

# South Africa's Democratic Transformational Agenda:

## *A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER*

OPINION

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### Preamble

I have been a South African public servant since 1996, and a member of the senior management echelon for almost 20 years. I have occupied senior positions such as being the Head of Department of Public Works, Roads and Transport in the Free State, the Director-General of the Free State Provincial Government, as well as being the Chief Operations Officer in the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development until end of June 2015.

When the new democratic dispensation was established in 1994, I had high expectations. This included eliminating political violence, addressing the legacy of apartheid by enacting new laws consistent with the values and principles of our new democracy, and addressing socio-economic inequalities by making basic government services such as education, health and municipal

services accessible to the previously marginalized majority as well as reduce unemployment.

The new government assumed office with an overwhelming support from the populace and the international community. The majority of South Africans looked forward to building a new nation characterized by a common vision and inclusiveness as opposed to the legacy of apartheid. The international community was inspired by the negotiated dissolution of apartheid and generously made resources and expertise available to support the beginning of a democratic era.

Despite the prevalence of goodwill, the new government was faced with difficult challenges. These included unifying the disparate and racially-defined homeland system into one country. Reducing fears and suspicions

between different racial groups engendered by decades of racial discrimination and political violence. Addressing racial inequalities while creating confidence to discourage both the business sector from disinvesting in the South African economy, and skills flight from the white community.

The new South African government was also expected by the international community to play an important role in promoting democracy and good government not only in Africa but throughout the world. The new government's approach in prioritizing the poor and historically marginalized, as articulated in the governing party's Reconstruction and Development Program, is correct given the legacy of apartheid and the consequent levels and depth of socio-economic inequalities in the South African society. Given the historical governance practice of marginalizing communities in their own development, the new dispensation was also correct in developing consultative methods of determining its service delivery priorities. Whilst these approaches were laudable, there were

also unfortunate developments. Firstly, the new government's attempt to promote transformation of the public service profile by giving white public servants retrenchment packages led to severe skills shortages. This was later remedied by the contracting of retirees as consultants. Secondly, the new South African government operated with very limited resources which delayed the much needed transformation programs related to service delivery and infrastructure development. Incidents of greed and corruption demoralized the new nation. What was particularly disconcerting was the leadership's failure to assure the nation it is committed to the eradication of fraud and corruption. There was dissonance in what they said and what the nation experienced.

Overall, the government's Transformational agenda and approaches, which were characterized by the emphasis on the vision and values of the Constitution, consultative processes and prioritization of the historically marginalized created a sound foundation for government to launch its future developmental projects.

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## **Introduction**

I have had a good fortune of serving as a public servant since the dawn of democracy to the present. This period was preceded by one's participation in the struggle for liberation mostly as a student activist. What one learned in liberation politics provided the energy and inspiration to serve the newly-established non-racial democracy.

The struggle for liberation was about building one nation that is not categorized by racial classification. It was also about promoting equality before the law and ensuring citizens participate in matters affecting their own development. One of the key goals of the liberation struggle was to reduce socio-economic inequalities, which explains why the ANC as the prospective ruling party developed the Reconstruction and Development Program. Twenty-one years of democracy provokes the question: have we achieved the goals we set during the liberation struggle? Has the newly constructed public service proved itself to have the relevant capacity to achieve these goals? What have I learnt in the public service in the last twenty years?

Having recently completed my tenure as a public servant, I find it appropriate to reflect on lessons drawn from serving in different administrations of the ANC government without necessarily making an attempt to assess which one was better than which. My purpose in this regard is to focus on what I have learned as a public servant, and propose key issues that the current generation of public servants need to keep an eye on to ensure that the development trajectory of the Republic of South Africa proceeded without any disruptions for posterity's sake.

South Africa's democracy is only twenty-one years old. It is critical that the older generation of public servants share experiences to prepare the next generation of public servants. This is primarily because it is now obvious to most South Africans that the country's developmental challenges could not be eliminated in only 21 years. The minimum that could be achieved was to lay the foundation for engaging these challenges, and draw from achievements and mistakes made in order to sustain social changes and the developmental trajectory triggered in the first twenty-one years of democracy.

