

## South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme: "A Better Life for All"

Daan Wessels

*Department of Political Science, University of the Orange Free State  
Bloemfontein, P O Box 339, Bloemfontein, 9300, South Africa  
email: fgdp@rs.uovs.ac.za*

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**ABSTRACT** The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the Macro-economic Strategy (GEAR) are the most comprehensive and detailed plan of action ever to be written in respect of government policy in South Africa. It forms the basis of the political, social and economic transformation of the South African community and is offered as "an integrated, coherent socio-economic policy framework" to be developed into "an effective programme of government". Its first priority is "to attack poverty and deprivation." The purpose of this article is to draw attention to certain critical aspects to be considered in the implementation of the RDP. This will assure early and long-term success in policy making and execution of the programme.

### INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION

As a concept, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) has gained prominence in popular language use among South Africans, and in many quarters the term has elicited expectations of a better life. The fact that many citizens identify with it as a symbol of a new beginning has led to frequent, rather idealistic references, to the RDP as South Africa's own Marshall Plan for reconstructing the country from the remnants of its apartheid past.

In recent years, South Africa and its inhabitants have undoubtedly experienced and participated in one of the most phenomenal processes of political transformation; that is, the orderly, yet rapid transfer or translocation of political power. Using a unique formula for democratization (i.e. a Government of National Unity), the country succeeded in initiating a process of constitutional transformation through a transitional constitution<sup>2</sup>.

The varying uses of the words "reform" and "transformation" allude to particular phases in

the process of democratization. Reform denotes a specific type of change. Huntington (1986: 344) refers to it as "a change in the direction of greater social, economic or political equality, a broadening of participation in society and polity". Transformation implies that if the process of change is taken to its logical conclusion, the "old" order is replaced *in toto* by a "new" (political, social and economic) order. The shift involves fundamental changes in terms of philosophical premises, values and norms, traditions and customs, as well as institutions. Changes that occur are fundamental, deep-rooted and, take place rapidly and incisively. However, without exception, the citizenry experience these events as traumatic. In the South African situation, it is probably more traumatic because changes introduced by the old order (i.e. the apartheid dispensation) were of an incremental nature. Incremental change means that change is subject to retaining the fundamental values of the old order (cf. Dye 1992: 4-5). For example, the policy of apartheid went through various phases of modification: apartheid > separate development > plural (multi-ethnic) development > consociational democracy; however, time and again, the philosophy that introduced the original doctrine of apartheid was retained, namely, segregation on the basis of race and colour. What had started initially as "reform" initiated by B.J. Vorster and P.W. Botha in the seventies and eighties, eventually culminated in "transformation" (more specifically "power-sharing" as a mode of change) in the nineties (see Huntington, 1991: 114-5; 154-5).

At the heart of the transformation process and the accompanying democratization of South African society is the RDP; in the words of Mr. Mandela "the cornerstone of building a better

life of opportunity, freedom and prosperity" (South African Yearbook, 1995-1997c: 1). The RDP, which emanated from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in the early nineties<sup>3</sup>, is presented, "[as] an integrated, coherent socio-economic policy framework," to be developed "[into] an effective programme of government," with its first priority "to attack poverty and deprivation" (ANC, 1994: 1-4). Six basic principles are at the heart of the political and socio-economic philosophy that informs the RDP, namely that "it should be an integrated and sustainable programme; it must be a people-driven process; there must be peace and security for all; there must be nation-building in order to eliminate the historical division of society into first and third world; reconstruction and development should be linked, as opposed to the view that growth and development or growth and redistribution, are contradictory processes; the people affected by the programme and policies must participate in the decision-making process" (ANC, 1994: 4-7).

The proposals, strategies and policy programmes, as encapsulated in the RDP, are grouped into and presented under five main, mutually integrated policy programmes: "meeting basic needs; developing the country's human resources; building the economy; democratising the state and society; implementing the RDP" (ANC, 1994: 7-13).

