

Daily Dispatch

OUR OPINION

Failing our children

EVERY parent dreads the years between childhood and responsible adulthood, when their children go out into the world to play, study, work and experiment with their newfound freedom and independence.

They are dangerous years when drink, drugs and fast cars threaten the lives of young people who need still to find their own boundaries.

Education institutions once accepted a role as "in loco parentis", which implied a responsibility to care for the children in their care as a parent would.

University residences monitored the comings and goings of youngsters living away from home for the first time and enforced the values of the absent parents.

Those rules suited a context that no longer exists and young people are now expected to take full responsibility for themselves from a much younger age.

But as a society, we seem to have failed to compensate for the withdrawal of extended parental care either by making their world safe or by equipping young people to manage the freedom they have.

That was demonstrated in part by the findings of a unique survey by the Saturday Dispatch, which revealed that while more than half of the urban schoolchildren surveyed were sexually active, three-quarters of those who were did not always practise safe sex.

The survey also showed up a perverse culture in some schools that makes it more cool to be a teenage parent than it is to claim your freedom years.

Earlier this year, 23-year-old Rhodes student Lelona Themba was murdered while travelling back to the campus for her graduation.

Today we report a second murder this year on WSU's Mthatha campus. Bhekinkosi Nkaziva from Nikwe village in Bizana was stabbed on Friday while walking with a girlfriend.

We cannot blame the government for failing our children in all these different ways. The responsibility is our own as a society which seems no longer to respect children, students or life itself.

Perhaps these things would happen less if there was less poverty and people could grow up believing they would prosper.

Perhaps they would happen less if police looked after their vehicles better and thought it was their job to be on the streets, making them safe.

But those failings, too, are symptoms of a society that has lost its way, which lacks role models and which no longer values personal responsibility.

The answers are within us as people and society. We can begin by cherishing our children – even when that is hard to do.



Cadre deployment just like a tornado raging through BCM

IT WAS recently reported that, some two months after the appointment had been made, the contract of Buffalo City municipal manager Andile Fani had yet to be tabled before the legislature.

The appointment itself had seemingly brought to an end more than three years of indecision about the position which, along with that of chief financial officer, had remained vacant.

It is true that for much of that time there was an acting municipal manager in place (Fani) but the temporary nature of any such contract means one is not able to plan long term, nor is the particular individual able to operate in good faith, as they have the sword of Damocles hovering permanently above their head.

With its short-term rating Buffalo City did by 2008 improve from the "Weak" band (zaA2) to the "Adequate" band (zaA1) but over the last four years has declined from zaA1 to zaA1- and is now in serious danger of lapsing back to zaA2.

This, then, is the reality in Buffalo City some 18 years after democracy. How did it happen? To answer that, one needs to turn to the policy of cadre deployment, a monster of the ANC's creation, now running wild in Buffalo City.

At the conclusion of the 2011 local government elections, Buffalo City appointed Zukiswa Ncitha as its executive mayor. This would bring the total number of mayors in charge of the city in three years to four – Zintle Peter, Sakhumzi Caga and Zukiswa Faku being the others.

Over the past five years the municipality has had six municipal managers, five of them in an acting position.

The chief financial officer position has now been unoccupied for over three years, again, with numerous acting officials rotating through it.

Following a history of poor financial management, in particular a failure to spend the budget properly ahead of the 2010 World Cup and huge tender irregularities, the municipality hired first PricewaterhouseCooper, and later Ernst & Young to conduct forensic audits. They made a range of findings against key members of the Buffalo City executive,

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policy and practice and the misuse of credit given to you, you won't qualify for a loan. A bad municipal rating is a clear signal to investors to stay well away. And when that happens, the economy shrinks, employment drops and it becomes harder and harder to create new jobs.

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including then mayor Zukiswa Faku, who was alleged to have interfered in the appointment of contractors and bypassed supply chain management protocols.

They set out in gory detail the massive material mismanagement of Buffalo City administration.

To date the municipality has failed to properly implement the recommendations contained within the report.

But it was enough for Jacob Zuma to discredit Faku as mayoral candidate for the 2011 local government elections and, with a new mayor, to confirm Andile Fani as municipal manager.

Prior to the election, Faku faced 12 charges from the party, which, according to The Times, included undermining the ANC by appointing a new municipal manager "outside the ruling party's deployment procedures". She and 22 Buffalo City councillors were expelled.

More recently, the Daily Dispatch reported that Faku had made a "dramatic comeback". Leading a group "hostile to President Jacob Zuma's bid for a second term as ANC president" she was elected head of the ANC's new Buffalo City region. The paper reported that this would no doubt "reopen debate about the controversial appointment of Andile Fani".

That Fani's appointment too was political is evidenced by his selection. More than 30 other candidates were overlooked, most instantly dismissed for not having the necessary qualification – a certificate in municipal finance management – but not so Fani, who is strongly supported by the Zuma faction and the SACP in particular. When he told the committee he had taken the requisite course but not yet received his results, they did not disqualify him as they had done other candidates, instead twice delaying the interviews so he might obtain his results. Later the Local Government Seta and the South Africa Qualifications Authority would not endorse his certificate, effectively nullifying it. He was appointed regardless.

Following the Ernest & Young report, Faku dismissed her mayoral committee and six managers – the politicians reportedly because they were mobilising against her. But the extent to which such political and public positions were in the past mistreated by cadres with a political agenda is well documented by the AG.

As a result of these problems and many others for the 2008/2009 financial year Buffalo City underspent its capital budget by R318-million or 46%. By the time an acting municipal manager took over in 2010, it was spending just 18%. In his adverse opinion for 2010/2011, the AG found the municipality could not properly account for some R2-billion. The inability to invest properly in infrastructure had led to a backlog so acute that in 2009 the municipality lost 53% of all water distributed and suffered electricity losses of R104m (13% of the total) – both primary sources of income for the metro.

These were service delivery problems on the grandest scale.

The minute you elevate political loyalty to a formal policy, as cadre deployment does, and seek to extend it not just to political appointments but the public service too, you have not only violated the principles that define best democratic practice, but created the potential for the perfect political storm.

Polokwane formed those condensed storm clouds into a raging tornado that now rips through the country, and the damage it causes is most evident in places like Buffalo City, where an entire public administration has been turned into a focal point for the ANC's political feuding.

Gareth van Onselen is the DA's Director of Political Analysis and Development. This is an edited version of a personal blog from www.inside-politics.org

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