This article will seek to provide a brief description of a public servant to establish a common understanding between the author and the reader. Secondly, there will be a brief outline of the policy context in which I operated as a public servant. Thirdly, I will

share the lessons learned in my tenure in the public service and provide a brief conclusion.

### **Definition of a Public Servant**

Public service has a broad definition. It is mainly an individual's commitment to serve the citizenry of one's country. This could be in different capacities including being a politician, serving as a judicial official or serving as an employee of the state in a government department. Whilst politicians may serve by being Members of Parliament and/or Members of the Executive, and judicial officers may serve as either magistrates, judges or prosecutors, the focus of this essay is public servants who serve as employees of the state in a government department as this is where most of my experience was gathered.

The different administrations I served, even though the ruling party was the same, existed in different global and political contexts and some of the policy challenges they addressed were informed to a large extent by these contexts. The Mandela administration, for example, emerged out of the ashes of the Apartheid administration. Its leadership consisted of people who either led the struggle for liberation from exile, prison or within the local political structures dominated largely by the United Democratic Front.

In preparing for governance, the ANC outlined its vision as a future ruling party in a document titled 'Ready to Govern,' which articulated the basic objectives of ANC policy as:

- To strive for the achievement of the right of all South Africans, as a whole, to political and economic self-determination in a united South Africa;
- To overcome the legacy of inequality and injustice created by colonialism and apartheid, in a swift, progressive and principled way;
- To develop a sustainable economy and state infrastructure that will progressively improve the quality of life of all South Africans; and,
- To encourage the flourishing of the feeling that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, to promote a common loyalty to and pride in the country and to create a universal sense of freedom and security within its borders.

## **The Mandela Administration**

Accordingly, following the first non-racial and democratic elections of 29th April 1994, the Mandela administration (1994-1999) had to address the post-apartheid policy imperatives which revolved mainly around nation-building. This recognized that we have been a nation whose different constituents have been in conflict with one another in response to the introduction and implementation of the policy of apartheid and its aftermath.

In Mandela's own words: "From the moment the (election) results were in and it was apparent that the ANC was to form the government, I saw my mission as one of preaching reconciliation, of binding the wounds of the country, of engendering trust and confidence. I knew that many people, particularly the minorities, whites, Coloureds and Indians, would be feeling anxious about the future, and I wanted them to feel secure. I reminded people again and again that the liberation struggle was not a battle against any one group or colour, but a fight against a system of repression. At every opportunity, I said all South Africans must now unite and join hands and say we are one country, one nation, one people, marching together into the future" (Mandela, 1994: p.745).

The policy imperatives of the Mandela administration, therefore, included such measures as the establishment of the Government of National Unity, the convening of the Constituent Assembly to draft the new Constitution on a multi-party basis, and the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to promote nation-building and reconciliation.

The current government is still engaged in the process of implementing the recommendations of the TRC. The 2014 and the 2015 Annual Reports of the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development indicates that of the 21 769 people eligible for reparations all but 40 have been paid. Of the 477 people identified as missing only about 98 remains have been returned to their families. The regulations on basic and higher education have been promulgated to implement the recommendation on medical benefits and other forms of social assistance. There has been a lack of progress, however, on the implementation of the medical benefits and community rehabilitation recommendations. A lot of attention needs to be paid by government on the outstanding recommendations.