Upon his election as President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Mandela made the following statement: "My government's commitment, to create a people-centred society of liberty, binds us to the pursuit of goals of freedom from want, freedom from hunger, freedom from deprivation, freedom from ignorance, freedom from suppression and freedom from fear. These freedoms are fundamental to the guarantee of human dignity" (Mandela, 1994: 9).

In this quotation, he provides an account of the overall aims of the RDP. These aims are articulated as follows: "The programme must embark upon nation-building. South Africa is a single country, with a single economy, functioning within a constitutional framework that establishes provincial and local powers, respect and protection for minorities, and a process to accommodate those wishing to retain their cul-

tural identity. It is on the basis of this unity in diversity that national sovereignty will be consolidated" (South African Yearbook, 1995-1997c: 2).

Given that the previous regime and constitutional dispensation were unable to establish a unified South African nation, one has to note what Johnson (1996: 3) has posited as three important aspects of nation-building, namely: "[...] there was to be a huge push towards national development; there was to be a heavily increased delivery of welfare towards the disadvantaged majority, thus fully incorporating them within the nation for the first time; and there was to be a multi-faceted effort to 'build one nation' through a process of racial reconciliation and through the transformation of institutions (schools, the media, universities, the army, etc.) to help mould a single common South Africanism".

For this reason, the RDP deals with three core concepts, namely: "South African society is in need of transformation and renewal; [South African society is in need of] a comprehensive redesign and reconstruction of existing activities; [and] the Reconstruction and Development Programme sets out to integrate growth, development, reconstruction, redistribution and reconciliation into a unified programme" (ANC, 1994: 2-6).

#### THE RDP AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

In respect of transformation, the RDP has the following goal: "Reconstruction and development require a population that is empowered through expanded rights, meaningful information and education, an institutional network fostering representative and indirect democracy, and participatory and direct democracy" (ANC, 1994: 120).

Given the central role of the empowerment principle in this stated objective, this would mean, firstly, the prevalence of a mature population, who are entitled to extensive rights which are constitutionally<sup>4</sup> entrenched in a Bill of Rights; secondly, a population fully engaged in the political processes of the state (a general franchise, regular free elections, the existence of a

multi-party system, and interest groups that function independently of the government).

Pillay (1996: 325) thus outlines the relationship between the RDP and the political transformation of society: "The RDP and the transition to democracy in South Africa are characterized by the simultaneity of two democratic traditions, namely that of traditional parliamentary or representative democracy, and that of grassroots participatory democracy. Parliamentary (representative) democracy ... had until 1994 been the domain of the white political élite (with limited participation by black élites in the tricameral system, and in the bantustans. On the other hand, participatory democracy has (in varying degrees) been articulated and practised by a vast range of black and non-racial social movements that emerged since the early 1970s".

Whereas indirect democracy is based on the principle of representation, representative democracy demands optimal popular participation in the political processes. This is a philosophy that can only be given form in a society based on the principles of modern pluralism, which implies "extensive participation in the political process through competing and autonomous groups" (Winter and Bellows, 1992: 40). This philosophy of empowerment also informs democratization philosophy which is at the heart of the RDP and can be articulated as follows: "The Reconstruction and Development Programme's vision is one of democratising power, which means that all South Africans must have access to power and the right to exercise their power" (South African Yearbook, 1995-1997d: 2).

Given the political democratization aims of the RDP<sup>5</sup>, it is clear that the pluralist political philosophy is fundamental to the political transformation of South African society (ANC, 1994: 120-1). This philosophy or model of social order is in stark contrast to the élitist approach of a governing élite, which has been typical of political life in recent decades.<sup>6</sup> The creative objectives of an open, democratic society is an ideal to be commended in all respects and which has to be shaped in our society so that one may ensure full integration into the international political order or world of modern states, and, moreover, to ensure that the élitist nature of the apart-

heid era (a minority dictatorship) is not merely replaced by a new élitism (a majority dictatorship).

