

# Partnership and outsourcing as tools for increased access to Consular Services

## A case of the South African High Commission in the United Kingdom

**M Diedericks and J Kgotso Tiba**

School of Social and Government Studies

Public Management and Governance

North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus

South Africa

### **ABSTRACT**

*The provision of consular services is an obligation of every government to its citizens who are living abroad. In providing such services, efforts must be made to ensure that they are accessible to all citizens, wherever they may be. In the current economic climate, maintaining an extensive network of embassies and consulates around the world is an expensive venture. It is against this background that governments must be innovative in providing services by ensuring that private and third sector organisations are involved, in order to complement their work of guaranteeing that consular services reach their citizens at affordable costs—wherever they are in the world.*

*This article makes a vital contribution to the concept of using partnership and outsourcing as tools for increased access to consular services in one of the critical missions of South Africa (SA) abroad—the United Kingdom (UK), by showing that the traditional way of rendering consular services from a diplomatic mission is inadequate to reach potential customers scattered throughout the host country. The research makes use of a mixed methods approach and concludes with significant recommendations that, *inter alia*, include even using post offices and the internet to ensure that consular services reach all parts of the UK where South Africans reside. Given that consular services have inherent security implications, the article also notes that, amongst factors that must be taken into account before outsourcing consular services, or even setting up a partnership, the chosen service providers must be able to maintain and protect the confidentiality of their customers.*

**Caveat:** The Journal cannot be held responsible for the views expressed in this article.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the important hallmarks of globalisation is the migration of skilled people from developing countries to the developed world, in search of better economic opportunities. Like other developing countries, South Africa (SA) is not immune to such migration. In the case of SA, the migration is caused by push factors such as crime, poor economic conditions and prospects, discrimination, political uncertainty, the impact of the HIV epidemic, and the quality of public services (Sveninsson and Gumuschian 2008:1). According to Plaza (2009:5), other push factors for South Africans include the cost of living and taxation. The destinations of most people leaving SA for developed countries include Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom, and the people leaving the country include those in professions in high demand such as engineering, medicine, accounting and banking (Crush & Williams 2001:7; Rule 1994:1).

The impact of this emigration on SA cannot be underestimated. According to Bohlman (2010:10) permanent emigration of skilled people, in the absence of complementary policies, can have a negative impact on economic growth and the welfare of the population in the long run. In as far as emigration of South Africans to the UK is concerned, the actual number of South Africans living in the UK is highly speculative due to a lack of process enabling people leaving the country to declare their intention to emigrate (Myburgh 2004:13). Much reliance for determining the actual figures is therefore placed on institutions in the UK such as the Department of Work and Pensions and also the Home Office. According to Kyambi (2005:90) the number of South Africans living in the UK increased from a mere 67 918 in 1991 to 140 000 in 2001 – an increase of 106%. Other reports by Crawford (2008:14) and *The Witness* (2005:1) put the figure between 400 000 to 1.5 million.

Concerted efforts to ensure that consular services were accessible to South Africans and foreigners in South African missions abroad have been largely half-hearted. The consequences of this lack of access to public services lead to unresponsive services and unnecessary costs for clients in terms of both time and money (Russell and Bvuma 2001:260; Kluever 2006:27; Mapisa-Nqakula 2006:1). Taking the aforementioned into account, this study investigated how partnerships and outsourcing could be used to make consular services more accessible to South African citizens in the United Kingdom.

## OVERVIEW OF CONSULAR SERVICES

Consular services can be defined as providing assistance to the citizens of a particular country while living abroad. These services are rendered within the context of international relations and in line with international agreements; the actual act of rendering such services is routinely referred to as consular diplomacy (Okano-Heijmans 2010:2).