One of the key difficulties of this era was amalgamating the disparate government administrations. Although this took a few years to achieve, it was eventually done. The country now has three tiers of government that are functioning generally well. There is a national government, supported by nine provincial governments and 278 municipalities. Hindsight also teaches that Mandela's dream of nation building and reconciliation is not yet fully achieved. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, in its SA Reconciliation Barometer 2015 Report, notes the following:

- South Africans generally believe that the country has made progress on the road to national reconciliation since the end of apartheid (59.2%) and are convinced that the country has to continue to pursue it as a national objective.
- Most, however, believe that this objective will remain impossible for as long as those who were disadvantaged under apartheid remain poor. Inequality remains the most frequently mentioned source of social division within South Africa.
- A majority of respondents (61.4%) feel that race relations since 1994 have either stayed the same or deteriorated. Only 35.6% of the sample indicated that they experience no racism in their daily lives. Moreover, trust between the countries historically defined racial groups' remains low- 67.3% of all respondents noted that they have little to no trust in their fellow citizens of other racial groups.
- Most interracial interaction between South Africans occurs in public spaces, such as places of work and study and shopping centres. Interaction in more intimate spaces, such as private homes and social or communal gatherings, is limited. Citizens who are materially better off report higher levels of interracial interaction than those who are worse off (Institute of Justice and Reconciliation, 2015: p.1)

The above findings suggest that more needs to be done to continue improving racial relations in the country. However, until South Africa has significantly reduced levels of socio-economic inequalities amongst different races, the nation building and reconciliation project will remain a desirable goal that is not fully achieved.

### **The Global Context and the transition to a non-racial democracy**

The demise of most Communist states in the late 1980s and the pre- eminence of the United States as a superpower almost created a unipolar world which unashamedly promoted market economics and liberal democracy to the exclusion of other models of governance. This reality shaped the ANC's thinking as a new ruling party in South Africa. Whilst the majority of its leaders pledged allegiance to the Freedom Charter and some (Mandela when he came out of prison) were steadfast advocates of nationalizing key sectors of the South African economy, the impact of the global economic order at the time forced the ANC's hand, and it resigned itself to a mixed economic model which allowed for some state intervention as well as the free market enterprise. This was a significant tactical ideological retreat by the ANC which may well be a subject of future political and economic discourse.

In adapting to these global challenges, the ANC as a ruling party remained alive to the need to address socio-economic inequalities which, to this day, remain an enduring legacy of apartheid. In response the Mandela administration initiated the Reconstruction and Development Programme and laid a policy foundation that prioritized education, health and social development.

### **The Mbeki Administration**

The Mbeki Administration (1999-2008), whilst it remained supportive of the nation building and reconciliation efforts, it shifted the gear towards Economic and social transformation. This was in recognition of the need to accelerate the pace of social and economic transformation.

According to Gevisser (2007: p699) "Mbeki saw his mission as effecting real transformation-the flip side to the coin of reconciliation, as he said repeatedly- even if this meant disrupting the comfort of the white South African population Mandela had gone to such lengths to reassure"

This period saw the enactment of affirmative action and the black economic empowerment policies. According to the South African History Online journal, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy was introduced by the Mbeki administration in 1996 to stimulate faster economic growth which was required to provide resources to meet social investment needs. The policy encompassed most of the social objectives of the RDP but was also aimed at reducing fiscal deficits, lowering

inflation, maintaining exchange rate stability, decreasing barriers to trade and liberalizing capital flows. The journal adds that, "Under GEAR policy, fiscal deficit, inflation and government consumption targets were all slightly met, reporting figures of 2.2%, 5.4% and 18% respectively by the end of 2000, bringing about greater macroeconomic stability, better reporting and increased accountability." The Gear economic policies, whilst found objectionable by the Trade Unions, proved their efficacy during both the 1997 and the 2008 global economic crises as South Africa emerged largely unscathed.

During this period, there was a recognition that South Africa's social and economic fortunes are tied largely to those of the African continent as a whole. This also took into account the important role that the African continent played in the liberation of South Africa. Through Mbeki's leadership, this prompted the development of the philosophy of African Renaissance, which strongly advocated that the resolution of Africa's problems should be led by the Africans themselves. This focus saw the transformation of the Organisation of the African Unity into the African Union, which inspired the democratization of many African countries. It also led to the establishment of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Programme, which became the African Union's socio- economic development programme for the entire African continent. Mbeki has been concerned, however, that the prevalence of fraud and corruption on the African continent will not only undermine good governance but the entire African Renaissance project. To this extent, he has cautioned:

