

DISCIPLINE OF ANC LEADERSHIP ESSENTIAL FOR PLANNING COMMISSION SUCCESS

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The preoccupation of five year regime change within the ruling party (ANC) is the biggest challenge to the success of the Planning Commission (PC).

The essence of the Planning Commission is long term planning. Three issues are important in this regard: first is the determination of a long term vision. That is, answer the following question: say, in thirty years' time – what must be the ideal of South Africa? This question must be answered in a multidisciplinary response. That is, economically, socially, and democratic dispensation.

Secondly; the consolidation of a multidisciplinary team to undertake long term planning at a technical level. Modern governance is highly technical and requires that those who undertake planning are multidisciplinary in thought and practice. For examples: those who undertake transportation planning must equally be alive to environmental, health, educational and human settlement matters. Essentially, the long term plan produced by the Planning Commission must ensure that governance is integrated, coordinated and synergized.

Thirdly; the Planning Commission must undertake inter sectoral mass mobilisation. That is, after the Planning Commission has technically finalized the national integrated long term vision and plan, it must ensure that various sectors of society are mobilized to contribute to the plan; buy in; accept it; and own it.

Such the plan is not necessary of government, but of society as a whole. Ultimately, the long term plan includes deliverables, timeframes, and responsibilities of the public, private, and civil society sectors. In essence, the ultimate long term plan as produced by the PC, is not of government per se, but of society as a whole.

There is no doubt that the current PC led by Minister Trevor Manuel has the relevant technical capacity to undertake the three planning aspects indicated above. The recently assembled team of commissioners unveiled by the PC is a clear indication that the foundation and building blocks are well on course. The Commissioners' multidisciplinary background and expertise does indicate that the PC is indeed working towards an integrated long term plan which largely will enjoy the support of various sectors of society.

The biggest challenge though, is the five year cycling of regimes within the ruling party. On the face value, this is indeed a normal democratic process. And indeed, this must be encouraged as it feeds positively into national democratic values.

However, the major preoccupation with five year regime changes within the ruling party is problematic for the sustenance of the PC for several reasons. For one it indicates that there is more concern about who gets into leadership positions than what needs to be done over time. Take president Jacob Zuma for example – in less than six months in the presidency, considerations were already given within the ruling party whether he should serve the second term or not. Currently, a significant preoccupation within the ruling party is on the elective congress of 2012. Whilst the ruling party may have long term plans, its current preoccupation at the highest level is rather leadership positions.

This would not necessarily be an issue if there was an organizational commitment to established long term programmes. However, there is a proven tendency of some new ministers to start things anew as if things were not happening in their posts. Upon the assumption of a new ministerial position, they undertake to re strategise anew as if they took over from a government run by the opposition.

The number of new strategies that have come with each and every minister of education in the first ten years of democracy is an example in point. Recently, the publicly reported altercations between the current ministers of Human Settlement with his predecessor are another example in point.

These examples are indicative of the relationship between the ruling party's government executive and ruling party's organizational leadership. At the heart of the matter, is the stability of the ruling party at the organizational level to ensure that ministers and the presidency need to implement in government regardless of who is the minister or the president.

Research on the nature of the relationship between the party at the organizational level, and the party at the cabinet executive level, is largely dependent on the discipline at the party level. Currently, the discipline at the organizational level is weak. There is little commitment to party principles and long term strategies and programmes as the biding element of conduct by the leadership. Instead, leadership conduct seem to be based on avoiding upsetting certain internal constituencies or leaders so that they can be elected or re elected in the next elective conference.

It is this instability at the organizational level which poses a significant danger to the sustenance and success of the Planning Commission than anything else. When climbing the leadership ladder or remaining at the top depends on appeasing certain individuals than the long term plans of the organization, institutional sustainability will suffer.

In the final analysis, the ruling party needs a cadre of leadership of men and women whose integrity is not necessarily dependent on being elected within the party leadership. That is, they must command respect simply based on their knowledge and ability to take both the organization and the cabinet to a higher level.

Without leadership sustainability within the ruling party, there are dangers that every emerging ANC five year leadership might undo the work of the PC and therefore hampering a sustainable drive to fulfill long term plans.

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