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Public Sector Reforms and Policy Making: A Case of Education in a Democratic Developmental South Africa

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Abstract

This paper discusses broad public sector reforms and it presents some perspectives on public policy making in South Africa, within the context of ensuring a developmental state. The focus is on “outcomes” of the reforms undertaken in education, with particular attention to general schooling – we draw from various studies and reports, such as the Council on Higher Education’s Higher Education Monitor (2007), the Human Resource Development Review (2008), the report on the Fifteen Year Review (2008) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s 2008 Reviews of National Policies for Education.

It is argued that in light of the unemployment challenge, and other fundamental socio-economic challenges and the objective of launching a democratic developmental South Africa as a formidable globally competitive economy, it is important to be honest about the serious challenges within the schooling and higher education systems as key direct areas of interface between citizens and labour market/the economy. It is concluded that attention should be paid especially to not only improving access but the quality education. It is also concluded that the immense administrative/organisational, academic and funding challenges in the higher education sector, as well matters relating to identity in the higher education environment, are important to consider so that South Africa can soberly reflect on its stance as an actor within the global economic system.

The paper also pursues an argument that further education will not flourish and benefit the society until appropriate structural features have been put in place. In the same vein, the quality of leadership in the South African society and economy is going to be decisive if we are to build a society united in its diversity and an economy that can sail the tumultuous global seas to prosperity for all. Clearly, the quality of the leadership South Africa develops is dependent on the quality of the institutions developed and more particularly on the educators within all levels of the education system. To fully achieve the developmental state, the education system – especially the higher education sector, of course benefiting from an appropriate general education system – has to address a number of philosophical and practical questions.

In essence, the implication of this paper is that a possible second phase of the reforms in the education sector may be ideal. In fact, it could be argued that reforms undertaken since 1994, though they have largely accomplished intended objectives, have not gone far enough. So even though the policy making processes and institutions for policy making are relatively sound, the specific sectoral reforms warrant another look if South Africa is to be fully a developmental state – a definition of a developmental state is crafted, drawing from relevant literature such as Johnson (1982; 1999), Onis (1991), Amsden (1989), Evans (1995; 2007), Leftwich (1995), Castells (1997), Robinson and White (1998), Bagchi (2000) and Mkandawire (2001) and other relevant studies such as Cummings and Nørgaard (2004) and the World Development Report of 1997.

1. Introduction

It appears incontrovertible that reforming the public sector in South Africa begun in earnest immediately after the first democratic elections in 1994. The appointment of the Presidential Review Commission to investigate the reforms required¹ was one of significant steps taken. According to the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (1995) government opted for the Strategic Change Management Approach. This model was believed to encapsulate the vision and mission for the transformed, integrated and equitable public service based on the following principles: new forms of managerial leadership, decentralisation of decision-making power, the democratisation of internal work procedures and inclusion of civil society organisations into governance process and development of an appropriate professional culture/ethos. In essence, the aspects of the model adopted epitomise reforms associated with New Public Management (NPM) and Third Generation Reforms as described in relevant literature (see for instance, Halligan 2007).

Such reforms permeated many other areas of public policy making in South Africa. Gumede (2008a) elaborates this claim, when he argues that the public policies that South Africa has pursued since 1994 and the manner in which they are undertaken constitute an attempt to mediate the neo-classical economic (or neo-liberal) thinking, including constraints imposed by theories (such as public choice theory) on development – contrary to characterisation of South African public sector reforms by scholars such as Wenzel (2007). Further, Gumede argues that South Africa has established ideal institutions for the policy-making processes and that South Africa encapsulates most of the salient features of a democratic developmental state.

This paper discusses some of the significant reforms in policy making that have found expression in South Africa's education policies and programmes since the advent of democracy. Focus is on the general schooling system wherein special attention is paid to the implementation of policies regarding the organization, governance and funding of schools as well as the curriculum reforms. In addition, it alludes to issues of reforms within the higher education landscape. Similarly, other education sub-sectors such as Early Childhood Development (ECD), Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and Further Education and Training (FET) are briefly discussed as a matter of reference. Lastly, as a context for analysis, we present a brief perspective on South Africa's public policy making processes.

