

POSITION PAPER

CAPABLE, PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL DEVELOPMENTAL STATE



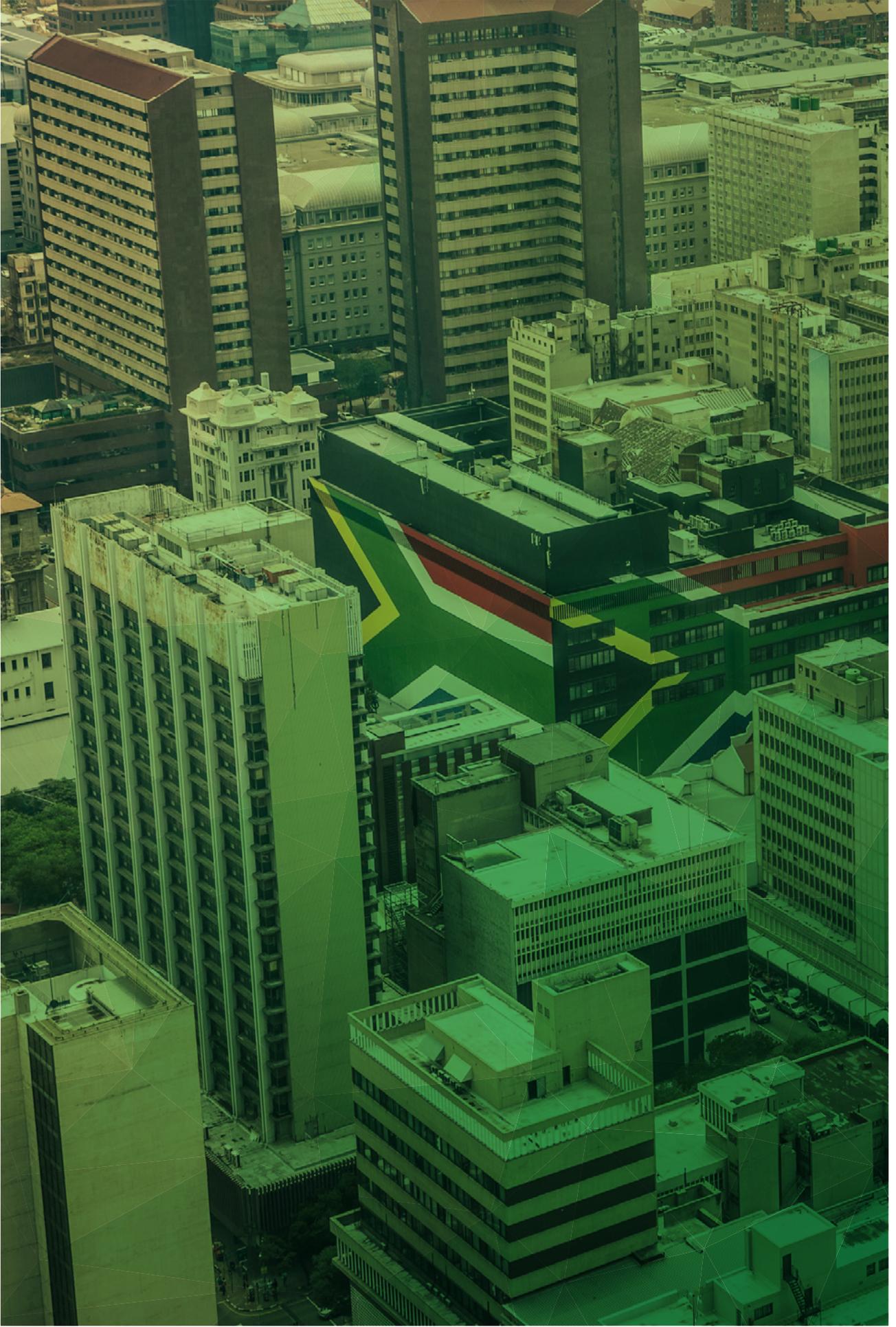
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Contents

Executive Summary	4
1. Introduction and background	6
2. Setting scene and context	8
3. Strengthening South Africa to be a capable developmental state	9
4. Actionable plans and programmes that advance ethical behaviour and a developmental environment	10
5. Improving co-ordination and implementation capacities	11
6. Why Capable and not just Developmental State?	12
7. Concluding remarks	13
Endnotes and References	14



