has tended to result in exaggeration of information and omission of certain information while emphasis is made to drive the local agenda.

Councillors who were interviewed also attempted to influence the researcher's decision as to who else to interview. This manoeuvre reflects the nature and character of local politics, and the inherent competition in the management of the flow of information.

Trust is generally low at local government level, and more so when outsiders are involved in seeking information. To get residents' co-operation, researchers undertook not to use their real names. This is also a security measure, to protect them against possible victimisation. In the instance of public officials, however, we have used their real names.

Negotiating entry into the field also posed an ethical challenge. In some cases, communities gave entry on the pretext that their concerns would be reported in the media. While it might be necessary for researchers to level with interviewees and state that the information collected would only be used for the purpose of research and not to expose community concerns in the media, at times this perception as held by the community could only be corrected in subsequent visits. The communities' understanding of the nature and purpose of this research developed gradually with further visits.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings confirm some of the assertions in the literature, while challenging others. Equally important to note is that the findings not only shed light on our case studies, but also apply to other municipalities throughout the country. This is borne out

by official and empirical reports (the Auditor General's office and official ANC reports), which are cited below, that not only validate these findings, but also demonstrate the ubiquitous nature of these dynamics. Accordingly, while the conclusions derive from the particular case studies, an attempt is made to generalise them to other municipalities.

Poverty and Unemployment Induces Dependence on the State

The State plays a pivotal role in the lives of the unemployed and indigent. Because they lack a source of livelihood, the State has come to provide for their subsistence. Social relief takes multiple forms, ranging from cash transfers to food parcels and lighting material, such as paraffin and electricity, and water. Social grants support some 40% of South African households, without which they would live in abject poverty.

Official relief extends to providing employment in public works. Though short-term, public works employment is highly coveted by locals. Employment is scarce, given the high national official rate of unemployment of which roughly 25%, broadly defined, goes into the mid-30s in percentage terms. This triggers intense competition among locals for the few, temporary jobs, available. Tension has consequently arisen, especially in instances where locals feel that 'others' such as residents from outside their community, and foreign-born residents, are preferred over them for employment, or are able to thrive better than the 'locals' in small business activity. In places such as Diepsloot, the tension has previously imploded into full-blown violence against foreign nationals. Such is the level of desperation to secure employment.

Reliance on social and other forms of relief, in turn, makes the State's provision of official documents, such as identity documents (IDs), especially critical for the indigent. Unlike other citizens not dependent on social grants, recipients of grants depend on IDs not only to apply for the grants, but also to access them on a monthly basis. This documentation is their gateway to subsistence.

Equally noteworthy is that it is not sufficient that such services are available in the vicinity; rather

they should be located within their residential area. Proximity is critical for poor people to access official services. Distance oftentimes requires the use of public transportation. This requires money they do not have. Similarly important is the use of media to communicate availability and location of such opportunities. Media reaches not only a wider audience, but is quite crucial for those who are illiterate and is even best in their mother tongue. It appears that the State does make optimal use of radio to announce services and programmes – but given migration and reception in various parts of the country, as illustrated in the case of Overstrand, this does not reach all the intended targets.

For residents of informal settlements, such as part of Diepsloot, the reliance on officialdom stretches beyond the ordinary. Because shacks do not have a documented formal address, informal dwellers lack official documentation that verifies their residence. This presents a problem in their interactions with officialdom. They need proof of residence. Councillors provide such proof. This increases residents' dependence on the State even more and makes them vulnerable in the presence of unscrupulous officials.

It is important to note, however, that the dependence is reciprocal. Councillors need the votes of the poor to remain in office. This requires that councillors attend to their needs. That they do not always perform these duties diligently notwithstanding, councillors are acutely conscious that their political fate depends on meeting the needs of their poor constituency.

Councillors' dependence on votes, in turn, gives residents leverage. They are buoyed to make demands upon their public representatives. Indifference to such demands risks loss of political support. Consequently, councillors take great effort to provide patronage going beyond what is ordinarily prescribed in their duties.

In the other words, patron-client relations are beneficial to both parties. Councillors are guaranteed political support, especially within party contests over nominations, and supporters secure the much-needed material benefits.