¹

White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (1995)

In the main, we argue that if democratic South Africa is to produce informed, productive and progressive citizens who value and practice the principles enshrined in the constitution, it has to have an education to match. Therefore, transforming the previously inequitable and fragmented system to an integrated and equitable one was not only important but a constitutional and moral imperative.

In the same breath, we contend that serious challenges still remain especially with regard to the contradictions brought about by the implementation of the reforms. For instance, the situation in previously disadvantaged and former white schools and the continued mismatch between the realities in SA's education system and the needs of a rapidly growing economy as well as challenges facing the higher education sector seem to need innovation and vigour in the conceptualization, implementation and management of interventions for improving access to and the quality of education.

As an important aside perhaps, it is important to note that the discussion is located within the context of a grim backdrop in relation to the socio-economic status of the primary beneficiaries of education; the youth. Since the advent of democracy, one of the most vexing policy challenges facing government is that of rampant and continued youth unemployment. According to a Towards a Fifteen Year Review (2008) in 2007 youth unemployment stood at 22% for young males and 35% for young females. The link between this sad reality and the education system manifests itself in challenging ways. This is further corroborated by an alarming figure of 2.6 million unemployed youth amongst those between the ages of 14 and 24 as a recently released report by the Centre for Development and Enterprise (2008) estimates. As expected, the majority of youth within this bracket are black, women and unskilled.

In the context of socio-economic transformation, this paper argues that reforms in the education system since 1994 have been necessary and have worked relatively well in improving the governance of the education system, access to education and so forth. This is visible in notable strides being made towards more inclusive, equitable and efficient policy making processes between government and social partners and amongst the national and provincial levels as facilitated by various pertinent policies and legislation². For instance, the Development Indicators (2008) shows that after 1999 the senior certificate pass rate improved substantially, reaching 73% in 2003; although in period between 2004 and 2007 has seen a slight drop in the pass rate each year.

² The progress being made in the South African educational landscape is acknowledged by many, not only by government. For instance, the Higher Education Monitor (2007) report of the Council on Higher Education acknowledges progress, notwithstanding challenges, that has been made in the higher education area.

The next section briefly discusses broad public sector reforms. Section three presents some perspectives on public policy making in South Africa, within the context of creating a developmental state. We then discuss “outcomes” of the reforms undertaken in education, with particular attention to general schooling.

2. Public Policy Reforms in South Africa

It is broadly agreed that within public management there has been a progression from the “traditional administration” models to “managerialism” to the “New Public Management” to what can now be termed Third Generation Reforms (TGRs) such as the “integrated governance” model. In a nutshell, the New Public Management (NPM) is an approach of “managing” the public services in a manner that applies principles of “management” traditionally associated with the private sector or market economy. Halligan (2007: 219), drawing from Hood (1991), mentions “disaggregation, privatization and private focus” as the features of the NPM that are “at the forefront”. Bale and Dale (1998: 119) list the following elements as descriptors of the notion of NPM: “a move away from input controls, rules, and procedures towards output measurement and performance targets – the accountability framework; the devolution of management control with improved reporting and monitoring mechanisms; a preference for private ownership, contestable provision, and contracting-out of publicly funded services; the adoption of private-sector management practices in the public sector, such as short term contracts, performance-linked remuneration schemes...”. Larbi (1999: 13) mentions various forms of decentralisation of management within public services, increasing use of (private sector) markets and competition in the provision of public services and increasing emphasis on performance, outputs and customer orientation as amongst the key elements of the NPM. The TGRs are largely associated with improving coordination and integration, including strengthening those issues that deal with coordination and monitoring and evaluation. Lastly, “traditional management” and “managerialism” approaches are those associated with Confucius, Han Fei Tzu, Marx Weber and Woodrow Wilson – the earlier thinkers on public management. Perhaps to add, another important aspect of the governance arrangements that South Africa has put in place could be characterised as a combination of “distributed institutional monopoly” and “institutional pluralism” to borrow from Cohen and Peterson’s (1999) administrative design framework – in effect, this implies a combination of various forms and types of decentralisation.