Executive Summary

This Position Paper highlights the pertinent issues from the viewpoint of the National Planning Commission (NPC). It will outline some of the key recommendations for government to consider towards achieving the goal of making South Africa a capable, professional and ethical developmental state. The Paper is informed by the work of the NPC, primarily the review of the implementation of the NDP and captures the emerging key findings from the Colloquiums held in 2019 and 2020. The colloquiums focussed on the review of the NDP and particularly progress towards the implementation of Chapter 13 objectives on building a capable and developmental state. The Position paper (referred to as the paper going forward) briefly explains why South Africa has not been able to become the developmental state that had been aspired to as was publicly declared in 2007. Essentially, for South Africa to make headway towards becoming an effective developmental state, it needs to start by addressing critical problems facing the country that range from lacklustre economic performance to poor delivery at the local government level and in state-owned entities.

The paper focuses on three objectives of the NDP which government needs to address for South Africa to become a capable, professional and ethical developmental state.

Firstly, strengthening a capable developmental state must occur through rethinking and constructing an agile public sector. Secondly, having implementable plans and programmes that advance ethical behaviour and a developmental environment is critical. Thirdly, the establishment of the necessary interventions that will improve co-ordination and implementation capacities of state institutions and officials must be vigorously pursued. Arguably, to make South Africa an effective and capable developmental state these three main areas and the recommendations of the various NPC colloquia need to be central to government efforts; equally the NDP must anchor Chapter 13 on these three points.

The colloquia that took place in July 2019, August 2020 and February 2021 made it clear that one of the systemic weaknesses within the government is the lack of a professional cadre of officials and systems. It is firstly, therefore, important that public sector employees and public officials have the requisite skills and capacities to deliver on the mandate of the government. One of the ways to ensure this could be to create professional certifications and professional bodies for all civil servants.

This practice of using professional bodies to ensure set standards and norms is a routine occurrence in the private sector. Moreover, if individuals fail to adhere to established norms and standards, they can be struck off such bodies and no longer practice in certain fields. Secondly, another possible solution for ensuring professionalism within the public sector is to ensure that the role of public servants is limited to those responsibilities. This requires a discussion to resolve the issue of public servants being both civil servant professionals and political operators. Thirdly, it is important to address the shortage of skills in critical areas such as engineering services and public finance management at local government level by ensuring that the best candidates are recruited through entrance examinations. The South African government could institute mandatory entrance examinations for critical areas of government in the same way that countries like the People's Republic of China and Republic of India have long been doing. Fourthly, there has to be sufficient time before officials move from one rank to the next, especially at higher levels (e.g. Chief Director level to Deputy Director-General level to Director-General level). The July 2019 colloquium highlighted the concern that officials seem to move from one rank to the next without sufficient experience and the growth necessary for the next level.

The Department of Public Service and Administration has started a process towards the professionalisation of the public sector which is being led by the National School of Government. The professionalisation of the public sector should help to improve the co-ordination and implementation capacities needed to make South Africa a capable, professional and ethical developmental state. Moreover, the suggestions made in this paper would be able to assist the aims and objectives of the District Development Model (DDM). The DDM is understood as being a model/approach that "consists of a process by which joint and collaborative planning is undertaken at local, district and metropolitan by all three spheres of government resulting in a single strategically focussed One Plan for each of the 44 districts and 8 metropolitan geographic spaces in the country, wherein the district is seen as the 'landing strip'". In addition, the recommended interventions can help ensure that South Africa catches up with the Fourth Industrial Revolution so that it can be leveraged to the country's advantage. These would also help with integrated planning and participatory government. Fundamentally though, effective leadership in and by government is needed.



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1. Introduction and background

Over the last few decades, the South African government has explored and discussed numerous plans and policies to create a democratic developmental state. However, due to a myriad of problems relating to either policy or implementation failures the pursuit of becoming a democratic developmental state is becoming a harder prospect to achieve in the current local and international political economy of South Africa. Part of the work of the NPC has been efforts to assist government to achieve the dream of a South African democratic developmental state through recasting what Chapter 13 of the NDP envisages. Among other things, the NPC convened a colloquium² on 26–27 July 2019 at the University of Johannesburg and another colloquium on 21 August 2020 on the Microsoft Teams online platform. The NPC, through the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), commissioned an anchor paper titled ‘South Africa as a democratic developmental state’ to guide deliberations at the 26–27 July 2019 colloquium. This position paper was initially presented at the NPC webinar on the developmental state on 23 February 2021 - subsequent relevant inputs have been incorporated to the extent possible.