The time has come that we call a halt to the seemingly approved deification of the (personal) acquisition of material wealth and the abuse of state power to impoverish the people and deny our Continent the possibility to achieve sustainable economic development....Africa cannot renew itself where it's upper echelons are a mere parasite on the rest of society, enjoying a self-endowed mandate to use their political power and define the uses of such power such that it's exercises ensures that our Continent reproduces itself as the periphery of the world economy, poor, underdeveloped and incapable of development....The African Renaissance demands that we purge ourselves of the parasites and maintain a permanent vigilance against the danger of the entrenchment in African society of this rapacious stratum with its social morality according to which



everything in society must be organized materially to benefit the few (Mbeki, 2015).

This challenges all Africans to remain vigilant that the scourge of fraud and corruption does not derail the African Renaissance project.

### **The Motlanthe Administration**

The Motlanthe Administration (2008-2009), because of its brevity, was largely a stop gap measure which oversaw the transition from the Mbeki to the Zuma administration. To this extent, policies enacted during the Mbeki Administration continued to be implemented. The biggest contribution of the Motlanthe government, however, was to ensure that the political transition, which was occasioned by the outcomes of the historical 52nd ANC National Conference in Polokwane in 2007, occurred without any disruption and instability to South Africa's governance.

### **The Zuma Administration**

The Zuma Administration has largely continued with the policies laid by the previous ANC administration. It has prioritized planning by finalizing and adopting the National Development Plan (NDP). The NDP is critically important as it is based on a sound analysis of key challenges facing the country. In the National Planning Commission's diagnostic report (2011), for example, it is acknowledged that:

- Too few people work
- The quality of school education for Black people is poor
- Infrastructure is poorly located, inadequate and under-maintained
- Spatial divides hobble inclusive development
- The economy is unsustainably resource intensive
- The public health system cannot meet demand or sustain quality
- Public services are uneven and often of poor quality
- Corruption levels are high; and
- South Africa remains a divided society

Based on the above analysis, the National Development Plan prioritized the following:

- Growing an inclusive economy,
- Building capabilities
- Enhancing the capacity of the State, and
- Promoting leadership and Partnerships throughout society.

The National Planning Commission advised that a focused leadership will be required to ensure the implementation of the plan. It also cautioned that "there is a real risk that South Africa's developmental agenda could fail because the state is incapable of implementing it" (Executive Summary, National Planning Commission, 2012). Four years into implementation, there is a possibility that the Commission's fears may come into fruition. The nation's political leadership does not seem to have focused society on the implementation of the plan. The partnership that is required to achieve the goals of the plan does not seem to be solid. In fact, there seems to be fragmentation as the labour movement is opposed to particularly the economic provisions of the plan. The business sector, on the other hand, laments the poor leadership of the implementation of the plan (Parsons, 2016). Hopefully the government will revive interest in the plan and ensure that key sectors of the South African society remain supportive of the plan. The role of the Ministry of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, created to monitor the implementation of the NDP, remains critical in this regard. Hopefully it will become more articulate and vocal in informing the nation about progress in implementing the plan.

In addition, the Zuma administration has demonstrated its commitment to accelerate gender equity by creating a full Ministry dedicated to providing leadership on gender struggles faced by women not only in South Africa, but on the African continent, and globally as the gender revolution has an international dimension. Unlike the Mbeki administration, it has changed direction on the management of the HIV/Aids pandemic and intensified efforts to provide structure, funding and support in order to reduce HIV/Aids infections.

Unlike the Mandela and Mbeki administrations, the Zuma administration existed in the global context where Russia's new President, Vladimir Putin, asserted Russia's presence and authority in global affairs as a counter-weight to the United States. China was also rising and surpassed Japan to be the second biggest economy in the world. This led to concerns being articulated about the influence of the United States in global governance, and the way it exercised its leadership of global affairs through the World

Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Inevitably Russia, China, India, Brazil and South Africa grouped themselves into a BRICS group of countries to provide leadership to developing countries on developmental matters. Consequently, South Africa's membership of BRICS influences how it conducts its foreign policy not only on the African continent but in the world at large.