To achieve the ideal of a political democracy, the government will have to familiarize itself, firstly, with the unique nature and function of the state as a typical social institution (Winter and Bellows, 1992: 26) in distinction from the place and role of the multiplicity of non-political institutions (Bullock and Stallybrass, 1977: 316). Given the unique place and function of the state in a democratic society, the state may never allow its function to be undermined from the non-political environment nor to be scaled down by interest and/or pressure groups; nor may it allow its governing function of policy-making and decision-making to be a slavish response to the demands and threats of organized interest and/or pressure groups. The democratization of the state (and society) does not presuppose a hyper-pluralistic society where the essence of general interest must retreat before the sum total of specific interests. If this were the case, it would be a recipe for what may be typified as "non-political anarchy"; in other words, where the authority of the state is compromised and debased from the non-political environment (Winter and Bellows, 1992: 107-8). As a vital instrument in the process of democratization, the state will have to guard against sacrificing its unique place and functioning in society through a hyper-pluralism (or over-democratization) in favour of organized (non-political) social institutions and/or interest groups.

Against the backdrop of the preceding argument, it is also important to point out that, judged from a historical perspective, the origins of the state as a social institution are rooted primarily in man's social needs (Roskin *et al.*, 1994: 35 and Locke, 1952: 70-73). The RDP is also committed to this historically-founded need (South African Yearbook, 1995 1997c: 2).

With regard to the "task of the state" (within the meanings associated with the concepts "protection", "order" and "justice") Lipson (1985: 43-50) argues that a developed society's social order is structured on the basis of a multiplicity of group relations or institutions through which people, as social beings, organize the multitude of their needs. This would mean, in effect, that

the function of protecting life and property is extended through the creation of a security network (Lipson, 1985: 50). The preceding argument is related to the fact that, in spite of the acceptance that the original function of the state is located in "protection", it must or is supposed eventually to develop a far more comprehensive task which would include "order" and "justice". These are successive objectives that can be achieved only if the state is willing to utilize (sometimes unpopular) means at its disposal ("protection by force", "order by power" and "justice by authority" cf. Lipson, 1985: 54-56) to impose stable and legitimate order in the long term rather than to gain short-term popularity through an unwillingness to act decisively.

As a transitional society, the "new" South African state and government are under threat of anti-democratic actions; actions in which the political violence of the past has been substituted by an unprecedented crime wave, and the threat of social disintegration.

That the government (and therefore the state) regard the situation with great seriousness and concern, is evident, among others, from their implementing a National Crime Prevention Strategy,<sup>7</sup> whose intention is crime prevention rather than crime control. The government will have to act rapidly and effectively in its implementation of this strategy in order to counter escalating anarchy so that the government may show its commitment to the ideals of a democratic social order in general, and a political democracy in particular.

As far as political democracy is concerned, one has to note that, structurally speaking, the core principles that are prerequisites for establishing a functional democracy must be maintained in a constitutional sense by implementing well-established democratic practices such as creating three levels of government, separating power at all levels of government, maintaining independent monitoring institutions such as the Constitutional Court, the Public Protector, the Human Rights Commission and the Commission for Gender Equality, the Auditor General and the Electoral Commission. These democratic values and practices are entrenched by the supreme authority of the constitution, particularly Section 2, which states: This Constitution

is the supreme law of the Republic; law or conduct inconsistent with it is invalid, and the obligations imposed must be fulfilled (RSA, 1996: 3). In this way, the long tradition of parliamentary sovereignty in South African political practice was suspended. Chapter 3 of the final constitution presents, among others, the following principles of co-operative government: effective, transparent, accountable and coherent government for the Republic as a whole; respect for the constitutional status, institutions, powers and functions of government in the other spheres (provincial and local) (RSA, 1996: 27):

#### THE RDP AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Another broad terrain on which the RDP focuses is the social transformation of society, namely, "to address the problems of poverty and gross inequality evident in almost all aspects of South African society" (ANC, 1994: 14). Starting from this premise, the appeal of the RDP is aimed firstly at "meeting basic needs: people should become part of the decision-making process of job-creation, land reform, housing, water and sanitation, health care, social security and social welfare" (ANC, 1994: 16). As specified here, this would mean the empowerment of the individual and the community in decision-making that pertains to basic needs that are valid in a universal sense.