One of the issues that requires attention is rethinking the desire to be an outright developmental state given the history surrounding what is and informs a developmental state. There are many ideas and debates concerning what a developmental state is, yet in the context of this paper it can be argued that it has three key characteristics. Firstly, it is a state that prioritises economic development and growth as its modus operandi, where the state can lead or intervene in this process³. Secondly, this type of state is heavily invested in and utilises industrialisation with various export-orientated strategies to ensure fast-paced economic growth and development⁴. Thirdly, at the core of a developmental state’s government and strategic economic sectors are skilled and highly trained politicians and administrators who are attuned to the private sector and global economic markets⁵. While numerous other authors have given their interpretation of a developmental state, it needs to be noted that these three characteristics can be found in most of the established literature on this topic.

In the case of South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) has since the late 1990s expressed a great interest in the country becoming a democratic developmental state. However, the clearest and most articulate

commitment to creating a South African democratic developmental state can be found in its 2007 Strategy and Tactics document. The ANC states that it wants to:

“build a developmental state shaped by the history and socio-economic dynamics of South African society. Such a state will guide national economic development and mobilise domestic and foreign capital and other social partners to achieve this goal. It will have attributes that include: capacity to intervene in the economy in the interest of higher rates of growth and sustainable development; effecting sustainable programmes that address challenges of unemployment, poverty and underdevelopment with requisite emphasis on vulnerable groups; and mobilising the people as a whole, especially the poor, to act as their own liberators through participatory and representative democracy”⁶.

Yet, the desire of the ANC to make South Africa a developmental state, some argue, has had to be modified and more centred on the democratic and constitutional nature of the government of South Africa. Older and established developmental states have not been democratic nor sought to make democratic constitutionalism a key pillar of their developmental ethos⁷. It is for this reason that the South African government’s approach to becoming a developmental state has had to be tailor-made with a bias in favour of democracy, participation and people-driven processes. In line with this approach, the NDP says “a developmental state builds the capabilities of people to improve their own lives, while intervening to correct historical inequalities. Neither government nor the market can develop the necessary capabilities on their own”⁸.

This interpretation of the envisaged South African developmental state considers South Africa’s political history and circumstances and should be viewed as different from Asian developmental states because those were not democratic. The reconsideration of the format of the South African developmental state should be with the understanding that it cannot be exactly the same as other developmental states. In the South African context, the developmental state must rigorously pursue socio-economic development instead of mainly prioritizing economic growth like the other developmental states have done.



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2. Setting scene and context

The South African government has ratified numerous policies and laws for almost three decades to counter the various legacies of British colonialism and Afrikaner nationalist-inspired apartheid rule⁹. These laws and policies dating back from the early 1990s to more recent times, which have included the Reconstruction and Development Programme, Growth, Employment, and Redistribution, Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa and legislation like the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act, have had some successes as well as shortcomings¹⁰.

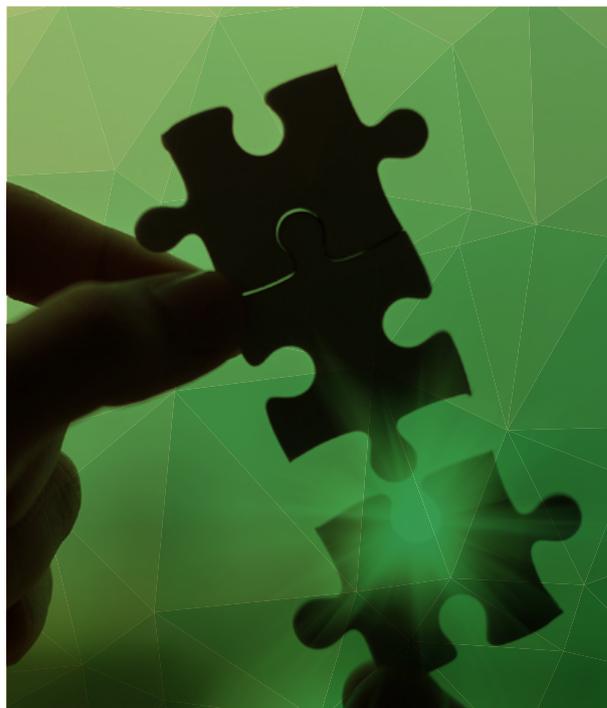
However, owing to a myriad of factors such as internal institutional faults or leadership failures in areas such as local government¹¹ and the poor utilisation of state-owned entities as engines of development¹², the ANC and the government have not achieved the aims outlined in many of its earlier policies. Factors beyond the scope of government have limited the possibility of South Africa becoming an effective democratic developmental state. These include the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the 2009 global economic crisis and the 2020 coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. There is also the challenge of the nature of South African society, given its history, as outlined in the NPC anchor paper. The historical experience of colonialism and apartheid as well as the post-colonial nature of the post-apartheid South African society and the skewed state-capital relations make it difficult for South Africa to become an effective democratic developmental state. These, however, do not stand on the way of South Africa becoming a capable and ethical state.