According to literature, the majority of African states that imported Public Sector Reforms (PSRs) have been left wanting partly due to the lethargic pace of their democratization, weak economies and so on (Adamokelun, 2005). In addition, analysts contend that another determinant of the success of PSRs in developing countries is local leadership and ownership (Schacter, 2000). At the time that South Africa embarked on the reforms around mid-to-late 1990s, these conditions were clearly evident as the reform process was driven at the highest level and the fact that there was debate about such changes demonstrated that there was a

demand for such. Gumede (2008a) suggests that in the case of South Africa the reforms were not as arbitrarily imported. This is backed up by Adamokelen (2005) who classifies South Africa in the category of advanced reformers. The other important issue regarding South Africa is that its reforms involved some “home-grown” approaches³. So, although there are still aspects of “traditional management” and “managerialism” in the South African public sector, it appears that there is more of NPM and even more of Third Generation Reforms, such as integrated governance approach.

South Africa, for almost a decade now, is immersed in the “integrated governance” or rather the “joined-up” phase. This is evidenced, amongst others, by the state’s configuration across the three spheres of government; the existence and function of the Policy Coordination and Advisory Services (Policy Unit) located in the South African state presidency which does not only deal with policy making and its various components such as policy analysis, policy coordination and policy advice, but also leads medium to long range planning as well as government-wide monitoring and evaluation.

In relation to education, the reality is that upon assuming state control, the democratic government inherited an education and training system fraught with imbalances due to apartheid policies. The educational vision of the new government as expressed in the Constitution became that of “a future founded on the recognition, democracy and peaceful coexistence and developmental opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief, and sex”. In this context, public sector reforms associated with education adopted various aspects of reform models that aimed at achieving the ideal committed in the Constitution.

The task of government in realizing such a vision, therefore, included action in the following four major areas: reorganizing and rationalizing of the nineteen departments of education into a unified system with one national department of education and nine provincial departments responsible for the provision of schooling; phasing-in of budgetary, human and infrastructure resources in line with the objective of enforcing the commitment of compulsory education for all South African children; collaborating with the national department of labour in developing a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that would among other things provide an instrument for an integrated approach to education and training and ensure quality assurance; and implement additional developmental interventions around curriculum development, open learning, support services for learners with special educational needs, teacher education policy, ABET and ECD (Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development, 1997).

³ For instance, the cluster system of governance appears to be mainly a South African innovation.

3. South Africa's Public Policy Making Approach – A Brief Perspective in the Context of a Developmental State

3.1 The South African developmental state

To start with, there are various definitions of a developmental state. One thing is clear, as Mkandawire (2001b) argues, is that developmental states are “social constructs” by numerous role-players in a particular society. This is in a way not very far from Onis' (1991) argument that the East Asian model of a developmental state is the product of unique historical circumstances. In fact, Castells (2000) identified three “cultural areas” in the case of East Asia: the Japanese communitarian approach, the Korean patrimonial logic and the Taiwanese patrilineal logic. Johnson (1982) saw the developmental state in Japan as epitomized by a “plan rational state” where “the politicians reign and the state bureaucrats rule” - the “plan rational state” shaped economic development as it intervened in the development process and established “substantive social and economic goals”. According to Castells (2000) East Asian states “pre-empted civil society” in an effort to guide industrial elites. In addition, Onis (1991) indicates that the manner in which Amsden (1989) describes South Korea shows a case of a developmental state in action. For instance, Amsden's analysis suggests a Korea that is a “prototype case of guided market economy in which market rationality has been constrained by the priorities of industrialization... government performed a strategic role in taming domestic and international forces and harnessing them to national economic interests” (Onis 1991: 112).