Consular services are divided into three areas. *Firstly*, issuing enabling documents such as passports, birth certificates and visas to people. The category of people using this service includes tourists, students or business people. *Secondly*, consular services provide individual assistance to citizens in distress. *Thirdly*, they offer assistance during major crises abroad; for instance the Rwandan genocide and the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York (Okano-Heijmans and Melissen 2007:2). Consular services thus remain a classic indicator of the



ability of government to look after its citizens, wherever they may reside. The birth of the new political dispensation in South Africa resulted in its citizens developing an increased interest in travelling abroad, and led to the establishment of a professional South African Consular Service (DIRCO 2009:4). The Department of International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO) offers the following consular services

- protection and assistance to distressed and destitute South African citizens abroad (including assistance following deaths; for missing persons; child custody cases; and abductions and kidnappings);
- assistance to South African citizens in detention or imprisoned abroad;
- service of process (facilitate the process via diplomatic channels to have documents in civil law served on respondents abroad);
- other legal processes including transmitting requests for extradition, mutual legal assistance, evidence on commission, rogatory letters and maintenance orders;
- consular notarial services, commonly referred to as legalisation services;
- information (local) services including requests for information and advice (relating to matters such as entry requirements to foreign countries, customs regulations, civil aviation, taxation, pensions, social services, legal services, travel, banking and education); and
- immigration and civic services at missions where the Department of Home Affairs is not represented (DIRCO 2009:4).

With regard to the functioning of South African Consular Services in the UK, the DIRCO is the lead organisation in terms of helping South Africans, and is supported by the Department of Home Affairs. The South African High Commission is based only in London. There are no consulates in other parts of the UK for assisting nationals living in other parts of the country. According to Kyambi (2005:90), South Africans are scattered all over the UK, with most living within the London area. To render consular services to South African citizens, customers are served on a first-come, first-serve basis. Apart from a walk-in system of service, the office also accepts applications by post, from those who cannot come to the office personally (Mnisi 2005:13).

Due to lack of access to critical departmental databases, the consular office forwards most applications for the issuing of enabling documents to SA (Mnisi 2005:14). The posting of received applications to SA results in delays in issuing any requested official document. Furthermore, it also results in loss of documents and unnecessary expenditure associated with having to resend another application to replace the lost one (Mnisi 2005:14). The presence of only one South African Consular Office in the UK often means that the customers have to incur costs to travel from all parts of the country to make the relevant applications that they require. It is thus clear that consular services are not readily accessible to clients in the UK.

Apart from the problems mentioned above, South African Consular Services are beset by a number of challenges that need innovative solutions in order to surmount them. These challenges *inter alia* include the absence of consular law in South Africa, arrests of nationals abroad, an increase in the number of nationals living abroad, parental child abductions, unrealistic levels of expectation about the nature of assistance that can be provided in case of emergency, demand for consular protection and lack of funds to render consular service (Tiba 2012:17–24). South African Consular Services abroad are rendered according to a regulatory and statutory framework that will now be assessed.

# REGULATORY AND STATUTORY FRAMEWORK FOR RENDERING SOUTH AFRICAN CONSULAR SERVICES

The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR) (1963) clearly stipulates the functions that consular officers should perform in host countries. The VCCR (1963) is a means of codifying consular practices originally governed by customary international law and bilateral agreements between states (Garcia 2008:5). It also provides a legal basis for the rendering of consular services. According to Article 5 of the VCCR (1963), consular functions, amongst others, include:

- protecting in the receiving state the interests of the sending state and of its nationals, both individuals and bodies corporate, within the limits permitted by international law; and
- furthering the development of commercial, economic, cultural and scientific relations between the sending state and the receiving state and otherwise promoting friendly relations between them in accordance with the provisions of the present Convention.

The prescriptions and provisions of the VCCR (1963) are complemented by South African regulations and laws. Table 1 provides an overview of the applicable regulatory and statutory framework for providing consular services abroad.