## **KEY LESSONS LEARNT AS A PUBLIC SERVANT**

The limited contextual analysis attempted above suggests that public servants need to be alive to not only the local, but also the global economic and political milieu in which they function, as these have significant implications for the policy choices that any government must make. Thus, public servants need to be adaptable to their circumstances. As critical elements of governance, they need to be able to anticipate change in order to manage it.

## **South Africa's Constitution**

South Africa's Constitution plays a major role in defining the context in which public servants provide services to the citizenry. First and foremost, it outlines the doctrine of the separation of powers between the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. It is crucial for public servants to know the boundaries. Most public servants serve in the national, provincial and local government structures. They, however, are often called to account to the National Assembly and Provincial Legislatures for how the budgets appropriated by Parliament and provincial legislatures have been used. These interactions have many dynamics, nuances and tensions and the Constitution provides a reliable guide of how the Executive and the Legislatures should relate to one another.

Similarly, while the arrangements maybe different regarding local government officials, the Constitution still provides guidance on how public servants should relate to local politicians. This is critical as the notion of political deployment is sometimes elevated above the Constitution.

## **Intergovernmental Relations**

In my tenure as the Director-General of the Free State Provincial Government 2000-2005), I learned that much as South Africa's Constitution outlines the different roles of

different tiers of government, it is incumbent amongst those tiers to seek to relate in a manner that ensure seamless service delivery in government. It is for this reason, that, through the Office of the Premier for the Free State Provincial government, we established, in 2001, a Provincial and Local Government (PROVLOC) Forum to improve communication and alignment of programs between the Provincial and local tiers of government (Annual Report, 2000-2001). This was partly informed by the daily realities of lack of alignment and ineffectual targeting of resources between the Provincial and Local tiers of government. It was also informed by the establishment of the President's Coordinating Committee (PCC), which President Mbeki initiated to facilitate smooth communication and resolve service delivery blockages between the National and Provincial Governments.

### **Public Accountability**

It is important for all public servants in all the three tiers of government to familiarize themselves with section 195 of our country's Constitution, which outlines the basic values and principles governing public administration. This section should actually inform the conduct of public servants on a daily basis as it provides, amongst others, for a high standard of professional ethics, efficient, economic and effective use of resources, serving in an impartial, fair, equitable manner and obliges public servants to be transparent in serving the citizenry (RSA Constitution, 1996).

Central to the implementation of the above values is public accountability and regular communication with citizens. Masuku and Ijeoma (2015: p8-9), in outlining the history of monitoring and evaluation, reminds us that public accountability is not a new concept in Africa. It existed in the form of traditional governance during the Stone Age. According to them the traditional leaders, working with their Councillors (Izinduna) made an effort to account to their communities. They share their observations of practices of public accountability in Botswana, Swaziland and Saudi Arabia to demonstrate that public accountability is not an invention of colonization. Such accountability and public engagements remains an important element of modern governance. In my tenure as Director-General two significant policy developments facilitated public accountability and communication. The one development in this regard was the mechanism we initially called 'Exco-Meets-the-People,' which later came to be known as an 'Imbizo' in national

government. It enabled political leaders to account to citizens on the performance of their government and to interact with citizens on any matters of interest to the people of the local area. It enabled transparency and gave feedback to politicians on the impact of government resources and programs on ordinary people. It remains a useful tool to bring government closer to the people (Annual Report, 2002-3). Hartsliet (2009:331-334) indicates that izimbizo, or Exco-Meets-the People as we called it in the Free State Provincial Government, has, as a form of public participation, a defining role in governance and allows for:

- Participatory process;
- Establishing whether or not policy is still on track with the desired goal it is intended for;
- Informing the Annual Government Plans of Action (thus assisting with policy co-ordination to some extent, but to which more expansionary attention should be given especially in relation to the value of the raw data gained from the imbizo);
- Support such an approach and elaborate that the involvement of citizens in monitoring through new policy spaces enhances public and direct accountability through which policy-making can be shaped;
- Easy access to information and feedback systems, allowing effective monitoring for policy implementation and evaluation of intended policy outcomes and trend analysis;
- Opening the opportunity for performance measurement by citizens;
- Identifying weak political structures or individuals within the policy implementation and decision-making cycles;
- Informing decisions as to when to discontinue a program;
- Strengthening and mobilizing partnerships for measurement of accountability and transparency;
- Improving on local democracy and informed decision- making while at the same time allowing the centre of government an oversight role;
- Civic education or citizens learning and strengthening the knowledge base through information sharing;
- Re-evaluating civil rights and responsibilities;
- Facilitating access to information and communication with the public;
- Redefine the roles of political office- bearers and public officials; and

- Allows for nation building and social cohesion in a society deeply divided by past inequalities.

The other policy development relates to the implementation of Multi-Purpose Community Centres (MPCCs), which were later known as Thusong Centres. Whereas apartheid's spatial development architecture privileged historically white urban areas, the construction of MPCCs was a deliberate policy initiative by the new government to improve the access of rural communities to government services. During my tenure as Director- General of the Free State we established these in Namahadi (Qwaqwa), Onalerona (Thaba Nchu) and Botshabelo in the Free State (Annual Report, 2002-3). The GCIS 2012/13 Annual Report (p.38) estimates that about 3.1 million people countrywide received government services through Thusong Centres. The process of establishing these MPCCs still continues.

### **A litigious society**

The last twenty-one years of democracy has taught us that democracy has opened significant spaces for litigation. As a result, we have evolved to become a highly litigious society. It is no surprise then that many transactions conducted by government end up being subject to a judicial process. This makes it valuable and important for public servants to appreciate the relationship between the Executive and the Judiciary. The courts, after all, are the significant arbiters of disputes in society provided by the Constitution. This is one of the critical implications of South Africa's judicial shift from the supremacy of Parliament, as it was the reality during the reign of apartheid, to the supremacy of the Constitution.

### **The National Development Plan**

The adoption of the National Development Plan by South Africa's Cabinet and its key stakeholders presents an opportunity for public servants, and indeed the entire society, to have a common vision in addressing the country's triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Whilst public servants' role obliges them to create capacity and systems to respond to short-term challenges such as the shortage of medicine, potholes, provision of school textbooks, and providing light bulbs in the

courts, and thereby accelerate service delivery, they cannot afford to lose focus on the vision and key priorities of the NDP. It is a huge relief, therefore, that government departments have begun to prepare their Medium Term Strategic Plans in accordance with the priorities of the NDP. I am concerned, however, that the leadership only demonstrated a lot of commitment to the NDP at the point of adoption and now the state's advocacy of the NDP is a bit muted. We need more visible leadership of the NDP to sustain the country's focus on its implementation (see Parsons, 2015). Failing which, we may not realize the promise articulated by its vision and mission.

### **Fraud and Corruption**

The reports of the Auditor-General, the Public Protector, the law enforcement agencies as well as the media are replete with examples of wastage and corruption. This is not only a unique South African concern. Afegbua and Ejalonibu (20: p98) for example, in analysing emerging issues in public sector reform in Africa. The need to reform Global South administrative structures to ensure efficiency and reduce the likelihood of corruption is obvious. The ultimate aim of the public sector reform in most countries of the Global South is to see remarkable improvement in the public service outputs, such as more effective and responsive service deliveries. Fatile, Olojede and Adejuwon (20: p152) further emphasizes this concern by observing that: "The civil service in developing societies has been described as corrupt, inefficient and a big drain on the economy, despite all measures put in place to arrest performance failure, the service, it seems, has defied all approaches towards tackling the problem of inefficiency and capacity collapse. Corruption or 'black market' bureaucracy continues to flourish. As a result, the performance of the public servants tends to be sluggish, their coffee breaks prolonged, and their need for supervision constant. Available evidence shows that the performance of the public service in virtually all tiers of government and in extra-ministerial departments in developing societies has remained very abysmal, hence the present state of underdevelopment."