It is therefore not surprising that Evans (2007) argues that the 20th Century developmental state (model) can no longer be used as a model for developing countries, for a number of reasons, especially given developments in new growth theory and institutional approaches to development. This is line with Bagchi's (2000) review of various country experiences on developmental states which leads to a conclusion that social capital and nationalism are critical factors for successful construction of a developmental state.

Some scholars in this field have proposed numerous ways of examining whether any state is developmental. Mhone (2004), for instance, suggests that one needs to look at whether the state is developmental in its thinking and action and also whether it is organized in a way that “developmentalism” is feasible. Mhone defines developmentalism as a “proactive role of the state in pursuing and defining a developmental vision to be attained in the long-term, in coordinating economic activities and steering them toward desired outcomes, mobilizing and synergizing class and social forces in support of the developmental agenda”. In a sense this is similar to Mkandawire's (2001b) differentiation between two components of a developmental state; the ideological and the structural.

Another point around the meaning or characteristics of developmental states is that they are traditionally associated with economic development. Bagchi (2000), for instance, defines a developmental state as “a state that puts economic development as the top priority of governmental policy and is able to design effective instruments to promote such a goal”. Economic development is largely associated with industrialization and/or industrial policy. This perspective seems to feature prominently in definitions of developmental states by leading scholars in this field [see for instance Johnson (1982; 1999), Amsden (1989) and Evans (1995; 2007)]. A different perspective, which emphasizes broader development, is presented by other leading scholars. However, it appears that all scholars highlight similar characteristics of the developmental states. For instance, although Leftwich’s (1995) definition of a developmental state seems to be focusing on broader development his model contains characteristics similar to Evan’s (1995) notion of “embedded autonomy”. It could, therefore, be concluded that a developmental state is the one that is active in pursuing its agenda, working with social partners, and has the capacity and is appropriately organized for its predetermined developmental objectives.

The starting point in a democratic South Africa, it would seem, was institutional reforms side by side with necessary legislative foundations. This process is continuing, focusing more on building effective governance and service delivery institutions going forward. This would be reflected in South Africa in the constitution; as the cornerstone of South African law, in the general enforcement of the rule of law, relatively healthy democratic institutions, a well performing bureaucracy and the strategic alliances between the state and civil society, notably the alliance partners, viz. the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) and to a lesser degree, community based organizations (CBOs).

The second major step was getting the economy right. In 1994, when the first democratic government was voted into office, the economy was in an appalling state in all respects. Moving from the premise that a growing economy will increase the pace of service delivery and expansion of human capabilities and cohesion of peoples of SA, it would seem, the government engaged on an intricate economic restructuring project. This is still underway, as the legacies of apartheid colonialism remain evident.

The third major step, it would appear, was a direct and explicit social policy focusing on eradicating poverty and strengthening social cohesion. This will probably occupy, alongside further restructuring of the economy, government business and its partners, for many years to come. Bagchi’s (2000) points around social capital for a developmental state is very pertinent for this. Similarly, Evans’ (2007) recommendations for 21st Century developmental states, in relation to the new kind of “embedded autonomy” would be critical. Lastly, the various dimensions of state capacity that Cummings and Nørgaard (2004) describe would have to be in place to fully accomplish a fully-fledged developmental state for South Africa.

The manner in which the democratic South African government sequenced the countries transformation agenda can arguably be characterized as a developmental state approach.

Literature on developmental states highlights institutions, economic growth and broader development involving various sectors in society. This is largely what South Africa has tried since 1994 and results seem to suggest that the South African democratic developmental state has done relatively well. The institutional set-up, as described above, is improving. The economy has done relatively well and it has recently started to create much needed jobs, though not sufficiently. The same can be said in relation to poverty. Most studies suggest that all dimensions of poverty are declining in magnitude, though some (like income poverty) are not declining fast enough. Gumede (2008b) reviews relevant studies and concludes that “the question of the extent, of both poverty and second economy challenges, remains unresolved. Different researchers give different estimates, although the trend seems to be showing a decline in poverty in South Africa which appears to have begun around year 2000 or so”.