In 2009, government decided to combine its planning endeavours into a national planning process and engage in policy discussions to deal with the factors that limited the extent to which South Africa could become an effective democratic developmental state. Both the planning and the monitoring and evaluation functions were formalised and improved including through the development of a long-term plan in the form of the NDP. This approach to using a singular guiding document or development plan is not without precedence in the discourse around developmental states and are critical to its agenda. The People's Republic of China, for instance, uses its five to ten-year planning documents to guide its economic development trajectory¹³.

This form of planning is the main feature of many

developmental states such as the Republic of Singapore, South Korea, Botswana and Rwanda. It is not uncommon for such plans to articulate a vision for the state that is prescriptive and that forces all government policy actions to be attuned to such planning methods. Therefore, when referring to development plans, it is important to note how powerful they have been in more established developmental states and how they have been able to focus the economic trajectory of these states, including when technical or technological economic factors are changing at breakneck speed.

This position paper considers three critical objectives to direct South Africa's efforts toward becoming a capable, professional and ethical developmental state. Firstly, strengthening a capable developmental state must occur through rethinking and constructing an agile public sector. Secondly, having implementable plans and programmes that advance ethical behaviour and a developmental environment is critical. Thirdly, the establishment of the necessary interventions that improve co-ordination and implementation capacities of state institutions and officials must be vigorously pursued. Arguably, these three critical objectives encompass the following NDP goals: (1) Stabilise the political-administrative interface (2) Make the public service and local government administration careers of choice (3) Develop technical and specialist professional skills (4) Strengthen delegation, accountability and oversight in government (5) Improve interdepartmental co-ordination (6) Strengthen local government (7) Achieve the developmental potential of state-owned enterprises (SOEs).



3. Strengthening South Africa to be a capable developmental state

The quest to make South Africa a capable developmental state needs to be understood as being integrated in the aims and ambitions of the South African government in the post-1994 period, either through the various policy pronouncements or the NPC work. This quest reflects the discourse of the South African government and the ruling ANC to fashion its socioeconomic and political model in line with more established developmental states. The NPC anchor paper on South Africa as a democratic developmental state analyses South Africa's performance in relation to the proposals contained in the 2007 and the 2017 ANC Strategy and Tactics documents. In relation to the issue of state apparatuses and configurations, the NPC anchor paper notes:

“However, flowing from the developmental planning idea is the importance of national governments having lead institutions like planning commissions to plot and sometimes lead economic development activities. As argued by Kuye and Ajam (2012, 25), countries that have put in place the institutional

architecture and capabilities for implementing development plans seem to perform better in terms of social and economic development. Over and above planning commissions or such institutions, the development plans/visions of countries viewed as developmental states are usually clear, concise and robust. This cannot be said about South Africa's NDP”⁴.

Government should therefore consider undertaking an analysis and assessment of the current state apparatuses if the aim of becoming a capable developmental state is to become a reality. While work is being done to improve the manner in which the NDP and NPC operates to further the goal of making South Africa a capable developmental state, this could be all in vain unless the issue of the structure of government apparatus is addressed. It is worth noting that one of the key ideas the NPC anchor paper highlights for reconsideration is the centrality and sway of the NPC itself in rolling out the NDP's goals and objectives.