**Table 1: South African regulatory and legislative framework impacting on consular services**

| Year of Promulgation | Name of Act (year omitted)                        | Summarised Purpose   |
|----------------------|---|--|
| 1961                 | South African Marriage Act 25                     | To make provision for the solemnisation of civil marriages in South Africa.  |
| 1992                 | South African Birth and Death Registration Act 51 | To make provision for the registration of birth and death in South Africa.   |
| 1994                 | Passports and Travel Documents Act 4              | To make provision for the acquisition of passports by South African citizens and residents.                                    |
| 1995                 | South African Citizenship Act 88                  | To make provision for the acquisition, loss and resumption of South African citizenship.                                       |
| 1996                 | Constitution of the Republic of South Africa      | To introduce the new Constitution of South Africa and all the matters related to it.   |
| 1997                 | Identification Act 68                             | To make provision for the compilation and maintenance of the population register in respect of the population of South Africa. |
| 1998                 | Recognition of Marriages Act 120                  | To make provision for the recognition of customary marriages.  |
| 1999                 | Public Finance Management Act 1                   | To regulate financial management in the national and provincial governments.   |
| 2001                 | Immigration Act 13                                | To make provision for the regulation of admission and departure of people from South Africa.                                   |
| 2006                 | Civil Union Act 17                                | To make provision for the solemnisation of civil unions for people of the same sex.  |

Source: Researchers' own compilation.



The above listed regulations and legislation are important instruments for governing and providing a legal mandate in the rendering of consular services in South African missions abroad. The VCCR (1963) emerged as the foundation for the rendering of consular services around the world, but should be complemented by country specific regulations and legislation as outlined above.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

As a point of departure, research methodology is a procedure according to which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena (Rajasekar *et al.* 2006:2). The study made use of a mixed-methods approach by using data collection methods from both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. It used semi-structured interviews, two sets of structured questionnaires (one for managers and one for customers) as well as a review of the available literature in order to attain the set research objectives. The reason for employing these instruments was to obtain the opinions of the respondents regarding available South African Consular Services within the United Kingdom. A literature review was conducted first, in order to underpin the theoretical basis of the article, followed by construction of a questionnaire and conducting of semi-structured interviews to obtain the viewpoints of the respondents, and to provide the empirical findings of the article.

A population of 60 respondents was targeted by means of convenient sampling to participate in the study. This involved that the respondents were selected randomly on the day of their visit to the Consular Office and were asked to participate in the survey. This approach was necessary as the population was scattered across the UK. However, it ensured that all relevant respondents had an equal chance to be selected as part of the study during their business visit to the Consular Office. The managers and immigration agents used in the study were selected by means of judgemental sampling because they possessed the relevant knowledge and judgement about consular services. The respondents thus included 51 customers in the UK, three managers from the South African High Commission, three immigration agents, one manager responsible for consular services at the Department of International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO), and two country managers of visa-outsourcing companies. After completion of the survey, 58 questionnaires were eventually completed and received back from the above-mentioned respondents. Fifty-three per cent of the respondents were male, while forty-seven percent were female. Seventy-two percent of the respondents were between the ages of 18–40, while the remaining twenty-eight percent were within the age group of people older than 40. This was an indication that more young people requested the services of the South African Consular Services Section (and by implication these are the people who normally leave their country of origin for other countries providing better opportunities).

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The data obtained from the respondents, as well as an analysis of the findings, are presented below according to relevant research themes. The perceptions of respondents (customers)

with regard to access and the functioning of South African Consular Services within the UK were measured first.

## **The kind of consular services customers have utilised**

In order to determine what kind of consular services customers received from the South African Consular Section, respondents were requested to reveal the kind of services that are in demand. This information was deemed necessary in order to increase the footprint of consular services that would result in greater benefit to customers.

Fifty three percent of the respondents indicated that they went to the Consular Services Section in order to apply for visas to visit South Africa. Another forty three percent of respondents indicated that they applied for passports. The remaining four percent of respondents indicated they had made use of other services, such as requesting certificates, retention of citizenship, or even renunciation of citizenship. The results indicate that applications for visas and passports constitute the most popular service rendered by the South African Consular Service. As mentioned, it was necessary to determine this in order to understand the demand for particular services by South African emigrants.

## **Applicable methods to make South African Consular Services more accessible**

Respondents were probed regarding the kind of alternative service delivery mechanism(s) that would help them access quality and effective consular services. Forty percent of respondents indicated that the use of a website could make consular services more accessible to applicants. Twenty six percent indicated that postal services should be used to make consular services more accessible. The use of honorary consuls for increased access to consular services was suggested by five percent of respondents. Thirteen percent of respondents suggested outsourcing to visa centres. Partnership with NGOs was suggested by seven percent of respondents and the remaining nine percent suggested accredited agents.