As Onis (1991) argued in the case of East Asian developmental states, that they were shaped by their historical circumstances, the African National Congress (ANC) – the ruling political party in government currently – aspires to “build a developmental state that is shaped by the history and socio-economic dynamics of South African society” within the “National Democratic Revolution” paradigm (ANC, 2007: 5). The ANC’s ideology (i.e. the national democratic revolution) is clear in many government documents and political discourse. This is one aspect of a developmental state that Mkandawire (2001b) alludes to. The second aspect, the structure, is clear in the detail of what the ANC deems a developmental state to be. The revised *Strategy and Tactics* (ANC 2007) says that the developmental state would have the capacity to intervene in the economy; implement social programmes that address unemployment, poverty and underdevelopment and also have the capacity to mobilize the people. With some exceptions, the ANC seems to be adopting Leftwich’s (1995) model of developmental states and combining that with Evans’ (1995) “embedded autonomy” recommendation and trying to ensure the “ideology-structure nexus” of Mkandawire (2001b).

From Leftwich’s model, the following components seem to feature in the South African case: a determined developmental elite; relative autonomy; the effective management of non-state economic interests; and legitimacy and performance. With regard to “ideology-structure nexus”, the attributes that the ANC lists as the main attributes of the (envisaged) South African developmental state include issues such as the proposed strategic orientation (which emphasizes people-centered and people-driven development) and capacity to lead the definition of an overarching developmental agenda and the mobilization of people around it. The ANC appears to also draw from Cummings and Nørgaard’s (2004) dimensions of state capacity. It highlights organizational capacity (i.e. organization of the state) and technical capacity (i.e. implementation capacity). It seems to have also tried to apply notions of “state-structure nexus” and “institutional coherence” that Robinson and White (1998) see as important institutional attributes of a democratic developmental state.

3.2 Economic and social policies in a South African developmental state

In a nutshell, economic and social policies, like those relating to justice, international relations, and governance are made through the cluster system or processes as described in section two. Each of the clusters is comprised of key departments dealing with matters pertinent to that cluster. For instance, the social cluster is comprised of its key departments such as Social Development, Education, Health, Housing, Arts and Culture, Water Affairs, Agriculture, Land Affairs, Provincial and Local Government, Environmental Affairs & Tourism, Sports and Recreation, Communications, Science & Technology, Home Affairs, Labour, Public Works, Correctional Services, National Treasury and Statistics South Africa. In addition, Provincial Heads of Departments dealing with social policy issues also attend. Government Communications and Information System is also represented (in all clusters as well as in the Forum of South African Directors-General Management Committee). For the economic cluster, the key departments include Trade and Industry, Public Enterprises, National Treasury, Science and Technology, Labour, Minerals and Energy, Agriculture, Land Affairs, Transport, Public Works and so on.

There are many departments that are represented in both economic and social clusters. The attendance at clusters is by Directors-General or their proxies. There are two (co)chairpersons per each cluster and the co-chairpersons are members of Forum of South African Directors-General Management Committee (FOSAD MANCO) which meets once a month, clusters meet every forth-night to deal with strategic matters, especially those in the Programme of Action of Government and also deal with matters that are going to Cabinet (as well as receive reports on Cabinet matters from the Policy Coordination and Advisory Services). There are two FOSAD workshops in a year, mainly to prepare for Cabinet Makgotla (which occur twice a year, in January and in July). Clusters regularly present progress reports to their respective Cabinet Committees. Similarly, for policy issues or any other strategic matters the clusters present that for Cabinet Committees' endorsements before the matter goes to Cabinet. There is a lot of interaction between clusters, and respective departments, and the Policy Coordination and Advisory Services especially on matters that end up in Cabinet. The Policy Coordination and Advisory Services also interfaces between Cabinet and clusters on policy matters. Though the cluster system and its processes have not been scientifically studied, some argue that it has not worked well. The difficult question, in the absence of a scientific study, is what is the next phase or stage of the cluster system and associated processes.