Against this background, however, an appeal has to be directed at the state, which should not become a mere consenting partner in an over-democratized society, but which, at all times, should govern the country in accordance with the democratic principle that the interests of the majority should be met. This, according to Ranney (1996: 31) would mean, that "the government must satisfy the needs that made the people decide to accept a government. Government must sift through the many political demands constantly besieging it, blend demands into public policies, and enforce those policies in such a way that no major group of citizens feels compelled to tear the nation apart".

Secondly, the appeal is directed at "developing our human resources: the Reconstruction and Development Programme deals with education

from primary to tertiary level and from child care to advanced scientific and technological training" (ANC, 1994: 60). Human resources development constitutes one of the core programmes of the RDP. At the core is an education and training system that expresses the vision of "opening the doors of learning and culture to all". Human resources development is rooted in the concept of "empowerment". Unlike assigning political rights, empowerment would imply the following: "The RDP sees education and training as a broad-based set of activities, without boundaries in time and place. The underlying goal is that all South Africans should have access to lifelong learning" (South African Yearbook, 1995-1997e: 1). Education and training, based on the principles of non-racialism, non-sexism, justice and fairness, and a commitment to the objective of lifelong learning, are principles of empowerment without which the democratic demand of equal opportunities cannot come to fruition.

Given the two stated core principles of social transformation, the question arises as to how the government will give form to this vision and demand that it be encapsulated in the RDP. The question is whether the goal is to be realized through a welfare-state approach (McNaughton, 1996: 25, 80), a classical-liberal approach (McNaughton, 1996: 68), a neo-liberal approach (McNaughton 1996: 70), or a modern-liberal approach (McNaughton, 1996: 70-71)

Which route the ANC government should follow in democratizing the social order is certainly not an easy choice. It would be far easier to sound warnings against directions they should not pursue than to identify specific, pre-defined directions. However, if the goals of the RDP be taken as yardstick, namely, that the programme should serve as a socio-economic programme of upliftment aimed at creating a requisite living space for social change and economic welfare, all the factors that pertain to the South African situation would have to be accounted for in such an approach.

In terms of *Real Politics*, the state should in the first place work towards democratizing the social order rather than pursuing the unaffordable classical welfare state with its extensive social and welfare programmes (1993: 93). One has to

guard against merely equating democratization with the classical welfare state. The South African economy does not have the capacity of a developed economy. Moreover, South Africa has an economically active population of 14,4 million (71 % of the total labour force) within a limited labour market<sup>8</sup>. Against this cryptic, factual background on the nature of the South African economy, it is self-evident that social transformation is unachievable if a predominantly welfare-based approach is followed.

#### THE RDP AS AN INSTRUMENT OF ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

As stated in the RDP, economic transformation is intended, among other things, to achieve the following goals: to address the scope of economic needs through job creation; to alleviate and to eradicate chronic poverty; to address economic inequalities and structural problems in, *inter alia*, industry and trade, mining, the agricultural, financial and labour markets; integration into the international economy; the phasing out of any discriminatory employment, training and promotion practices in the economy; the development of human abilities as a production factor in the economy; the democratization of the economy; and, the development of a growing and balanced regional economy (ANC, 1994: 79-80).

The current economic crisis in the South African economy emanates, on the one hand, from international isolation and punitive economic measures that were applied by the international community during the apartheid era. On the other hand, the crisis derives from structural crises (Scholtz and Scholtz, 1996: 79). This dualism is expressed in terms of the existence of structural imbalances such as pronounced race-orientated class differences, expressed in terms of wealth and income; a statutory race-based labour division; and the low productivity levels of a large unskilled labour force. These imbalances have necessarily exerted an inhibiting effect on the expansion of economic activity and economic growth.

As in the social field, one may become involved in the process of democratization of the economy, utilizing certain economic practices that may have a decisive impact on the degree

and scope of success of the RDP, as well as the democratization of the economy in general. Social Democrats argue that a true democracy must reflect the characteristics of both a political democracy and an economic democracy (Levine, 1993: 40). Democratic socialism is related to these ideas; however, this point of view contends that an economic democracy (cf. Levine, 1993: 41 and Ranney, 1971: 95) is the exclusive element of a democracy.