Case study and Example: Integrated Planning within and for District Development Plan (DDM)

The NDP and all other diagnostic reports on inter-governmental relations (IGR) have consistently identified the failure of IGR as the reason for the failure of service delivery. Part of what IGR needs to do is to develop (revise) and implement the resource allocation model that is backlog-driven and takes into account the spatial transformation objectives and consolidated infrastructure plan of the country. Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) mainly fail because of a lack of genuine commitment to sharing responsibilities and resources. Similarly, (horizontal) planning between contiguous provinces, districts and municipalities needs to improve. It therefore becomes important that the attitudes of various stakeholders improve to promote co-operation instead of creating competition between various state organs. The role of the state in relation to the aims of the DDM should, therefore, be clarified to ensure that there is a total end to the silo approach among the three spheres of government and across departments. This will require research that addresses the risk factors. For a capable developmental state to be established, it will, therefore, need to be illustrated in the manner that local government plans are supported including by the other spheres of government. Moreover, for the DDM to be successful, government would have to carefully think about which state apparatuses could be appropriate to ensure IGR planning, budgeting and implementation can be tracked in real-time. In this regard, the implementers of the DDM should be aware of the following possible problems that could hamper its success (a) limited financial and human capital due to years of neglect from government, particularly at the local governments sphere (b) forgetting that the DMM is not a new initiative per se but one that needs to be anchored in the responsibilities outlined by section 3 of the 1998 Local Government White Paper (c) the problem of localised political elites, and the spoiler role they often play in interventions such as the DDM and (d) that co-ordination and implementation should be a key focus for government at all levels.

4. Actionable plans and programmes that advance ethical behaviour and a developmental environment

The NDP 2030 states:

“The public service needs to be immersed in the development agenda but insulated from undue political interference... Staff at all levels must have the authority, experience and support they need to do their jobs. This will require a more long-term approach to skills development... stabilize the political-administrative interface...Make the public service and local government administration careers of choice...Develop technical and specialist professional skills.”

The NPC anchor paper¹⁵ makes the point that it is not uncommon for institutions like state-owned entities and local government to be led by handpicked, incompetent and poorly-trained public servants at the request of political principals in those spheres of government (NPC 2019:10). This contention needs to be understood in the broader context of successful developmental states where there is an emphasis on a firm commitment to meritocratic recruitment and a bias towards allowing this recruited talent to operate in politically neutral environments where decisions can be taken in evidence-based ways. The consequence of this nexus between political inference and ill-trained public servants is that there is no adherence to ensuring that the development agenda is supported.

Government needs to, therefore, thoroughly consider how political interference is having a poisonous effect not only on civil servants, but ultimately on public service delivery as a whole. This gives rise to two primary problems:

- The problem of political elites holding the administrative interface hostage and exerting their obvious and existing power.
- The lack of a professional interface that seeks to place the best and brightest in critical positions of administration and that replicates their experiences to empower and transfer skills to younger employees.

To correct this in the immediate and long-term, the following three suggestions are made:

(1) Political principals should start their careers at local government, through being elected councillors in their constituencies. Thereafter, they will only be able to progress to provincial and the national legislatures if their portfolios of sustained successes are independently verified, using service delivery and active community engagement as key markers of this endeavour.

(2) Political principals in their ongoing work should, in addition to these independently verified portfolios, be required to attend accredited schools of government to complete customised qualifications in (a) local government theory (b) constitutional law and administration theory (c) public finance and economic development (d) international relations and business administration (e) African history and one elective language.

(3) Mandate that all administrative positions in government be linked to a professional body, which will monitor and evaluate the following: (a) that the administrator's qualifications are verified and kept up to date in line with the applied position and (b) that all promotions are vetted and accompanied by independent verification to ensure competence for the position and that no political interference took place.

These suggestions should not be seen as simply aspirations but as important corrective actions to reverse the problems plaguing the public service in South Africa. The NPC anchor paper, drawing from international experiences concerning successful developmental states, explains that all have a bias towards technocrats and expert civil servants leading their institutions and get positive economic and social dividends in the long run¹⁶.

5. Improving co-ordination and implementation capacities

These two interventions, considered as the crux of ensuring that the capable, professional and ethical developmental state becomes a reality, depend on the drastic improvement of and adherence to the co-ordination and implementation capacities of the state.