Albeit mutually beneficial to the two parties, such relations erode meritocracy in employment recruitment. Rather, it puts a premium on personal or political relations above anything else. Securing a job depends on who one knows, rather than one's competence.

Consequently, residents have come to rely strongly on nepotism. By nepotism in this case, and as used in popular lexicon, we not only mean granting favours or preference to family members, but also to friends and political allies: Applying for a job and submitting a curriculum vitae seems to have become inconsequential. As a result, residents have come to accept, and are resigned to, such practices. It has become the way of life, about which residents feel nothing can be done. Personal ties (or primordial identities) therefore have become extremely important as a way of securing a livelihood. Put differently, people are taking 'care of their own'. This is especially salient in the areas of Overstrand that are somewhat diverse and have relatively large 'migrant' communities. This accentuates ethnic identities and the result is tension, as an ethnic group feels marginalised in favour of another.

Political Office as Source of Employment – Power Struggles

Recipients of social grants, however, are not the only citizens dependent on the State for a livelihood. Local politicians, too, are dependent on political office for an income. Without a political office, a sizeable number are likely to battle to secure employment. A significant number of councillors lack professional qualifications.

This would explain why political office is so highly contested among local politicians. Candidates, as in the case of Mhlontlo's Jeremiah Jikijela and Mzikalimela Mxinwa, employ unscrupulous ways to secure both a party nomination and, once elected, renomination. In a party nomination contest, residents, especially those who are illiterate, such as the villagers of Mhlontlo, are made to sign forms under false pretences of applying for jobs. This is how a parallel party branch in Mhlontlo's Ward

19 appears to have been formed. Residents were duped and the wily politician was able to sign up members in support of his party's nomination for the 2011 local elections.

Controversy over nominations, especially for the 2011 local elections, however, was not confined to Mhlontlo; it was commonplace and widespread throughout the country. The Jikijela-Mxinwa dispute, therefore, was far from unique. The Eastern Cape had the highest number of disputes (167), with the majority coming from the OR Tambo (where Mhlontlo is located) and Amathole regions.

The manner in which party members contest nomination not only engenders violation of organisational procedures, but also encourages misuse of state resources. Because nominations depend on securing sufficient votes at a branch level, incumbents build such support through providing employment to some residents, who are also card-carrying party members, to the exclusion of others. In some instances, money is disbursed to branch members as an enticement to vote in particular ways – reflecting an even more extreme manifestation of intra-party patronage, and the forging of sinister mutual dependencies.

In Diepsloot, defeated candidates felt that their rivals won unfairly. Mhlontlo's experience tells that the discord extends to the community as a whole. The community becomes divided between winners and losers. When it comes to local employment and other benefits, those who ensured a candidate's success are favoured by the victorious candidates (where councillors have discretionary powers).

In other words, rather than create a common platform where residents deliberate and take collective decisions over affairs of their community, politics has become a corrupting influence. It divides the community, instead of uniting it. A sense of community and public participation is consequently waning. Mhlontlo residents expressed disinterest in community meetings because of their exclusive character. They had attended what were supposedly public meetings only to be made to feel unwelcome. Some have opted not to attend

public meetings anymore.

Disengagement and weakening of community ties, however, have not quite translated to fatalism. Residents have not entirely resigned themselves to a sense of hopelessness. They have developed alternative ways quite different to the factionalist manner of councillors. And Mhlontlo's Hlubi traditional authority is one example of this. In instances where paid community work goes through the traditional authority, the chief applies a different formula of employing people. Rather than give to supporters of a councillor to the exclusion of others, the authority, together with residents, gives preference to those most in need. This is in keeping with the idea that a traditional authority is the representative of all in the community, regardless of political affiliations or differences, which, after all, is meant to be the guiding principle of public office. As such, the democratic local government system, which is meant to be the representative of the popular will, is delegitimised by manifestations of crass patronage.

But, where councillors use job creation as patronage, they have also been pitted against municipal officials. Councillors meddle in municipal work, insisting on the delivery of jobs and specific allocations of tenders. Municipal officials do not always co-operate, for job creation is not considered a function of councillors. Officials also have to follow the prescripts of public finance management legislation. This leads to tension, which at times breaks into full-blown confrontation between councillors and municipal officials, such as in the case of Petsana, where the municipal council was consequently thrown into disarray. In such instances, delivery of social services comes to a halt as the municipal council, due to internal squabbles, fails to meet and approve programmes for execution by municipal officials.

