



RESPONSE

August 17th, 2012

The National Development Plan

At a joint sitting of Parliament on Wednesday Minister Trevor Manuel, on behalf of the National Planning Commission, handed over to President Jacob Zuma the 484-page National Development Plan. The document is the result of three years of work by the Commission, during which it engaged in one of the most extensive public consultation processes since the drafting of the Constitution.

The plan analyses some of the most trenchant problems in South Africa and makes recommendations to the government on tackling some of the 13 most pressing needs (including education, job-creation, citizen safety and rural development) and sets targets for the country for the next 20 years. Included in the latter is the challenge to raise formal employment from 13 million to 24 million by 2030.

Mr Manuel pointed out that, were the warning signs enumerated in the plan not heeded, “South Africa could slide backwards while dealing with immense challenges, overwhelming our capacity to succeed.” He went on to say that “we do not suffer from a poverty of ideas, our weakness is in implementation.”

During the subsequent debate, all the opposition parties lauded the plan, and spoke of the honesty of its analysis and the boldness of its recommendations. One example of this was the call for the state to move away from the cadre deployment system. The plan states: “Build a professional public service that serves government, but is sufficiently autonomous to be insulated from political patronage. This requires a clearer separation between the roles of the political principal and the administrative head.”

However, opposition parties were unanimous in their concern that factionalism in the ANC during the run-up to the Mangaung conference might block the implementation of the plan. They were also worried that there was a lack of political will on the part of the President to put his weight behind the plan, given that it has not received the support of some factions within the tripartite alliance; indeed, it is an open secret that there is strong opposition to the plan within the ranks of the ANC and its alliance partners.. Many speakers queried why the earlier versions of the plan had received such scant attention at the ANC’s recent policy conference, and there were hints that getting the plan through at Mangaung would be an uphill task. The Freedom Front Plus’s Dr Pieter Mulder said that “ignoring this report in Mangaung would be a serious mistake to the disadvantage of South Africa.” On a more positive note, though, opposition parties promised to work with the government in implementing it. Ms Lindiwe Mazibuko of the DA pledged that President Zuma “would have the unflinching support of the DA if he lands this plan in government.”

One major problem is that the Minister and the Commission have only an advisory role and no real muscle in ensuring that the plan is implemented via the necessary alignment of departmental policies to the plan's recommendations. There are thus many opportunities for it to be torpedoed! The Minister himself alluded to this when he spoke of 'the uphill battle' with some in government during earlier phases of the Commission's work.

The next step is for cabinet to consider the NDP, adopt its key recommendations, and set in motion various strategies for its implementation. President Zuma said this process would begin at the cabinet *lekgotla* next month.

Looked at through the lens of Catholic Social Teaching, the plan is a most laudable and sincere attempt to promote the common good of all our people, and it deserves the fullest co-operation of civil society, including the faith community. Ultimately though, no matter how widespread such support is, its future will be decided in the formations of the ANC.

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Director