The results indicate that the current walk-in and postal methods used by the South African Consular Services Section should be complemented by other methods of service delivery, in order to improve the quality of services and their accessibility.

## **Possible providers of consular services that are accessible in the UK**

To obtain a closer understanding of the possible providers of consular services that are accessible or available in areas where customers of the South African Consular Services Section lived, respondents' perceptions were measured. Twenty four percent of respondents indicated that the South African Consular Services Section is accessible to them. An additional twenty four percent indicated that visa centres are mostly accessible to them. Honorary consuls were suggested by only four percent of respondents. Forty-eight percent of respondents suggested that the post office is accessible to them as a possible service provider for consular services.

The results suggest that post offices are most accessible to customers of the South African Consular Services Section, which is followed by the Consular Section itself, the visa centres



and lastly, honorary consuls. There is thus a need for a wider variety of accessible consular services to SA emigrants living in the UK.

### Factors to take into account before outsourcing consular services

Several factors should be considered by the SA High Commission before outsourcing consular services, such as accessibility and affordability. Twenty two percent of respondents stated that cost saving is an important factor to be taken into account before outsourcing consular services. Seventeen percent agreed that the ability of the service providers to maintain the confidentiality of applicants is a vital factor. Continued affordability of the services was suggested by twenty three percent of the respondents. Thirteen percent of respondents agreed that access to skills and expertise not available within the consular section is an important factor to be considered. The remaining twenty five percent of the respondents agreed that improved access to consular services by customers in all areas of the UK is a factor worth considering. The results indicate that respondents had different needs and therefore cited different factors to take into account before outsourcing consular services.

The study made use of two structured questionnaires. One was used for customers, as previously stated, and the other for managers at the South African High Commission, DIRCO, and for immigration agencies. Themes from the latter questionnaire are deliberated next.

### Challenges facing South African Consular Services in the UK

This theme was aimed at determining from the respondents the challenges that face the South African Consular Services Section in the UK.

Figure 1: Challenges faced by South African Consular Services

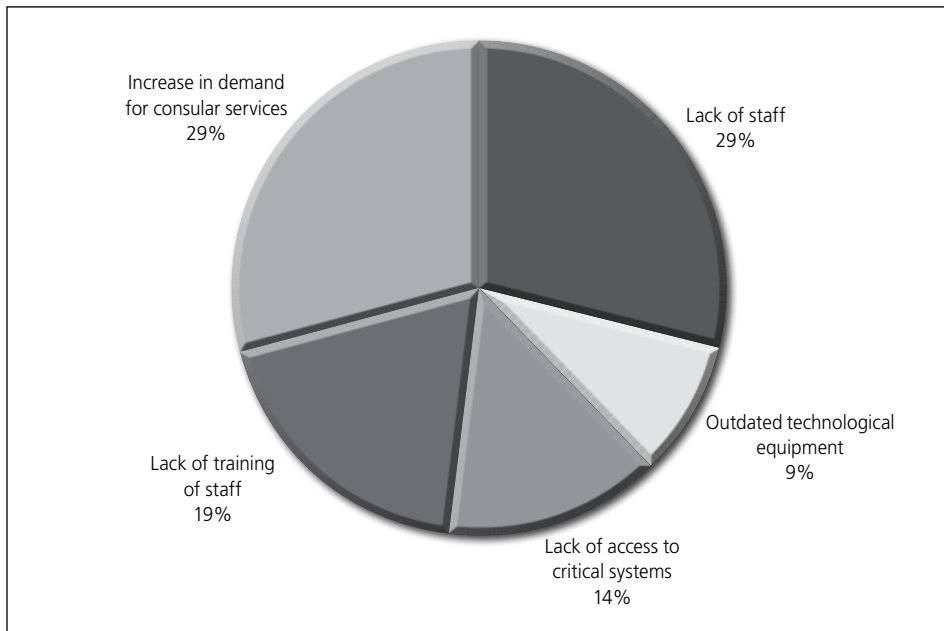


Figure 1 illustrates the responses of the managers interviewed, regarding the challenges faced by the South African Consular Services.