Delivery of social services is not the only casualty of the power struggles. Procedures also suffer. Take the case of Mhlontlo's Jikijela. He was re-elected ward councillor of Ward 19 in the 2011 local elections despite his party having decided against councillors holding another job. Though Jikijela eventually resigned a year later, his very

nomination suggests laxity of rules. Relaxation of rules, in turn, reflects on the institution of the party itself.

The subversion of rules is not confined to parties alone. Rather, it is also practiced within official institutions and involves many other officials. Institutional violations are inevitable. Once employed within a party, these practices assume a life of their own. Political parties are incubators of political and institutional culture that is consonant with democratic institutions. For all institutions, including democratic political parties and democratic governing structures, operate on similar principles and spirit. Both have similar expectations of their members and office-bearers. If one thwarts and defies procedures of a political party, there is no stopping that individual from replicating a similar corrosive behaviour within a municipality. In violating the integrity of democratic processes, the transgressor has shown to have an anti-institutional culture. Once developed, that culture applies in a non-discriminatory manner.

Infighting indicates dire dependence on political office as the possible sole source of income. Occupation of political office depends on a party nomination. Councillors serve only a five-year term and are not guaranteed renomination. This generates a propensity to 'build a nest' in case they are not returned. And because most lack professional qualifications, finding a source of income outside of political office becomes a great cause of anxiety. Thus, accusations of councillors influencing decisions over who gets a contract are commonplace. Councillors, in return, get a certain share of the total value of the contract.

At the one level, business people interested in such opportunities put a high premium on having 'dependable' councillors or municipal officials who can push such opportunities their way. These range from catering to local infrastructure projects. Such self-interest infects the party nomination processes and the 'deployment' of council officials. At another level, councillors award themselves contracts or do so through family members.

If not for a mere income, the political rivalry amongst the local elites is therefore spurred by spoils of office. Municipal contracts are one such spoil. This is not only a violation of procedures, but also exerts a deleterious effect on the quality of services delivered by the municipality. Oftentimes work is left either incomplete because the budget ran out; the quality of the work is poor (due to contractors being inexperienced or to insufficient building material being used as contractors seek to maximise their profit margin); or council overspends on the original budget as it tries to repair the initial flop.

Self-Initiative & Official Assistance

High unemployment levels have resulted in some locals initiating activities to generate a living. These vary from formal trades, such as shop owners, who run what are known as spaza shops, to informal traders who sell foodstuffs on the side of the road. Challenges faced by both formal and informal traders call into the question the effectiveness of the State in assisting local economic activities.

In some areas spaza shop owners face stiff competition from shops owned by foreign-born residents. The edge enjoyed by the latter goes beyond longer opening hours, but also extends to the pricing of foodstuffs. They sell at a much cheaper price than locals. This phenomenon is not only confined to Diepsloot. A number of townships throughout South Africa have seen a proliferation of shops owned by foreign-born residents, while local traders seem to have been driven out of business.

In a series of events reported throughout the country, local traders have retaliated with violent attacks on foreign nationals and their properties. In a free market economy, especially if foreign-born shop owners acquire their stock fairly, it is not clear how driving them out benefits the poor consumers. Empirical evidence, including from these case studies, points to the organisation of foreign shop owners into effective bulk buying syndicates, which – on the basis of economies of scale – helps to drive prices down. Should government take it upon itself to assist local traders in this regard, or should this be left to the local business associations, in the spirit of free enterprise?

Would such action by government constitute discrimination and further entrench divisions within communities?

Some locals rent out their properties to foreign-born traders to use as shops, while they move out to stay elsewhere. In other words, locals have not been affected similarly by the presence of foreign-born traders. They are a threat to some and a source of income and cheap goods to others. Thus attacks on foreign-born traders are not always spurred by xenophobia. They seem, largely, to manifest intra-class rivalry.

Informal traders, too, face challenges. But theirs are of a different nature and come from a different source. Though helpful in some respects, state assistance seems somewhat inadequate in other respects. Municipalities provide shelters to hawkers under which they can set up their stalls and be protected from bad weather but the way in which municipalities function with respect to informal trade can also be obstructive. Informal traders put up stalls where their customers are concentrated, which is oftentimes on the side of the road. As a result, they come into conflict with overly rigid bylaws. More often than not they are forced off the most convenient spots.

