

## Building a Capable State

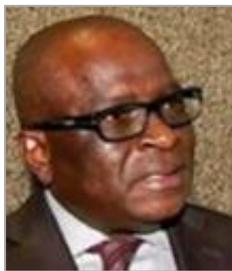
Debate 5 of the **OR Tambo Series** on **IMPLEMENTING THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN** addressed issues related to building an ethical and effective public service and a capable state able to play a transformational and developmental role in realising the plan's vision for 2030.

This article is a selection of major themes and highlights from the debate, aimed at giving readers a taste of perspectives and concerns from both the panellists and the audience.

### The Panellists: Framing Comments



Prof Richard Levin  
[Moderator]



Minister Ngoako  
Ramatlhodi



Mr Elias Masilela



Mrs Phindile Baleni



Adv Richard Sizani

A brief introduction to the panellists:

**Prof Richard Levin**, Principal of the National School of Government which he is responsible for steering as a centre for learning and development from which public sector training is coordinated, provided and facilitated, and curriculum and training standards are directed, drew on his wide knowledge and experience to provide insightful context for the discussions.

**Adv Ngoako Ramatlhodi**, Minister of Public Service and Administration and a member of the Judicial Service Commission, drew on his extensive experience to provide significant and practical insights on a range of issues to enhance the audience's appreciation of the debate's key themes.

**Elias Masilela**, Executive Chairman of DNA economics, member of the first and second National Planning Commissions and a visiting Senior Fellow at Wits University, provided insights into the context of developing the NDP and some of the concepts that informed the plan, particularly in relation to a professional public service and its role in a developmental state.

**Phindile Baleni**, Director-General in the Gauteng Office of the Premier, described the Province's programme for implementing aspects of the NDP, aimed particularly at economic and spatial transformation to address the challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

**Adv Richard Sizani**, the Chairperson of the Public Service Commission (PSC), spoke to the role and influence of the PSC in building a professional, ethical, effective public service equipped to support the development of a capable state.

### Framing remarks on the NDP's Chapter 13 – how far we might have come, and where we might be going:

Professor Patrick Fitzgerald's Concept Paper offers some key perspectives on the five key areas identified for targeted action in Chapter 13 of the National Development Plan:

- Stabilise the political-administrative interface
- Make the public service and local government careers of choice
- Develop technical and specialist professional skills
- Improve relations between the three spheres of government
- Clarify the objectives and mandates of state-owned enterprises

In concluding, he notes: "...the strength and weakness of the Chapter was perhaps its exemplary character in terms of expressing good public administration and management practice. Seemingly, despite its trenchant analysis of key issues, and most constructive recommendations pursuant to achieving a developmental state, its somewhat textbook and best practice approach has left it without any discernible influence.

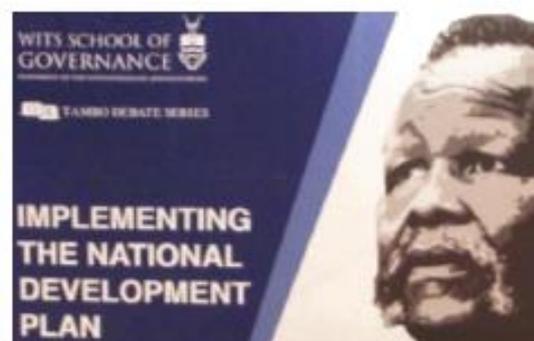
One may opine that this Chapter was batting on a sticky wicket from the very beginning as even partial implementation of its key recommendations would serve to challenge current bastions of power and patronage. Is there any real will to curb political interference in public service appointments? Would major players actually welcome transparent and well-functioning SOEs? Are the political power-brokers really concerned about attracting talent to the public service/sector? Does anybody in a position of real influence have the appetite for the long-haul and hard work of configuring relationships with the Higher and Further education sectors to develop professional and technical skills? These questions ... are also surely worthy of debate." [Click on [http://www.bridge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Concept\\_Paper\\_OR-Tambo-Debate-5\\_Building-a-Capable-State\\_29March2016-3.pdf](http://www.bridge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Concept_Paper_OR-Tambo-Debate-5_Building-a-Capable-State_29March2016-3.pdf) to view the Concept Paper]

## The Dialogue: Highlights and Key Themes

### A Capable and Developmental State

It was noted that Chapter 13 of the NDP does not only consider a capable state, but rather a **capable and developmental state**.