Such observations should be a source of great concern to Africans in general, and South Africans in particular. This is the public servants' major ethical responsibility to the nation and future generations combat fraud and corruption, and eliminate inefficiency wherever it exists. South Africa's present reality of low economic growth, high unemployment rate and high demands on our health system suggest we need to

mobilize every resource we can to invest not only in skills for youth, but also in income-producing economic activities to increase our society's wealth prospects. All means necessary, therefore, need to be deployed to discourage wastage and corruption and ensure that our development path is not derailed.

### **Skills Development**

In a world characterized mainly by technologically- driven change, attention need to be paid to upgrading the skills base of public servants. The pace of technological change in government departments does not seem to keep pace with society, and yet government must always maintain its leadership of society by keeping pace with change in society. This became obvious when, as the Chief Operations Officer in the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, I was assigned the task of leading the project to digitize court records. The purpose of the project was to eliminate problems associated with lost records, storage problems and enable easier access to records. The audit of public servants' record management skills revealed the chasm between what existed and technology can enable us to do. The project successfully digitized more than 5 million cases in ten courts countrywide and the process still continues (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development's Annual Report, 2014/15: p47-48).

The preponderance of cybercrime provides numerous examples in this regard. The local and international crime syndicates seem to have a technological edge compared to the local law enforcement agencies when it comes to the prevention of crimes such as identity theft, fraud, car theft and illegal money transfers. In addition, South Africa's competitors for global economic opportunities seem to have invested in technological skills and capacity in a way that we have not. Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, South Korea and Mauritius come to mind.

This is not to mention countries such as China and India, which, at one stage, had the same level of development indicators as South Africa. This, of course, reminds us that investment in upgrading the skills and competencies of public servants, needs to be supported by strong leadership, management and plausible strategic outlook.

The above reality of the demand to continuously upgrade the skills base of public servants prompted the Free State Provincial Government to establish the Free State Training and Development Institute in 2001 (Annual Report, 2002-3). In its first year of



existence in 2001 it trained 1071 public servants in different programs including finance, project management, HIV/aids, diversity management and customer care. The training and development programs continues to this day, and to date, most provincial governments have, fortunately, established these institutions including the National School of Government.

### **The Relationship between Tertiary Institutions and Government**

Improving the skills and competencies of public servants requires a much deeper exploration of how the relationship between tertiary education institutions and government departments and agencies can be strengthened in a way that is mutually beneficial to both. Public servants have, over the years, accumulated a wealth of experience of successes and failures in policy implementation. Such knowledge and experience, however, has not been fully shared, translated into research, and properly documented.

Tertiary institutions, on the other hand, while they have played an important role of providing qualifications to public servants, they seem not to have fully availed their teaching and research capacity to government departments to create a sustainable relationship between theory and practice. There are mutual benefits for both the public service and tertiary institutions if public servants are allowed to use tertiary education institutions as platforms to reflect, conduct research and document their daily practices. Tertiary education institutions, on the other hand, can use their immense research and teaching capacity to facilitate such reflection, supervise research and produce knowledge that will not only enable the country to address its most difficult challenges, but serve future generations.

### **Concluding remarks**

History teaches that twenty-one years in a life of a nation is a very short time to completely eliminate the poverty, inequality and high levels of unemployment currently experienced in South Africa. Similarly, experience especially in Asia and the developed world suggests it is not an impossible task. It requires a dedicated and focussed public service led by a visionary leadership to achieve our developmental goals for the sake of the next generation.

Establishing a new non-racial democracy in South Africa has encouraged new governance approaches, including emphasis on public participation in governance. This needs to be sustained. Attention needs to be paid, however, to combatting fraud and corruption, consistently upgrading the skills of public servants, accelerating the implementation of the National Development Plan, and encouraging and strengthening the relationship between tertiary education institutions and government departments to ensure that governance and service delivery are consistently informed by relevant research endeavours by tertiary institutions.

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