

DPME has not yielded any material results – it's just plans without implementation

By **Zakhele Mbhele MP** - DA Shadow Minister of the Presidency

Year after year, ANC governments have announced plans and programmes but fallen short on achieving them to address South Africa's governance, social and economic challenges. We have been witness to a never ending stream of promises without performance, intentions without implementation, and policies without political will.

Economic growth is in chronic stagnation, job creation is in reverse gear, and the opportunities, and increasingly the stomachs, of too many of our people are shrinking in the face of our current crisis of rising living costs and food insecurity. The prospect of hope is rapidly shrinking, and the future for the youth and most vulnerable is a dark and gloomy horizon.

Ten years after the adoption of the National Development Plan, this prevailing situation in our country is very far from the story we should have been telling about current reality measured against the NDP. Given that one of the key mandates of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation is facilitating the implementation of the NDP, it is clearly failing in that mandate.

Just this week, the Portfolio Committee received a monitoring report presentation from the Department in which it admitted that since the NDP was adopted, progress has been slow towards achieving its main goals and that South Africa is under-performing on various targets. Eight years in, we are nowhere near the lofty ambitions of eradicating poverty, or creating 11 million new jobs.

While we acknowledge that the DPME is not an implementation or delivery agent, it does need to demonstrate its merits more concretely through consistent follow-ups and leveraging of its position at the nerve centre hub of government, as the Minister himself conceded to SCOPA earlier this year concerning complaints of SIU reports gathering dust, despite corruption findings across the state.

Statistical research findings by the Department such as more than 40% of the population living below the poverty line and a country Gini coefficient of 0.68, keeping in the No. 1 spot as the most unequal in the world, should have long set off huge alarm bells that triggered massive, radical and urgent action to tackle the factors underlying structural unemployment and drive novel interventions.

As a planning department, one is pressed to ask, "Where is the clear and convincing practical plan, facilitated by DPME, to stimulate economic growth to at least 4% per year?" As a monitoring and evaluation department, one is also pressed to ask, "Why are shortcomings with reaching performance targets not leading to capacity-building and remedial corrections?" Surely the Presidency has the power to do so?

But any informed observer of the governing party will already know that the Presidency does *not* have the power to help translate planning into performance, or monitoring and evaluation into meritocracy

and innovation, because the ANC in government is run on cadre deployment, and its animating lifeblood is patronage and political horse-trading.

Under such conditions, there is no fitness-for-purpose, no accountability, and no drive for achievement, let alone excellence. Instead, there is loyalty-for-reward, impunity for failure, and bumbling mediocrity at best or catastrophic incompetence at worst.

We need look no further than the shocking amateur hour that was the woeful preparedness and response of ANC governments and political office-bearers to the July 2021 riots and KZN floods this year. Unsurprisingly, no heads have rolled or consequences sanctioned for those in high government office who let citizens down as they faced chaos, destruction of infrastructure, and loss of lives and livelihoods.

The small ray of hope that shone through during those disasters as they unfolded and in their aftermath was a gritty demonstration of the adage that the things that are wrong in South Africa – poor governance, dysfunction, incompetence and mismanagement – can be fixed by what is right about South Africa – the resilience, decency, enterprising spirit, and pragmatism of ordinary people, working to benefit their families and communities.

One of the seminal scenario planning exercises ever produced in South Africa is the Dinokeng Scenarios, whose optimal scenario called “Walk Together” could also be described as the achievement of the vision of the National Development Plan. In that vision, a capable state and active citizens work together to fulfil the potential of South Africa for the realisation of social cohesion and shared prosperity.

Its worst scenario is called “Walk Apart”, in which disappointed citizens who no longer trust the government after multiple failures, essentially disengage from the weak and ineffective state. Already there have been growing signs of this “walking apart” for close to 20 years: as trust diminished in state schooling, government healthcare and policing, citizens who could afford to have switched to relying primarily on private education, healthcare and security.

As the state-run freight and commuter rail service gradually ground to dysfunction, businesses switched to private freight trucking and commuters switched to private taxi transport services. And more recently, as intensified load-shedding exposes the terminal decline of Eskom, households and businesses are switching from state-run power generation and supply to private alternatives that minimise or eliminate these disruptions.

The simple truth, Minister, is that unless the planning, monitoring and evaluation work of this Department starts to yield material and positive results, then the households, businesses, communities, and competent local and provincial governments in this country will increasingly find themselves having to “walk apart” from an ineffective and incompetent state, to do their own planning, their own monitoring and evaluation, and their own implementation to secure their desired future.