To be sure, the State has introduced measures to offset inconveniences to informal traders. These include locating them within certain premises or requiring that they get permits and are assigned to particular spots on which to sell. Traders are sceptical about the efficiency of such regulations. Zoned areas can only accommodate a certain number of informal traders, and hawkers prefer the flexibility to follow their customers, wherever they may be. The location of customers will generally change from one place to another, especially if, for instance, traders are catering for workers on construction sites. Workers move upon completion of the construction and a new construction elsewhere provides another site for trading. This demands flexibility on the part of the hawkers, and in effect, the municipality. Albeit they are meant to assist, municipal bylaws require an appraisal. Evidence shows that they have become more of a hindrance than an aid.

Official Approach to Local Economic Development

Though employment may be scarce, some communities are endowed with natural resources that can be exploited to provide economic opportunities. Mhlontlo and Overstrand municipalities are certainly amongst such communities. One has an abundance of communal land and the other has fish in the ocean. These natural resources are not only a source of subsistence, but also of commercial activity.

Subsistence seems to take precedence in Mhlontlo over commercial activity. There are hardly any co-operatives or developmental projects to encourage commercial activity. Instead, some assistance, such as providing tractors, is made available towards helping locals till the soil. Conversely, Overstrand uses its access to the ocean to promote both commercial activity and subsistence. The way the municipality does this, however, appears to foster inequality among its racially divided residents. Most of Overstrand's poor residents are largely involved in subsistence fishing, whilst the industry itself seems to be dominated by established business.

The dichotomy – black subsistence and mainly white commercial activity – is partly a result of unequal resources. Even though local fishers obtain licence to fish, they still have to rent the facilities – boats and transportation – owned by established entities. All told, they are left with very little of their proceeds which are sufficient only for subsistence. They are unable to accumulate income in order to acquire a boat and other such capital, which would make them self-sufficient. Rather, they fish to live and remain on the economic margin. Access to the ocean is critical to the extent that it should be able to sustain livelihoods, while enabling the generation of meaningful income.

Petsana's experience further accentuates the inadequacy of officialdom towards promoting small business or the informal sector. The numerous co-operatives in Petsana have largely gone unsupported by local government. This is despite official urgings to form co-operatives

in order to qualify for government contracts towards local economic development.

There is clearly a keen desire and initiative amongst the poor to lift themselves out of poverty. They are not content living off the largesse of the State. They would rather be self-sufficient, generating their own income. The informal sector already employs a significant number of abled-bodied individuals, estimated around 1.6 million citizens. And it would appear that there is potential for further absorption. Diepsloot's informal traders, for instance, exuded enthusiasm and had many ideas about business and how the State could assist them with start-up capital. But, rather than engage them, the State has tended to criminalise informal traders. They are seen as a problem that requires controlling through all sorts of regulations and licenses. Their economic activities are deemed the cause of 'chaos, and the harm that would befall society were the State not to maintain order' (Charman, 2010, p. 2).

In reality, rigid official control undermines the informal sector. It is doubtful in the present South African economic order if such controls can ever rid the streets of hawkers. Informal economic activity is necessitated by economic marginality. It is a survival strategy. Absent other sources of livelihood, it is highly likely that hawkers will persist trading on the pavements, despite police harassment and fines. They do so out of necessity in order to stay alive. Faced with extortion and other corrupt activities by those in positions of authority, informal traders are forced to oblige the tastes of officialdom rather than lose their sources of livelihood. Corruption thus reproduces and sustains itself as part of the survival strategies of the poor.

Unemployment and lack of skills do enhance reliance on the State. Politicians depend on political office for income especially when they cannot find employment elsewhere due to a lack of qualifications. The uncertainty of political office encourages corrupt practices to 'build a nest for rainy days'. Poor residents utilise their political support to gain material benefits from the State, in this instance, from councillors. In sum, political support is traded for material benefits.