Twenty nine percent of the respondents agreed that the South African Consular Services were faced with the problem of employing too few staff. A further twenty nine percent indicated that an increase in demand for the service was another challenge. Lack of training of staff was identified by nineteen percent of respondents. A lack of access to critical systems was identified by fourteen percent of respondents. The remaining nine percent of respondents proposed outdated technological equipment as the challenge.

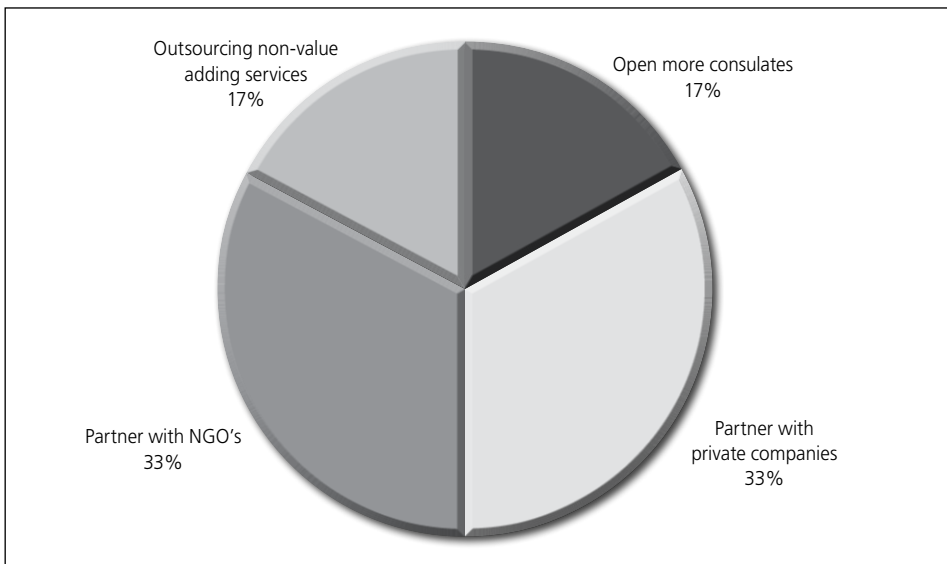
### Conquering South African Consular Services challenges

In following up on the challenges faced by the South African Consular Services Section in the UK, respondents were requested to provide possible solutions, which included the following:

- development of methods for interpretation of statutes, to avoid lack of uniformity in enforcing legislation administered by the South African Consular Services;
- investment in labour-saving devices;
- buy more bandwidth for improved communication between the Consular Services Section and Head Office in Pretoria;
- train staff for effective and efficient service delivery; and
- employ more personnel.

The results confirmed that the use of partnership and outsourcing could contribute towards improvement of consular services. This is because it could provide possible solutions to the afore-mentioned challenges, bearing the solutions suggested by the respondents in mind.

**Figure 2: Possible solutions to improve access to South African Consular Services**





## **Making South African Consular Services more accessible to customers**

Accessible consular services are an important yardstick to measure the responsibility of a government towards its citizens staying abroad. This theme probed the perception of respondents regarding the possible methods that could be used to increase access to South African Consular Services. The findings of this question are illustrated in Figure 2.

Thirty three percent of respondents were of the opinion that South African Consular Services could outsource non-value-adding services in order to make their services more accessible to customers. Furthermore, another thirty three percent agreed that partnering with a Nongovernmental Organisation (NGO) could contribute towards making South African Consular Services more accessible. Seventeen percent of the respondents considered that opening more South African consulates in the UK could contribute to increased access to consular services. The remaining seventeen percent noted that partnering with private companies could also increase access to consular services. The results indicate that more innovative ways should be sought to realise more effective access to consular services.

