



**A
conversation
with
South
Africans**

The establishment of the National Planning Commission presented an opportunity to get South Africans thinking, talking and debating about the South Africa they wish to see in 2030. The mandate of the Commission as outlined in the revised green paper is to:

- Take a broad, cross cutting, independent and critical view of South Africa; to help define the South Africa we seek to achieve in 20 years time and to map out a path to achieve those objectives.
- Put forward solid research, sound evidence and clear recommendations for the government.
- Work with broader society to draw on the best expertise, consult relevant stakeholders and help shape a consensus on how to tackle the key challenges facing our country.

To support and advance this mandate, President Jacob Zuma made it clear in his speech at the inaugural meeting of the Commission that the commissioners “must not be apologetic to government and they must not try to be loved by government. South Africa is looking at a commission that is going to deal with issues very frankly. Not seeking favours from government but seeking to help this country and its people”.

We have demonstrated to the world that it is possible to have sensitive and difficult conversations about our country's challenges and identify solutions. Our Constitution, which is loved and protected by many, illustrates what can come out of a nation that is able to engage in constructive dialogue. The ability of a state to have conversations with its people and vice versa is an art form that South Africans cherish and nurture. It is a democratic practice that lays the foundation for a South African social compact.

From its inception the Commission understood that it would have to adopt an inclusive and participatory process to allow South Africans to engage with the Commission and, most importantly, with each other. The plan and vision belong to all South Africans and so it was important for a broad range of people to input into the formulation of the plan.

The conversation began in 2010. Since then South Africans have been debating the kind of South Africa they wish to see in 2030. The Commission has listened to and shared in people's life experiences. The process speaks of a nation that is able to work together. Balancing views was not an easy task. Difficult trade-offs had to be made. Nevertheless, through dialogue South Africans were able to participate in producing this national development plan. It is a story about planning together.

STRATEGIES USED FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Commission used a range of strategies to engage with a broad range of South Africans. These strategies included traditional print and electronic media (newspapers, television, radio), and innovative forms of electronic media (online Jam, Facebook, Twitter, Mxit, YouTube). Many people visited the NPC's website, www.npconline.co.za, to find out about the work of the Commission. The website provided readers with different ways of contacting the Commission and making comments. There were also direct engagements with a broad range of groups including Parliament, government, the judiciary, business, civil society, trade unions, religious organisations, institutions of learning and community based organisations.

Following the release of the diagnostic report on 9 June 2011, lead articles written by commissioners were published in all major newspapers. These articles generated debate in the letters columns and editorial pages, as well as responses from social

commentators. In addition to lead articles, the Commission placed a popular version of the diagnostic overview in the most widely read weekend newspapers.

Commissioners appeared on both SABC and ETV platforms, including a structured dialogue over four weeks. The Commission worked closely with the SABC and made a specific effort to ensure that commissioners were interviewed and participated in talk shows in all indigenous languages. Commercial talk radio stations featured commissioners on a regular basis. Commissioners were also interviewed on a range of community radio stations. As part of the mobilisation towards the NPC Jam, the Commission used a simultaneous broadcast over 65 community radio stations.

Engagements with different sectors of society were used to engage in dialogue about the content of the plan and seek inputs. The leaders of political parties represented in Parliament were briefed on a consistent basis. The Commission visited all provinces in the country. The visits to the provinces reached members of the provincial executive committees, senior government officials, mayors and municipal managers. In all provinces, broader forums were held with labour, business, civil society, youth formations, traditional leaders and religious formations.

The Commission established a Facebook page and set up a Twitter account. These have provided a forum for people to raise issues as well as a mechanism to keep people informed about the work of the Commission. A dedicated Facebook dialogue on the theme of nation building was also convened and sparked significant participation. To reach a youth audience, two live chats were hosted through Mxit providing an opportunity for users to engage with the draft plan.

To capture the essence of the plan in visual form, three animated videos were produced. There have been over 30 000 visits to Youtube to view these animations, with "Thandi's story" proving the most popular. The animations were also shown at numerous meetings, including in parliament, and also broadcast on the SABC during a Morning Live breakfast show in partnership with The New Age. Media, university, non-governmental organisations and others have placed the animations on their websites.

IDENTIFYING THE KEY CHALLENGES

Once the Commission had been appointed, it started by conducting a detailed analysis of the challenges facing the country. The Commission established a number of thematic working groups, which held consultations with a broad range of experts. The intensive early work by the Commission gave birth to the diagnostic report. This was tabled in Parliament.

The Commission visited all nine provinces. Discussions were held with provincial executives and local government officials who are at the coal-face of delivery, traditional leaders, political parties, religious organisations, business and trade unions and civil society. The Commission met men and women who have to negotiate daily an overburdened health system, crumbling infrastructure, race and class inequalities and exclusion, whose children are the victims of poor quality education, men and women who are jobless. Based on these engagements the Commission decided to include additional chapters in the draft plan to cover social protection, regional integration, rural development and community safety.

THE NPC ONLINE JAM

The Commission in conjunction with IBM hosted a 72 hour online discussion, known as the NPC Jam, the first of its kind in Africa. Inputs from the NPC Jam helped to inform the draft national development plan, which was handed over to the President and Deputy President on the 11th November 2011.

Profile of participants

The Jam was launched at the University of Johannesburg with a call on young people to look ahead and shape the future of South Africa. The Commission encouraged the youth to take up the baton of leadership and own the plan for their future. Given that many South Africans do not have access to the internet, the Commission reached out to universities, the National Youth Development Agency and LoveLife to make their ICT infrastructure available for all South Africans who were interested in participating in this online brainstorming event.