Patron-client relations have in turn fanned nepotism. It has become accepted as a way of life. This accentuates ethnic identity. One takes care of one's own to ensure that one, too, will be attended to, should one fall into hard times. Recruiting one's own thus is a way of providing security to future employment. Meritocracy is eroded.

The qualification is worth repeating, that patron-client relations are not peculiar to the poor and illiterate. Nor should an assumption be made about a causal relationship as such between poverty and patronage. Councillors do prioritise the interests of the wealthy and established business, as well as the 'middle classes'. They discriminate against the poor, whilst promoting established business and wealthy residents. Such policies effectively aid and perpetuate inequality.

For instance, failure to support informal traders not only freezes income-generating possibilities, but also widens inequality. This, in turn, breeds tension. Those who remain poor, while others prosper, are embittered. The bitterness stems from a sense of unfairness. This is especially prevalent where the State is seen to provide preferential access to the rich over the poor to what should be commonly owned natural resources. This is effectively discrimination and, combined with the 'value chain' of patronage and corruption experienced by the poor, it creates even more bitterness and tension.

Patronage Politics: Impact on Local Politics

Patronage politics must not be understood to be only the domain of the poor. The middle-class and individual business people, through tenders, do partake in patronage politics. The poor use their votes to leverage material benefits from politicians, whilst business people rent out politicians for financial gain. As for politicians, they hand out patronage to win and retain political office, and do also benefit financially.

Albeit an understandable survival strategy, especially on the part of the poor, patronage politics has a corrosive effect on South Africa's body politic. Because it fosters factionalism and social tension, marginalised sections of the

community disengage from political institutions and processes. This implies loss of faith in political institutions. Consequently, residents are prone to resort to extra-judicial measures to register concerns and seek remedy. The State is, as such, steadily and corrosively delegitimised, and its authority undermined.

Factionalism also breaks community ties. Residents are divided into winners and losers. Social cohesion suffers. Communities no longer function as a cohesive whole. This presents a challenge for public mobilisation. Societal problems often require collective remedial action, and a community divided presents a challenge to combat societal problems and efforts to build a social compact around a common vision.

Prevalence of patronage politics reduces politics entirely for the fulfilment of instrumental ends. In other words, it downplays the normative values, such as fairness and equality, of the democratic system. This predisposes citizens to tolerate violations of procedures so long as their material needs are met. Democratic culture is thus weakened.

Nepotism, a direct outcome of patronage politics also promotes ethnic identification. This is a particularly dire problem in diverse communities for it fans ethnic tension, which may easily break into full-blown ethnic/racial conflict. Places like Grabouw, for instance, have already experienced full-blown racial conflict amongst Coloureds and Black Africans.

Tension not only results from racial or ethnic tensions, but also from inequality or uneven development. This is because inequality takes a racial form, which suggests a perpetuation of South Africa's past of racial division and its attendant social consequences. Racial hostility has not entirely evaporated. In fact, it is sustained by persistent inequality that is now somewhat aided by patronage politics.

POLICY CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Patronage and other related practices, as discussed above, are a function of history, social institutions, and culture: they cannot be easily changed through policy action; that said, there are some social practices that can be influenced through policy actions. And while others are not amenable to policy influence, their impact, nonetheless, on institutions and political behaviour, should thus be highlighted. Based on the foregoing research findings and analysis, the study recommends the following policy actions:

1. Selection Processes Based on Democracy and Merit

Quite clearly, one of the central interventions required for dealing with the culture and practice of patronage politics pertains to processes that political parties follow to select candidates for local government elections and for management and other positions in this sphere of government. With regard to councillors, all parties represented in these structures (and independent candidates) will argue that their political processes are informed by criteria based on service to the people, including confidence of, and popularity within, the community; capacity to understand policy and how it should be translated into development programmes; some educational qualifications; and so on. Yet, as pointed out in the study, this does not always manifest in actual practice, and it raises the question about the rigour and integrity of the selection processes. Further, it is critical to follow both the letter, and the spirit, of statutes that govern recruitment of municipal officials.