Regarding implementation, the proposed revised Chapter 13 of the NDP states the following:

*“The analysis of the challenges identified, alongside inputs at the NPC’s Development State colloquium indicate that there is widespread dissatisfaction in society around the NDP and the developmental state. The dissatisfaction relates to communication around progress being made with regard to the implementation of the NDP, as well as fundamental concerns about the institutional arrangements, public sector capacity and utilization of planning tools in government that were designed to achieve developmental outcomes, and latterly the NDP goals”.*¹⁷

It is worth noting that the DDM, at its core is a tool aimed at improving co-ordination and implementation using various district municipalities as focal points. However, for the DDM and ultimately the NDP to work, government needs to have a strong focus and an iron-clad policy relating to capacity to ensure that the DDM and NDP

achieves its goals before 2030. This reference to capacity relates not only to the technical skills of municipal, provincial and national government (as covered in the second objective) but to recognised capacities that have succeeded and has the political support to convince/encourage communities to pay for services while also taking responsibility to protect and maintain public infrastructure. Government, therefore, needs to urgently consider the following objectives to ensure the effective co-ordination and implementation capacities of state institutions and officials:

- The use of new safeguards and technological tools to better determine co-ordination and implementation of important government actions/policies e.g. infrastructure, etc.
- Reconsideration of the role of the private sector in directing action to strategically address and correct glaring service delivery failures.

Co-ordination and implementation are critical for all levels of government, as indicated earlier. The position paper, therefore, suggests that appropriate officials be appointed at senior levels or that officials should have the requisite gravitas and experience for senior portfolios. While co-ordination, in particular, is critical for the national government, this is not confined to horizontal co-ordination. Policy and other major decisions need to be well co-ordinated.



6. Why Capable and not just Developmental State?

The position paper refers specifically to South Africa becoming a capable, professional and ethical developmental state, rather than simply the traditional idea of being a developmental state. This approach has been pursued in line with the NPC and NDP's view, expressed in the anchor paper which contends that,

...South Africa has veered far away from becoming a developmental state any time soon. However, given the existing institutional architecture and an assessment of developmental outcomes, it would seem that South Africa can still become an effective developmental state although many of the salient attributes of developmental states are no longer in place in South Africa.

While publicly stating its aim to be a developmental state, the South African government has failed to put in place long-term actions such as (a) the necessary political administrative interface (b) the required focus on economic development policies (c) the strategic state institutional arrangement for governance, among others.

The objectives and recommendations explored in this paper should be viewed as mitigating actions required to get South Africa back to the correct path of becoming a functional developmental state. The capability of the South African government through professionalisation and the ethical behaviour of civil servants and politicians is therefore crucial for progressing towards becoming an effective democratic developmental state.



7. Concluding remarks

This position paper has attempted to capture various ideas and considerations for South Africa to become a capable, professional and ethical developmental state in line with work carried out by the NPC. The three anchor objectives presented in this paper addresses some of the shortcomings of the NDP and devises new ways for the implementation of Chapter 13.

The position paper considered three critical interventions to make South Africa a capable, professional and ethical developmental state. The need to strengthen a capable developmental state must occur through rethinking and constructing an agile public sector was emphasised during the August 2020 NPC colloquium as needing serious attention. The intervention that there must be actionable plans and programmes that advance ethical behaviour and a developmental environment is perhaps one of the harder ones to plan for but is the most pressing for the government as highlighted in the August 2020 NPC colloquium and emphasised in the February 2021 NPC webinar. Lastly, the necessary actions that will improve co-ordination and implementation capacities of state institutions and officials must be in place.

These three critical objectives encompass the following NDP goals: (1) Stabilise the political-administrative interface; (2) Make the public service and local government administration careers of choice; (3) Develop technical and specialist professional skills; (4) Strengthen delegation, accountability and oversight in government; (5) Improve interdepartmental co-ordination; (6) Strengthen local government; and (7) Achieve the developmental potential of state-owned enterprises. Over and above the three interventions that this position paper recommends, leadership in and by government is fundamental. Thought leadership, in particular, is critical as it involves problem-solving, the ability to foresee reality in granular dimensions, advancing sustainable solutions to seemingly intractable challenges and the capability to improve wellbeing.

It is critical that leadership, starting from the Presidency to local government, ensures that portfolios in government are occupied by the skilled and competent meritocratic officials. It is important to ensure that there is always an objective debate about what human capital would advance the public service (this includes political office bearers) best, and to ensure that this occurs in a professional manner even if they do not agree with the

political principals of the day.

Lastly, as the Covid-19 pandemic has illustrated, public leadership or leadership in general in the context of building a capable, professional and ethical developmental state requires an eye for the future which reaffirms the emphasis on thought leadership. It is important to ensure that the public sector and its officials are aware of and orientated in how to use the latest available technology and tools. It is without doubt that developmental states that are able to leverage technology to improve the lives of the people will be effective in future.



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