



INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

Op-ed

A people-driven state is required for national renewal ***Klaus Kotzé***

When the ANC gathers for its elective conference in December, observers' eyes and ears should not only be trained on politicians and factions. Instead, the resolutions of the conference, as the party's highest decision-making body, must be assessed so to perceive the party's next chapter.

In its 2022 policy conference documents, captured in a special edition of *Umrabulo*, the party recognises that its shift from a liberation movement to government has given rise to problems of capacity and organisation. These problems are associated with the self-enrichment by opportunists and the over-centralisation of social and economic control in the state, respectively. The policy conference documents call on the party to resolve its' inward-looking, overly centralised focus.

As redress, the documents advance the much touted yet poorly explained concept of renewal. For renewal to be more than a buzzword, it is incumbent upon the party structures and leadership to define what a renewed party and state would look like. Determining the required processes, structures, and outcomes. Identifying the roles of the party, state and citizenry.

In 2017 and again at the recent national policy conference, the party resolved to urgently build a capable, ethical and developmental state. This can be read as its interpretation of renewal. With this target in mind, appropriate policies and pragmatic pathways are required to comprehensively catalyse the roles of the party, state and citizenry. With a sizeable task at hand and due to existing incapacities and constraints, policy must create an enabling environment that stimulates active participation by all stakeholders.

The ruling party, in its commitment to renew itself, must give practical expression to its goal of establishing a state that is primarily focused on enabling development and creating social wellbeing of its people. It is critically important that the South African model of the developmental state is not dominated by centralising, statist forces such as those synonymous with East-Asian developmental states. There is no case to be made for an East-Asian type developmental state which runs contrary to the democratic principles of both the state and the ANC. The recent failures of the state, illustrated in the reports of the Zondo Commission, read together with the incapacity, historical disparity and the Constitutional mandate requiring meaningful citizen participation, prove that a statist approach is inappropriate and insufficient.

Instead of driving development, the state must fulfil a coordinating role, with an efficient bureaucracy, an effective administration and a long-term vision. Critically, it must also mobilise society and facilitate the developmental process. It should function as an entrepreneurial agent that crowds in private investment and rallies stakeholders to embrace and advance the national interest. It is, therefore, through preferencing a comprehensive people-driven and not a state-driven approach that a capable and ethical developmental state can be built in South African.

A people-driven developmental state responds to principles and values of both the ANC and the nation. The core principle of the Freedom Charter, as characterised by its founding statement, is that "the people shall govern". It sets out the hugely ambitious and transformative programme whereby

people, working in democratic concert, achieve self-actualisation. The Freedom Charter served as South Africa's lodestar to dispel the subjugation of colonialism and apartheid. As a united declaration of an undivided, sovereign people, the Freedom Charter informed the drafting of the new South African Constitution.

In its preamble, the Constitution gives expression to the principles and goals of the Freedom Charter. Its preamble does not only declare, "we, the people of South Africa...believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity", thereby overcoming separation or apartheid. The Constitution also takes forward the conviction that *the people shall govern*. It empowers and charges all people to actively participate in building a transformed country. Collaboratively, "we" must "heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and human rights...and build a united and democratic South Africa".

Herein, the Constitution, much like the Freedom Charter, lays great significance on the participation of the citizenry in the practice of governance and statehood. A just government would not only have to advance the will of the people. The citizenry must co-operate and co-develop the state. To legitimately lead South Africa, any ruling party, in abiding by the Constitutional principles and goals, would have to be people-centred in its orientation, while its administration would have to function in collaboration with the people, or be people-driven.

Through programmes such as RDP and frameworks such as Batho Pele (people first), the ANC government has undertaken a people-centred approach. While noble and just in their orientation, these programmes have centred power inwards into the administration. It has led to delivery dependency. The government placed a huge burden on itself to counteract the racialised delivery programme of the former regime. These programmes, in seeking to drive transformation, produced policy tools that would be government-driven and therefore susceptible to political influence. The party's policy formulation meant that the maxim of *the people shall govern* became suffixed by *through political representation*. Instead of ensuring Batho Pele, a culture developed where the politically connected overextended the power they wield.

In its 2017 national conference report, the ANC undertakes to recognise and address its shortcomings, which it describes as "a loss of confidence in the ANC because of social distance, corruption, nepotism, arrogance, elitism, factionalism, manipulating organisational processes, abusing state power, putting self-interest above the people". According to the party, it is only through a singular, renewed spirit that is awake to the realities of the land, that it can continue to play a defining role in South Africa's future. The resultant conference report suggested that "organisational renewal therefore is an absolute and urgent priority, and we may go as far as to say, to the survival of our great movement".

In his extraordinary letter to ANC members on 23 August 2020, ANC President Ramaphosa specified two sets of measures that "demonstrate clear political will", are "unflinching in restoring the values, ethics and standing of our organisation", and will help "win back people's trust". These, says Ramaphosa, are not his own views, but represent the mandate received by the national conference. It represents a renewed approach. The first set deals with ANC members. It describes the measures to be undertaken to "implement without delay the resolutions of our 54th National Conference in dealing with corruption". It is only by punishing offenders, by acting and being seen as acting to restore discipline that the party can become ethical and have any chance of truly renewing itself.

The second set enumerated in his letter pivots toward greater co-operative democracy. Ramaphosa, calls for the mobilisation of "a 'whole-of-society' response against corruption and (that) ANC members must support progressive organisations in their stand against corruption". Rallying for such an approach performs an important leadership role. It determines upon aspirational concepts. Describing the capable state to be one that is distributed and people-driven. Co-operative democracy is an

important concept that should be enumerated in the South African context. It refers to a state where government acts in consultation with the citizenry. According to former Deputy Finance, Minister Mcebisi Jonas, the various aspects of renewal should be subject to democratic public reasoning. He suggests that South Africa adopts co-operative democracy “as a guiding principle”.

Co-operative democracy departs from the ANC practice of consolidating state control, regardless of capacity and capability. It resolves the tension between a statist and a people-driven state where the party must lead and not dominate the state. This entails a capacitating or consultative role. An illuminating example of such a change of course is the President’s comment that “government does not create jobs. Business creates jobs”. This comment, an act of conceptual and strategic direction, reverberated throughout the country as an act of renewal. It presented a watershed moment that initiated a new chapter where development necessitates co-operation between all who have an interest in the state. This should not be seen as renegeing on power or responsibility. Instead, as is illustrated by the decision to permit up to 100MW of private power generation, it shows a state that enables itself when it enables others.

Deliberation and engagement are required for true co-operative democracy. While this may be a departure from recent resolutions, it is an approach that has been successfully used by the ANC in its past. When it first came to power, it employed a consultative and collaborative approach with such skill, that it strategically outplayed its political opponents. True renewal would, therefore, be underscored by an enabling power. Inclusion can yet again be used to the advantage of the party. “To be effective”, says Ramaphosa, a capable state underwritten by a comprehensive social compact “needs to include every South African and every part of our society. No one must be left behind”.

Dr Klaus Kotzé is a researcher attached to the Inclusive Society Institute. This article draws from the Institute’s soon to be published paper ‘A path towards renewal: An ethical, people-driven state’.