2. Ensuring that Party Members and the Public Generally Know Their Rights

While it is the responsibility of parties to ensure genuine non-partisan service to the public and individual residents, communities at large have

an important complementary role to play. When residents and party members know their rights and have the confidence to assert them, it is difficult for crooked leaders and officials to treat them shabbily. There is the need for intensive campaigns to educate party members and the public at large to know, and demand, their rights in internal party processes and services they deserve from municipalities. Related to this are such issues as the effectiveness of ward committees, as well as the integrity of processes to develop integrated development plans. The latter are in most instances developed by consultants, with a modicum of public consultation. Measures such as those proposed some years ago about usage of name tags and posters outlining citizens' rights in front offices – which were hardly implemented – need to be rolled out in earnest.

3. Eliminate Factionalism Within Parties and Racial/Ethnic Mobilisation in Inter-party Competition

It is in the interest of all genuine political parties that intra- and inter-party contestation is informed by issues of substance. Faction-riven party organisations are unable to debate and resolve issues of policy and coherently articulate these to the public. Critically, if they are elected into office, their ability to meet their mandate is severely circumscribed. While divisions on policy and ideology are the stuff of democratic politics, this is different from groupings coalescing around the dispensing of patronage. Besides the many adverse consequences for the parties and the public outlined in this report, factional patronage politics has the tendency to attract crooks who, by mimicking and exaggerating factional conspiracies, entrench themselves in parties and aggravate poor service delivery. Others divisively seize on identities of race, ethnicity, language, and places of birth as the currency of political mobilisation.

4. Campaign Against Corruption at All Levels and in All Sectors

It is necessary to ensure the integrity of systems and structures set up to deal with patronage,

maladministration, and corruption. It should be obvious to the councillors and the officials that there are consequences to a failure to meet the requirements of the country's laws and other requirements of public administration. This should apply equally to the private sector. Provincial and national spheres of government – which are populated by individuals who in terms of party hierarchies are regarded as senior cadres – should act and be seen to act as a force of example. The unedifying accounts of similar or even more serious misdemeanours in the other spheres of government do not inspire confidence among lower structures of parties. Over time, patronage and general misconduct can be internalised as the norm, impoverishing the entire body politic.

5. Enforcement of Accountability

Tolerance of mediocrity is partly reinforced by a relative lack of consequences for incompetence or poor performance. The Auditor General's latest municipal audit report highlights this as a worrying trend. A similar concern was raised in last year's report: officials are simply not sanctioned for wrongdoing, it is as if malfeasance is condoned, which shows a failure of oversight or unwillingness to hold wrongdoers accountable, and institutional performance consequently suffers; only by exercising accountability and applying sanctions where they are warranted, can this be averted.

6. Promote Integrity of Public Institutions

Violation of rules undermines the integrity of institutions. This creates space for abuse of power and resources. The consequence is not only the failure of public institutions to live up to their mandate, but also recourse to violence. Where individuals feel failed by rules or are bullied by those in positions of influence, they lose faith in the institution and take matters into their own hands. There have already been instances of municipal council meetings breaking out in violence, even shooting, in Eastern Cape's Lusikisiki, for instance. This is alarming and needs to be curbed. One way is simply to ensure that officials and politicians stick to the rules. Adherence to rules ensures

that everyone is treated fairly and institutions are likely to perform as intended. This will reinforce a culture of respect for rules, from which our society can only benefit.

7. Informal Sector: From Nuisance to an Economic Activity

The informal sector presents an opportunity to the unemployed to make a living and accumulate an income: it not only frees them from state dependency, but has the potential to catapult them into sustainable economic activity. Local government structures must review policies towards informal traders. Rather than placing too high a premium on artificial, aesthetic notions of a town/city, policy makers should prioritise the economic upliftment and self-sufficiency of its citizenry. The country has more to gain from a relatively self-sufficient citizenry than from streets without hawkers.

8. Small Traders: Organisational Mobilisation

It appears that small and/or informal traders are relatively unorganised. This partly explains why officialdom does not heed their concerns. Sectors and interest groups are more effective as an organised force than as individual voices. Informal traders must be encouraged to mobilise themselves into effective organisations. This will not only give them numerical strength, but will also draw in various forms of expertise and competence they can utilise towards their objectives. The inability of established small traders to compete with immigrant peers, for instance, is reflective of poor organisation, infrastructure, and systems to source merchandise collectively, and thus use economies of scale to negotiate lower wholesale prices.