In contrast to these forms of a command economy, we find the free-market system, which is defined "as an economic system characterized by private property competition, a market economy, and freedom of managerial decision" (Levine, 1993: 90-1).

Without making an explicit choice, it is stated in the RDP that neither a "commandist central planning system" nor "an unfettered free market system" will have the capacity effectively to address the country's economic problems. The RDP envisages, as a policy position, a "leading as well as an enabling role for the state; the government must play a leading and enabling role in guiding the economy and the market towards reconstruction and development" (ANC, 1994: 78-81). In the search for the golden mean between the two extreme poles (socialist centralism and an unfettered free-market system), the answer for a society in transition will probably be found in the economic model of a social-democratic approach because this approach is feasible within the economization parameters of the RDP, and that of, the government (GEAR).

The GEAR, which was announced on 14 June 1996, provides an indication that the government does not want to guide the economy in a socialist direction. The macro-economic framework is a strategy that may allow South Africa to escape from the threatening impact of African socialism if the strategy be taken to its full and logical conclusion. President Mandela (in Parliament on 7 February 1997) also pointed out that this macro-economic strategy would contain "critical signposts" in guiding government programmes, such as growth in export production, infra-structural development, the restructuring of state assets, decreasing the budget deficit, human resource development, and a comprehensive policy for labour relations. Job creation

and a fair redistribution of wealth are defined as critical features of the strategy (Mandela, 1997: 8).

It is indeed the case that when all factors are considered, only a strong movement on the basis of a strategic macro-economic plan towards a market economy will be effective. The single most important support factor, namely direct investment capital, required for economic growth and a "rolling" (wealth-creating) economy, may be obtained in meaningful amounts from the large industrial countries of the world (in particular the G-7 countries) on a scale that will ensure a minimum real economic growth rate of 6 per cent by the year 2000. According to De Wet and Van der Walt (1994: 111-2), the South African economy can grow at an average of approximately 3 per cent per year in real terms in case of a zero net financial capital flow on the balance of payments. If the goal be to achieve an average growth rate of 5 per cent or higher - which should be the accepted goal to address unemployment meaningfully, and to counteract this problem - South Africa will have to, given the current structure of the South African economy, secure a minimum net capital inflow of R3 to R5 billion. Before the 1994 election, the situation was one of a net capital outflow in the region of R5 billion per year since 1985. It is important for the RDP that a turn-about should be achieved in net capital flow in the region of R8 to R10 billion per year. More importantly, it is required that a net capital inflow of at least R3 to R5 billion be achieved per year for several years in succession.

Given these prerequisites, De Wet (1994: 21) claims that the government, in its implementation of the RDP, which also encapsulates, amongst other things, an economic strategy of transformation, "should get rid of the internal incompatibilities and the underlying mistrust in the market system and concomitant desire to direct, lead, control and supervise the entire economy. Should it become a programme of action for the government, while promoting competition as the disciplinary force for the market or private sector, it possesses all the potential to break the low equilibrium growth trap and propel South Africa into sustained, high growth and development."

South Africa already accounts for four fifths

of the Gross National Product in the Southern African region, as well as approximately 80 per cent of the total annual trade of approximately R136 000 million in the region (Scholtz and Scholtz (1997: 75083). Therefore, the successful implementation of GEAR may also imply an economic revival of the member countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) so that eventually a significant economic power bloc may be formed in the region, where the regional countries may have a unified voice, and will be able to compete as an economic unit with other power blocs, such as the European Market. The RDP articulates the view that the South African economy cannot be expanded in isolation of its Southern African neighbours: "If South Africa attempts to dominate its neighbours, it will restrict their growth, reducing their potential as markets, worsening their unemployment, and causing migration to South Africa" (ANC 1994: 11).