Nonetheless, given that economic and social policies go through the cluster processes before they are consulted with stakeholders outside government, it can be argued that the development of economic and social policies in South Africa is rigorous enough. Another point worth making is that economic and social policies pursued have been influenced by the

commitments of the “national democratic revolution” alluded to above. These commitments are elaborated in many policy documents of the ANC. Government, through respective structures and instruments with the Policy Unit’s leadership, translates those noble ideals into an implementable programme of action within the obtaining policy (and political) platform. Always at the core of that programme of action is explicit sense of trade-offs that are being made, almost always reprioritising human development within an economic growth “construct”. This is a correct approach and we see a case of “politics” positively influencing public policy making. Leftwich (1995) emphasized the importance of “politics” in the analysis of whether a country has a developmental state or not. According to his definition, South Africa’s policy making appears to be sufficiently influenced by political dynamics and it can be argued that the South African state’s “politics” has amassed sufficient authority, autonomy and capacity in its pursuit of its developmental objectives.

Although this requires further interrogation, it could be argued that South Africa, among a few African states, has had a better democratic developmental state. For instance, Barrett et al (2006:168) estimated that there is a “population-weighted poverty gap of 42% for sub-Saharan Africa relative to the \$2 per day per capita international poverty line”. However, in the case of South Africa, as indicated above, many studies suggest that living standards are overall improving. Gumede (2008a) backs up this argument with data that shows relatively remarkable progress in the lives of South Africans.

Edigheji (2005) suggests that a democratic developmental state is a state that principally embodies the following four principles: electoral democracy and popular participation in the development and governance processes; economic growth, state driven socio-economic development and “embedded autonomy” as coined by Evans (1995). All of these seem to obtain in South Africa. Edigheji further emphasizes prevailing institutional arrangements as an important variable to the success of a democratic developmental state, and the South African policy making institutional mechanisms seem sound.

Even with regard to perspectives of leading scholars on developmental states (of East Asia), South Africa seems to have been trying prioritize economic development. There have been various attempts to get the industrial policy off the ground and it could be argued that the “industrial elites” are under the guidance of the state. The guidance of “industrial elites” has taken various forms, including Presidential Working Groups on business matters. There are elements in the South African state, in the manner in which it determines the developmental agenda and mobilizes society, that resembles to some extent Japan as described by Johnson (1982) and Korea as described by Amsden (1989) and Taiwan as described by Evans (1995).

Also drawing from Robinson and White (1998), some salient characteristics – such as “institutional coherence” – of a democratic developmental state seem visible in the South African state. Also, Evan’s (1995) concept of “embedded autonomy” which is central to the effectiveness on a developmental state seems to play itself out in the South African context. Evans (1995) point is that state institutions have to be *autonomous* in so far as that facilitates the identification and promotion of strategic developmental objectives, while *embedded* in a

sense that the state would be able to establish and sustain working partnerships with key social groups that would add much needed impetus to the achievement of development goals. In the South African context, this appears to be a case in point through the role of the state and its partners. Linked to this is the state's commitment to "meritocratic" recruitment; the appointment of skilled bureaucrats that would ensure the important political "neutrality" which would in turn facilitate sound networks and delivery on developmental goals. This is one of the matters that are debatable, whether top civil servants are appointed on merit and whether they are insulated from political manoeuvres.

Another issue for contestation is whether there is sufficient technical capacity, especially for planning and implementation. When compared with countries that are said to be having developmental states, South Africa's Policy Unit has much less number of technocrats. Also, some question the influence that the National Treasury has. These are not only issues for debate but also empirical questions. Would, for instance, a larger policy unit have a better impact or would an un-influential Treasury be effective? Another relevant philosophical question perhaps is whether the current institutional arrangements were by default or a conscious and considered plan.