9. Proximity of Social Services

Proximity of social services determines access. Oftentimes they are required to use public transportation to reach centres where state services are provided. This demands money they often do not have. For services aimed at the poor, it makes sense that they are located within

their place of residence. Some departments, especially the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), have received praise for their accessibility, but others remain distant from where people live. If a permanent structure cannot be built, then adequate, more regular and predictable mobile services should be provided.

10. Official Communication: Public and Community Radio

Poor people rely on radio both for entertainment and as a source of information. Radio is not only cheap, but it is accessible to the overwhelming majority in languages that people understand, including local dialects in the case of community radio. There are parts of the country, however, that do not have access to signals of public service radio channels, and do not have community radio stations. This denies poor people useful public information that may make a difference to their lives. The public broadcaster should ensure that no part of our country suffers from this deficiency. If not all channels, the dominant language in any given community should be accessible on radio. Information can make a huge difference to the lives of citizens. Radio eliminates the problem of distance and time. Messages communicated through radio are received instantly, and thus generate quick, if not immediate, response.

11. Address the Corrosive Effect of Nepotism on Social Cohesion

Nepotism erodes community ties. It leads to people shunning the different 'other' and associating with their 'own'. This undermines a sense of community built around common residence or even political association. Although it is an understandable consequence of survival, nepotism nonetheless has a dire impact, not only on the health of South Africa's political life, but also on the quality of public institutions.

Nepotism may not easily lend itself to elimination through policy action, but the practice itself can be discouraged through exemplary public behaviour and credible messaging. Public appointments should be

made in a way that underscores the importance of merit. This includes removing individuals who lack demonstrable competence for jobs in which they are employed. The Auditor General's municipal reports for the last two years, including this year's report, reveal countless instances of individuals employed in positions for which they have no skills. Nothing has happened to remedy such inappropriate appointments. Instead, consultants have been hired, at huge cost to the fiscus, to perform functions for which individuals have been employed. Tolerance of mediocrity implies that merit does not count, and when this becomes a popular belief in society, the legitimacy of the State and the democratic system suffers. Once this sets in, it will take generations to reverse.

12. Resolve the Issue of Party Political Funding

Secretive contributions to political party coffers present fertile ground for patronage and deeper manifestations of corruption. Besides the fact that liaisons of this kind lend themselves to all manner of temptations (fund-raisers taking and concealing 'cuts' of the donation, for example), with the organisational principal unsighted, many benefactors do directly or by implication, suggest or expect paybacks. The fund-raisers themselves do hint at 'prosperity' that would somehow befall the donors for their generosity. As indicated earlier, this descends to a level where business people identify and back specific candidates for senior positions with the expectation that the candidate's success would advantage their enterprise. This has the effect of eroding democratic principles within parties and across society.

It may well be time for South Africa to take the plunge and allocate more public resources to political parties in accordance with existing formulae, which can be 'tweaked' to take into account factors such as parties that are not represented in legislatures. To supplement the public coffers for such allocations, a Fund for the Promotion of Democracy could be established, to which contributions at an agreed threshold can be made.

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Patronage Politics Divides Us

A Study of Poverty, Patronage and Inequality in South Africa

The Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA), which was publicly launched as a think tank in March 2011, was founded to create a platform of engagement around strategic issues facing South Africa. It combines research and academic development, strategic reflections and intellectual discourse, and applies itself to issues such as economics, sociology, governance, history, arts and culture, and the logics of natural sciences.

Patronage Politics Divides Us: A Study of Poverty, Patronage and Inequality in South Africa is the culmination of a research project that forms part of MISTRA's first suite of eight priority research projects.

The research explores the relationship between patronage, poverty, and inequality with a particular focus on its impact on the conduct of local politics. The overall aim of the study was to explore the possibility of constituting public institutions in a manner that enables them to become legitimate arbiters between the various interests, rather than as instruments that are captured by contending interest groups for their own accumulation.

Most importantly, this study was necessitated by the realisation that post-apartheid patronage politics has not received sufficient scholarly attention. This research study aims to help fill that gap, especially by contributing empirical research to the subject. The report goes beyond answering the primary questions of the study: it is a profile of socio-economic life in South Africa's various communities as experienced not only by locals, but also by foreign-born residents.

The findings provide a window on relationships between councillors, business interests, and local party organisations.



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