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, I commit myself to the view that the RDP, and GEAR, represent the most comprehensive and detailed action plan of its kind that has ever been passed as government policy in South Africa. To the ANC, it has meant a paradigm shift to move away from a liberation movement to a political party and a government. Moreover, the ANC is a government that has to guide a transitional society in terms of the high expectations that were elicited by the RDP in the period prior to the election of April 1994. Luiz (1994: 13) states, *inter alia*, that "South Africa's transition to political democracy is being accompanied by extra-ordinary, unrealistic expectations that only Utopia could fulfil. It is falsely believed by many that political freedom will result in the immediate economic emancipation of all from poverty".

Trapped within the poles of political freedom and economic empowerment, a stable transition in South Africa is also under threat from the politically liberated masses' perception of the discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities. Gurr (1970: 24) remarks in this regard that "value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people

believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of getting and keeping."

The question now arises as to whether the politicization of the RDP in the period prior to the election in 1994 had not already institutionalized the potential conflict between expectations and capabilities, and that the institutionalization of these conflicting forces in a relatively deprived society (cf. Amstutz, 1982: 340) may indeed have resulted in the crime wave and the many cases of corruption because the RDP did not meet the immediate expectations of economic empowerment. It is indeed the case because expectations preceded the process, instead of the process shaping the expectations. The reverse order in the process of transformation is self-evident, in the words of Gurr (1970: 24), who contends that "relative deprivation is greatest with respect to discrepancy affecting economic values, less with respect to security and community values and least with respect to participation, self-realization, or status".

However, the National Crime Prevention Strategy, the Code of Conduct for Public Servants, and GEAR provide definite indications that the government would like to guide the RDP in the direction the policy document and transformation strategy intended: "The RDP is focused on people's immediate needs and it relies, in turn, on their energies. Development is not about the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry. It is about active involvement and growing empowerment" (South African Yearbook 1995-1997c: 2).

#### NOTES

1. South Africa's Government of National Unity is an elected, constitutionally defined multi-party government that consists of seven political parties. The parties are: the African National Congress (252 seats); the National Party (82 seats); the Inkatha Freedom Party (43 seats); the Freedom Front (9 seats); the Democratic Party (7 seats); the Pan Africanist Congress (5 seats), and the African-Christian Democratic Party (1 seat). A Government of National Unity was constituted in terms of the stipulations of South Africa's transitional constitution, Act 200 of 1993 [sections 77(1)(a) and 84(1)]. (South African Government, 1997a: 1-2; South African Yearbook, 1995-1997b: 1).
2. The transitional constitution specifies various

transitional arrangements with regard to the public service, the police, defence force and traditional institutions of the previous regime or dispensation; moreover, it contains specific arrangements for the processes of writing and accepting a final constitution. The transitional constitution was announced on 28 January 1994 and came into effect on 27 April 1994.

3. Cf. Von Holdt (1991: 14-33) in which the RDP is seen as a joint product of the South African Communist Party, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the South African National Civics Organization, the National Education Coordinating Committee, and the ANC "[as] the most significant statement on South African society since the ANC's Freedom Charter was adopted in 1955" (South African Yearbook, 1995-1997c: 2).
4. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, stipulates in Chapter 2 (as a Bill of Human Rights) in sections 7(1) and 7(2): This Bill of Rights is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. The state must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights (RSA, 1996: 6).
5. "Apart from introducing and maintaining a system of one-person-one-vote, the RDP envisages a system of ongoing, participatory democracy. All people will participate in a wide variety of fora and institutions, from grassroots level upwards, at community, local, sectoral, provincial and national level, in decision-making and in policy formulation" (ANC, 1994: 119-135; De Wet, 1994: 6).
6. Prominent contributions to the literature, such as those of Gaetano Mosca (1896), Vilfredo Pareto (1935) and Robert Michels (1920) articulate the role of élites and governing classes in various societies.
7. The full text is known as the *National Crime Prevention Strategy*, and is available at the following Internet address: South African Government (Inter-departmental Strategy Team) (1992, March 2). *National Crime Prevention Strategy* [Online]. Available: <http://www.sacs.org.za/gov/defence/docs/crime1.htm>.
8. In SA 59 per cent of the economically active population work in the formal sector, and 12 per cent in the informal sector; currently 29 per cent of the 4,2 million economically active population are unemployed.

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