Over 10 300 logins and 8 700 individual posts were recorded during the Jam. Every district within South

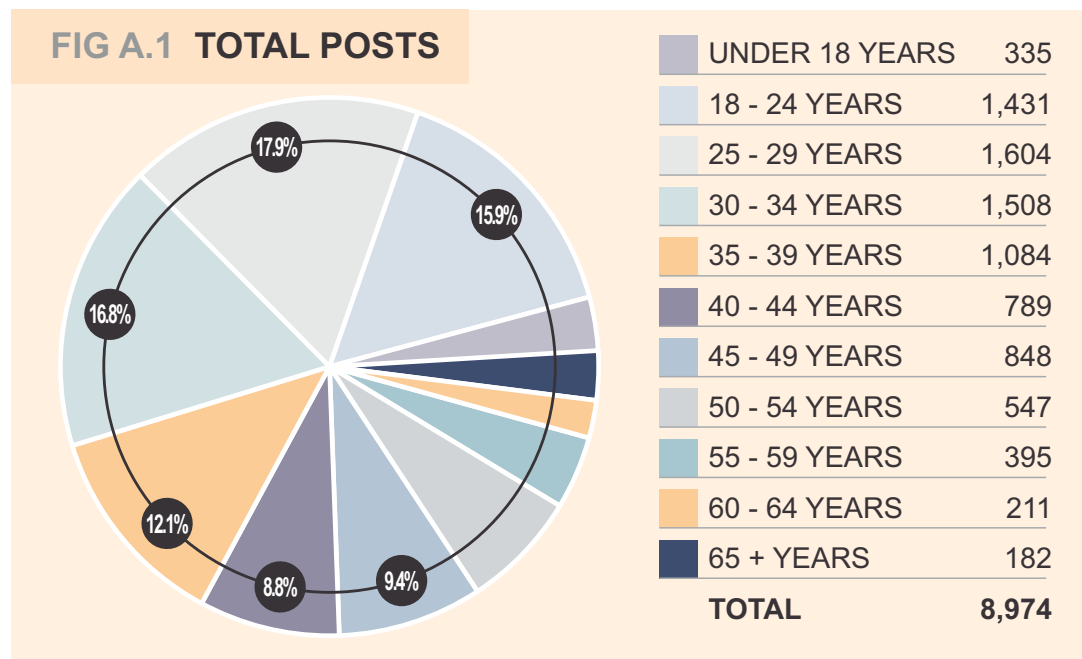
Africa was represented. South Africans engaged as individuals from their homes and offices, and as groups from many venues including high schools, Walter Sisulu University and Orange Farm LoveLife centre. Within the first three hours of commissioners going online, the Jam attracted high levels of participation and conversation.

The youth were well represented throughout the jam with 38 percent of posts coming from people under 30.

Hot topics

The Jam held ten parallel discussion forums, covering the nine challenges identified in the diagnostic document as well as the vision for 2030. The top three discussion forums, by posts, were education and training, the economy and jobs. The graphic below highlights the issues raised most frequently in the Jam. Education received the greatest attention. Significant attention was also given to issues relating to employment and the quality of public services.

FIG A.1 TOTAL POSTS





CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

On receiving the plan, the President commended South Africans for their participation. He reiterated the role of South Africans in the crafting of the plan by calling upon the Commission to hold six months of public consultation to build consensus and refine the plan.

There was extensive discussion about the plan in the media. Commissioners participated in radio and television discussions and engaged in an extensive range of meetings. Over this period the Commission held 60 meetings with government departments, government structures and agencies within the three spheres of government; dialogues with state-owned enterprises and development finance institutions; engaged with trade unions; held meetings with parliamentary committees, organised business, academic institutions and international organisations. Commissioners also briefed the national and provincial leadership and management of the Independent Electoral Commission.

The Commission met with the national structures of all political parties represented in Parliament, religious formations and civil society structures. The Commission held a training workshop with the Kwa-Zulu Natal Community Development Workers to assist them to propagate the draft plan in their communities. Many companies encouraged their employees to send comments directly to the Commission. In total the Commission held over 160 direct engagements in a period of six months.

Over 1 000 email comments were sent to the Commission as well as letters and faxes.

CRITICAL ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE CONVERSATIONS

During these engagements it became clear that there was broad support for the draft plan as a basis for taking the country forward. People recognised the complex nature of the challenges we face and the areas where we need to make steady progress. There was strong agreement with the Commission's identification of jobs and education are the country's two biggest priorities. Word clouds generated from the written submissions received and comments on Facebook indicate that education and employment are major concerns for many South Africans.



Word cloud generated from submissions¹



Word cloud generated from Facebook²

CONCLUSION

The public participation initiative has enriched the national development plan. There has been clear agreement with the Commission's view that the most pressing challenges are that too few people work and the poor quality of our education outcomes. There was also strong support for the need to build a capable and developmental state.

The revised national development plan presents an opportunity for South Africans to continue engaging with each other. The Commission has highlighted the importance of an active citizenry for the successful implementation of the plan. It will be important for debate to continue on how the plan can be implemented and what role each and every citizen needs to play to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030.



THANK YOU VERY MUCH

NOTES

1. This word cloud represents the frequency of words used, in response to the diagnostic overview and draft national development plan, in the written submissions received, print media coverage, the TV and Radio interview transcripts as well as the two Mxit dialogues.
2. This word cloud represents the frequency of words used in the comments posted on the NPC Facebook page.