## **Possible consular functions that could be outsourced to private companies or NGOs**

Respondents were requested to indicate functions of the Consular Services Section that could be outsourced in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Eleven percent considered that the provision of counselling services could be outsourced. Another eleven percent agreed that enrolment of biometrics could be outsourced. Provision of temporary housing to stranded South African citizens abroad was another possibility suggested by twenty one percent (21%) of respondents. Furthermore, twenty five percent of the respondents agreed that the receipt of passport applications could be outsourced. The outsourcing of receipt of visa applications was suggested by only eighteen percent of the respondents. Fourteen percent of the respondents suggested confirmation of need for medical attention in times of crisis as a function that could be outsourced.

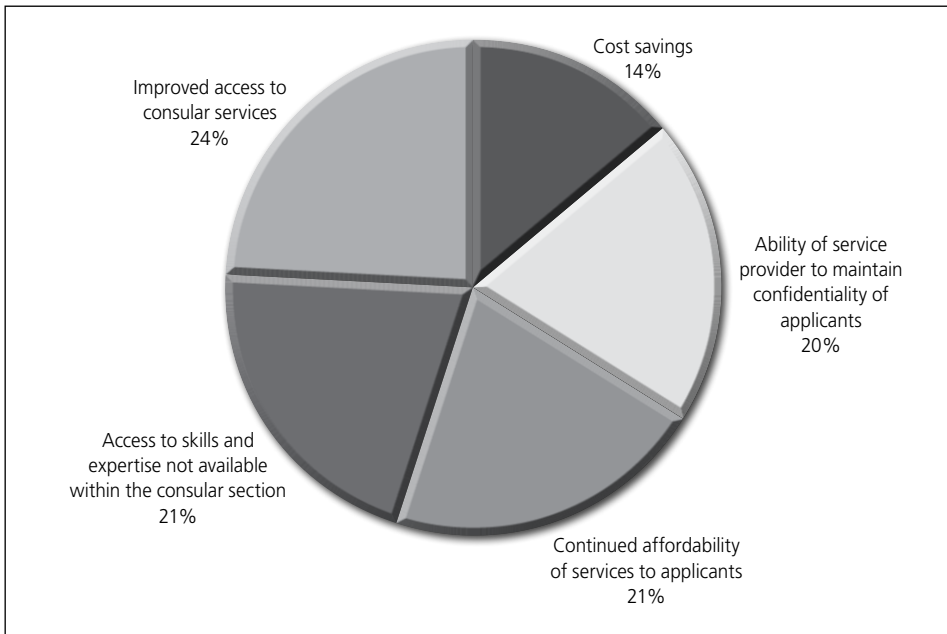
The results suggest the need for outsourcing certain consular services. The findings are in line with the objectives of this research, namely that outsourcing could be used as an effective tool to increase access to consular services. Consular services would furthermore by means of outsourcing be able to concentrate on its *core business*.

## **Factors to take into account before outsourcing consular services**

The purpose of this question was to enable the respondents (managers) to identify the factors that must be taken into account by the South African High Commission, before deciding to outsource identified functions, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Twenty four percent of the respondents indicated that improved access to consular services was a vital factor to be considered. Continued affordability of services and access to scarce skills was suggested by twenty one percent of the respondents. Another twenty-one percent (21%) identified continued affordability of services to applicants as a considerable factor. Fourteen percent of the respondents noted that cost savings was a vital factor to be considered; while the remaining twenty percent of the respondents agreed that the ability

**Figure 3: Factors to be considered before outsourcing consular services**



of a service provider to maintain the confidentiality of applicants is an important factor to be considered. The results therefore indicate that there is also a realisation, even amongst managers, that consular services could be more accessible if outsourced or entered into partnerships with similar service providers. The next section therefore provides arguments on the need for partnerships and outsourcing in rendering more effective consular services.