The distinction is important given South Africa's context and its dichotomous economy comprised of rural and urban elements. Almost all the skills, capital and highest-quality services are located in urban areas. There is also the vast racial inequality in achieving access to resources.



The concept of a developmental state takes all these factors into account. A capable and developmental state is a state that can intervene to correct historical inequalities and generate opportunities for its citizens. The developmental state model recognises that neither government nor the market can develop the necessary capabilities on their own. A developmental state calls for the involvement of all spheres of the state, not just the executive and public service, but Parliament and the judiciary too. For example, the key role of Parliament as the interface between an active citizenry and the governance sector of the state, and of the judiciary in transforming critical relations in society through gender-aware rulings in family courts.



## The Context of the National Development Plan

The context that drove the NDP and its recommendations provided a backdrop for the debate:

- The NDP is premised on the understanding that there is a strong correlation between good governance, productivity and the ability to deliver.
- Governance is key and the plan conceives of the state as a critical and conscientious player in the development and transformation of society and the economy.
- Accountability and transparency are fundamental to ensuring good governance.
- The NDP imagines an anti-corruption system that holds public servants accountable, protects whistle-blowers and closely monitors procurement. It hopes to create a public service that is public-spirited, efficient and that understands the complexities of development.



The panel members and moderator

“The NDP appears to be a very insulated process. How can it be implemented successfully when within the ruling party it has only lukewarm acceptance?” [Member of the audience]

## Stabilizing the Political-Administrative Interface

The Concept Note notes the politicization of public service appointments and the associated risks and controversies, and asks if it would not be more viable to bring our doctrine and legislation in line with our current custom and practice by “recognising and rendering transparent the nature, scope and modalities of political appointment”.

Some contrasting views on this issue were:

- We are a country in transition. It thus becomes vital for there to be political consciousness and an appreciation of the political agenda at hand, within the public service. The roles of ministers, politicians and public servants become one in many respects because of the agenda of the day.
- The political and administrative realms have a dual but unequal relationship which makes it vulnerable.
- We have to come up with a model that doesn’t erase the work of previous ministers. To have each minister coming in with his/her own DG makes it difficult to build on previous efforts. The short life span of Directors General (on average, two and a half years), also negatively impacts the functioning of departments.
- There is a profound need for an efficient and effective public service that doesn’t depend on politicians.

“We are talking about two legs of the same entity to take us into the new South Africa” Minister Ngoaka Ramatlhodi

“Contrary to what has been suggested, the PSC has no need to be granted further powers. Instead, it should work to use its existing powers more assertively.” Adv. Richard Sizani

## The Role of the Public Service Commission

A key point in the political-administrative interface debate was the role of the Public Service Commission (PSC):

- The PSC is properly empowered to deal with its work which is oversight of the administration and executive functions of the public service. It does not set norms and standards, but ensures adherence to these.
- The PSC supports the notion of building a capable state and recognises that part of this effort is the building of a professional, efficient, ethical and effective public service. To that end, the PSC is working to build an integrity system which promotes the values of fairness and human dignity as enshrined in the constitution. With the help of Parliament, the PSC works to ensure Heads of Departments are held to account, that departments that go astray are dealt with and that there are regular inspections and reports on service delivery.

## The public service and local government as careers of choice



Extending a welcome from the Tambo Foundation

Panellists agreed on the need for better career management and building a pool of skills within the public service. An administrative head of the public service would play a significant role in achieving this.

- There should be collaboration with Higher Education and technical institutions, particularly in relation to building technical and specialist professional skills. An integrated system would source top talent from institutions and provide planned career development to build appropriate skills, attitudes and experience.
- There has to be a career system that insulates public servants against petty political considerations and ensures that career paths are not corrupted.
- We have to ensure that those who are appropriately skilled are promoted and that this is done against norms and standards.
- Career paths should be structured to build capacity (for example, giving counsellors the ability to survive once they leave office).

““We don’t want skilled machines – we want a public service that is driven by the need to serve the citizens of our country.” Adv Richard Sizani



### Gauteng Province Development Roadmap

To give effect to the NDP, including aspects of Chapter 13 relating to the public service, the Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG) has developed the radical Transformation, Modernisation and Reindustrialisation (TMR) programme, aimed at transforming the economic and spatial dimensions of the province. In working to implement the TMR programme, the province makes use of a ‘governance roadmap’ which comprises 4 pillars:

#### Development of balanced and coordinated city regions:

This pillar aims to ensure integrated urban regions characterised by social cohesion and economic inclusion. Fundamental to this is the revitalisation and mainstreaming of township economy by supporting the development of township enterprises. It also involves transforming the spatial patterns of apartheid and modernising human settlements.