### **THE NEED FOR PARTNERSHIPS AND OUTSOURCING IN RENDERING MORE EFFECTIVE CONSULAR SERVICES**

To reach their clients in every country, foreign ministries render consular services through a network of embassies, high commissions, consulate generals, and also honorary consuls (Berridge 2010:131; Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) 2003:19). According to Okano-Heijmans and Mellisen (2007:201), the increasing demand for consular services and poor fiscal conditions have forced diplomatic missions to consider alternative ways of dealing with challenges and the dilemmas in the consular field. The alternatives include partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) dealing with crises, and outsourcing of services to private companies and law-enforcement agencies (General Accountability Office (GAO) 2005:1; UK National Audit Office (NAO) 2005:12).

Outsourcing is one of those innovative ways in which governments work with third parties (Okano-Heijmans and Melissen 2007:9). Venter and Landsberg (2012:157) reiterate that appropriate services are contracted out to the private sector where it is financially beneficial and where the service expertise cannot be employed cost effectively. According to Seidle (1995:44), access to consular services includes convenient working hours for the public, proximity of the

service point to customers, coordination of the service in such a way that it takes into account different clients, suitable means of transaction, and information availability to clients. In as far as increased access to services is concerned; it appears that outsourcing can serve as a tool to deliver this. Hamilton (2009:20) found that outsourcing can increase access to services to a certain extent. The Hamilton study was largely based on the experience of the transformation of the United States (US) Consular Services. In this regard, the findings of the study were that the need to streamline services and cut spiralling costs of rendering consular services impelled the US State Department to outsource non-core services. Those services included security, switchboard operation, acceptance of visa applications, and even the posting of issued visas and passports. Cost-effective savings were made as most of the costs were shouldered by outsourced partners<sup>1</sup>.

The findings of Hamilton (2009) are in line with the Computer Services Corporation (CSC) (2009:1) and the Visa Facilitation Service (VFS) (2009:3). According to the CSC (2009:1), outsourcing was instrumental in increasing access to services to over 30 visa application centres that were opened in 14 countries, and also multilingual call centres in 87 countries. Concerning the VFS, the use of outsourcing by the UK Border Agency resulted in the opening of 76 new visa application centres around the world, and also the processing over 2.5 million visa applications well ahead of the set turnaround time. The benefits of outsourcing included, *inter alia*, the following (VFS 2009):

- established call centres handled over 200 000 e-mails and 2,1 million calls per year;
- opening of additional visa centres in countries where the VFS was appointed; those countries included Italy, Morocco and India; and
- handling and delivery of issued visas for the US Embassy in India.

Furthermore, access to consular services increased through the development of multilingual websites in the local languages of customers. The case studies of the VFS (2009:3), which outlined outsourcing and its benefits for rendering consular services, covered countries such as Italy, India, the UK and the United States of America, and visa centres jointly operated on behalf of Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland.

Apart from using outsourcing to cut costs, it is also used to ensure that expertise that is not present in an organisation is accessed from outside the public sector. According to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) (2009:12), outsourcing can be used to access services that are not provided internally, like emotional support and also assessment of the need for medical care during times of emergency.

In addition to outsourcing, partnership is another tool that can increase access to consular services, and also enable the state to access much-needed expertise. For the purposes of this article, partnership is defined as a commitment to a common goal through the joint provision of complementary resources and expertise, and the joint sharing of the risks involved (Ridley 2001:1). According to Seidle (1995:140–142) the hallmarks of partnerships include the following factors:

- partnerships can be distinguished by the nature of the parties to the agreement. Public-private partnerships fall under this category, as this can involve agreement with the private sector or a NGO;
- partnership with a social sector organisation is called a social partnership;
- true partnership: where there is an equal sharing of power among partners. This form of partnership requires public officials to cede authority to partners outside government; and
- degree of empowerment of the parties involved in the partnership.

Furthermore, hallmarks of partnership in the public sector include each partner being capable of bargaining on its own, the relations among partners is enduring, and each partner brings something to the partnership and this can include expertise they might have (Pierre 1998:13).

The implementation of partnerships in the public sector is not without problems. If it is not properly implemented, it can lead to serious reputational problems. The Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) (2001:3) suggests that to ensure that partnerships are successful, the following factors must, *inter alia*, be taken into account, before implementation:

- adequate funding of public services;
- consistent rationale for using partnerships;
- the presence of a strong public sector partner;
- responsible private and third sector willing to embrace a high standard of transparency and accountability; and
- legitimacy among the general public and public service workforce.

Partnership in the area of consular service may involve countries working together to assist each other's national citizens in countries where they are not represented. The forms of partnership and their role in increasing access to consular services may include:

- *Partnerships between countries in areas of non-representation*, especially where the interests of the country will be greatly served.
- *Honorary consuls* that would serve as vital partners in extending consular services to far-flung areas. Honorary consuls are mainly used for attraction of foreign investment, and establishment of relations between academic institutions of countries.
- *Partnerships with NGOs* especially in areas where the diplomatic mission is less effective and where matters fall outside the domain of the consular service.
- *Consulate on wheels* which entails arranging with local authorities where services could be rendered to expatriates.
- *Warden network* which is mainly a network of expatriates who volunteer their services to serve as a point of contact of their country abroad.

(Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, 1963; Berridge 2010:137; Rispoli 2009:2; Berridge and James 2003:273).

## A SYNTHESIS

The discussion and empirical findings above clearly indicate that there is a need to explore partnerships and outsourcing as alternatives in order to improve consular services offered by the South African Government to its citizens residing in the UK. Effective, efficient and economic partnerships and outsourcing must be developed and put into practice, as this would assist in improving consular services. The ultimate goal of public sector organisations is to provide customer-oriented services. It is on this basis that all avenues and service-delivery mechanisms should be explored.

The rendering of South African Consular Services in the UK has been discussed with a view to highlighting and understanding the need for accessible and affordable services to expatriates. Considering that the traditional way of rendering consular services from a diplomatic mission is inadequate to reach potential customers scattered in parts of the host



country, the following recommendations are made based on the findings of this research, in order to ensure increased access to South African Consular Services within the UK:

- Alternative consular services such as electronic internet or web-based services should be considered, which would ensure that customers receive value for their money by not having to travel for services that could be accessed online. However, these services can only include those not requiring the collection of biometrics for issuing a requested document.
- Outsourcing the handling of mere enquiries could improve services and furthermore enable the consular officers to focus their attention on ensuring that the received applications are processed speedily.
- The handling of visas and passports could be outsourced to a service provider, in order to increase the footprint of the Consular Section across the UK and also to provide customers with value for their money.
- Social services such as the provision of housing to stranded South Africans abroad can also be outsourced, together with determination of the need of medical attention in times of crisis.
- Before outsourcing consular services, factors such as cost savings, improved access to consular services in the UK, continued affordability of services, and the ability of service providers to maintain the confidentiality of applicants, should be taken into account. This would ensure that outsourcing is in the customers' best interests.
- The South African Consular Services Section should ensure that a website providing information on relevant services offered is regularly updated and that brochures are printed and disseminated upon request. Such an initiative would guarantee that customers do not have to incur costs and spend time asking about the requirements for their applications before coming to the office.
- Lastly, the Consular Services Section should negotiate mutually beneficial partnerships with postal services, to enable customers to apply for designated services from them. In this way, the footprint of the South African Consular Services could be increased at little or no cost to the government.

## CONCLUSION

This article locates the significant challenges faced by the South African Government to render consular services in the UK for its citizens staying abroad. It has been argued that due to South African emigrants being scattered across the UK, access to consular services was not easily available. This therefore requires a shift in approach in terms of how consular services could be rendered more effectively and efficiently. This shift involves considering tools such as partnership and outsourcing for increasing access to South African Consular Services in the UK. The study found that partnership and outsourcing provide value for money in the rendering of consular services. Furthermore, the study found, *inter alia*, that factors such as continued affordability of outsourced services, and the ability of chosen service providers to maintain the confidentiality of customers, should be considered before consular services can be outsourced.

Though partnership and outsourcing have been found to be effective for increased access to consular services, it is also recommended that a monitoring and evaluation mechanism be

developed and agreed upon before implementation. The results of such an evaluation could be disseminated amongst customers in the interest of transparency, as well as for instilling confidence in the new service-delivery mechanism.

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