#### Development of a dynamic data collection system:

The GPG will develop a sophisticated system of data collection to ensure data is accurate and that governance and fiscal management is sound. In line with this pillar, the provincial government has introduced an Open Tender System for big contracts (tenders over R50m) to improve transparency in the procurement process.

#### Development of a skilled and discipline-oriented public service:

This pillar compels the GPG to develop human capacity within the public service field and institute anti-corruption measures in order to forge a hard-working, people-centred and professional public service.

#### Development of an integrated, connected and ‘smart’ public service system:

The GPG aims to modernise and digitise service delivery and work to strengthen information and communications technology in Gauteng. Toward this end, free ICT services will be made available to those who cannot afford them.

## Crowding-in the Private Sector



Prof Anne McLennan  
discussing the  
Concept Note

The NDP's goals cannot be achieved and delivered by government alone and will require a collaborative approach with the private sector.

- There is a fine line between what we call economic goods and social goods. Healthcare, for example, is provided by both the public and private sector. This narrow divide cuts across all utilities, including education and security.
- Given South Africa's mixed economy, the NDP recognises that the private sector has an important role to play in achieving its objectives. Crowding-in of the private sector, whereby private investment increases as debt-financed government spending increases, is vital.

"We need to create the right environment for investments to bring the private sector on board." Elias Masilela

### A Selection of Questions Raised by the Audience

The questions give an indication of the audience's wide-ranging concerns:

- Has society mobilised behind the NDP? Has there been buy-in from all sectors of the country or are we assuming a false consensus?
- Should there be an entrance exam to enter public service? Should public servants be required to swear an oath of office? Would these measures encourage a more respectful attitude towards public service?
- Is it possible to build a developmental state if the political party is seemingly not developmental?
- Given the considerable amount of criticism levelled against the public service sector, should the government be doing more to communicate its successes?
- Should government revisit its approach to training public servants and work to develop front line staff and not just senior government officials? How do we build from the bottom up to capacitate the front line staff that may be senior officials someday?
- Given the short lifespan of DGs and the need to focus on moving forward, should government use former cadres as mentors to help develop new DGs and other senior public servants?
- Why should we expect the private sector to come on board now, when they have not done so before, although the government has been saying to them since 1996 that they should?
- How would including the private sector help when it is so expensive?
- Why does South Africa not commit to education, so that even lower lever clerks have a sound basic education?
- The NDP was planned for the long term, but are we doing enough to monitor its implementation in the short term?

## Successes and Challenges

The debate highlighted **successes** while acknowledging that there was still much work to be done:

- There are two ways of measuring our success: by the heights we haven't yet reached, or by the depths we have come from. We started by having to bring all the various services together. We have had to deal with many negatives, and to find a balance.

By the nature of the topic, there was an emphasis on **challenges**. These are some of the challenges highlighted during the debate:

- The inequality within society is our biggest and most critical challenge.
- Our biggest mistake was to create a society that is dependent on government. This is not sustainable. We need to be able to 'reproduce' ourselves through our labour, and to move towards a space where we are our own masters.
- It is common cause that corruption is widespread, which takes away from the poor and undermines our country. We have to overcome these instances of selfishness and greed, to build an ethical public service.
- There is a high level of inefficiency in the public service.
- The roles and relationships of the three spheres of government need to be clarified and streamlined, and ways must be found to aid the many municipalities that do not have capacity and are not sustainable.

## Closing Remarks and Way Forward

A key consideration is that an inability of the state to deliver will result in the failure of the country. Will the logic of the NDP override the logic of party politics? Will ethics, values and more dedicated monitoring and evaluation help us to escape this trap?

This debate is forcing us to question the social contract we made from 1990 to 1994. Should we revisit aspects of that social contract, in order to avoid the trap of false consensus?

In the meantime we have to continue to build a cadre of skilled public servants, so partnering becomes critically important, as highlighted during the debate.

### SHARING THROUGH TWITTER

The OR Tambo Debates are all about opening up issues of vital importance to our country's development to public scrutiny and debate.

Here we share the top 20 tweets from the many Twitter interactions going on during the session.

Click on <https://twitter.com/hashtag/ortambodebates> to read the tweets.