3.3 Organization and capacity of the South African developmental state

The World Development Report (1997) describes state capacity as "the ability of the state to undertake collective actions at least costs to society". This is broader than administrative or technical capacities of civil servants. It entails, also, "institutional mechanisms that give politicians and civil servants the flexibility, rules, and restraints to enable them to act in the collective interest". This resonates with Cummings and Nørgaard (2004) conceptualisation of state capacity along four dimensions: ideational, political, technical and implementational. Cummings and Nørgaard (2004) define ideational state capacity as the degree to which the state – its actors, role and policies – is legitimated and embedded in state institutions. Political state capacity refers to effectiveness of state institutions in terms of governance structures and technical and implementational state capacities refer to administrative capacities.

As indicated above, the organisation of the South African state remains a matter of debate. Some scholars have argued that government is too large. For instance, Luiz (2002) finds it "worrisome" that the proportion of government expenditure going to salaries and wages keeps increasing. Others argue that the amount of technical capacity of government is scarce. For instance, Mhone (2004) sees a need a "nodal or pilot planning super-agency" as well as more capacity for policy formulation and implementation. Edigheji (2007:19-20) states that:

"The PCAS has, to a degree, enhanced the coordinating capacity of the emerging developmental state in South Africa. However, its limited capacity remains a major constraint to its work. For example, compared to the superministries in East Asia with more than a hundred highly trained economists, the PCAS currently has very few staff with advanced training in

economics... Therefore, to build a truly developmental state in South Africa, there is an urgent need to increase the recruitment of highly qualified and politically astute economic bureaucrats into the PCAS”.

If advices from scholars such as Mhone and Edigheji are to be taken on board, the current amount of human resources in government would substantially increase. This will also exacerbate the relatively polarised public discourse on whether the current head of government has centralised powers and decision making. For instance inaccurate perceptions such as that “Ministers are required to submit all new policy documents and draft laws to the presidency for scrutiny, and they all have to go through Netshitenzhe who decides whether or not proposals are in accordance with government’s policy goals” (Gumede, 2005: 130) maybe further exaggerated.

To some extent there is merit in the argument that the South African developmental state requires additional capacity. The organisational aspects require further consideration. There is no a priori reason why should a differently organised South African state be more effective. The question is more of whether the systems, such as monitoring and evaluation and performance assessments, are effective in detecting inefficiency and deploying appropriate responses. The recent developments in the South African state’s monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, especially setting up coordination capacity for that in the presidency’s policy unit, have begun to show promising results. Similarly, the revised performance management systems will go a long way in addressing inefficiencies in the public bureaucracy. However, this remains to be seen. For instance, Chibber (2002: 952) argues that for any state to be effective, “bureaucratic rationality must also be structured in an appropriate apportionment of *power* among state policy agencies”. In short, Weberian bureaucracy is not enough just like the bureaucracy based on Confucius’ perspectives was not enough, “interagency relations” are critical. Bureaucratic rationality, if the institutional setting is not supportive, can easily lead to processes that are not developmental or rather effective, as Chibber (2002) found in the case of India.

Overall, the analysis seems to suggest that South Africa as a (weak) developmental state has undertaken social and economic policies in a sound manner. However, it could be argued that South Africa has not been a very effective state owing to its technical and implementational state capacity. This does not imply that the state should be organised differently, though coordination could be further ameliorated. It simply means that the capacity that is said to be lacking, such as long-term planning expertise, should be created. As Gumede (2007) argues there are, in government, “various planning instruments and tools mainly focused on medium-term planning, not long-term developmental planning”.

4. Transforming the South Africa Education System

Acknowledging the challenge of poverty and underdevelopment faced by the majority of South Africans, the White Paper on Early Childhood Development (2001) highlights that children raised in poor families are most at risk of infant death, low birth-weight, stunted growth, poor adjustment to school, increased repetition and school dropout. This was cited as a strong enough case for the national department of education to put in place an action plan to address the early learning opportunities of all learners but especially those living in poverty. The objective of government has been to increase access to and improve the quality of early learning and development programmes, particularly for poor children.

In addition, in recognition of the massive adult illiteracy challenge faced by the country (estimated by the national department of education in 2007 to be at 4.7 million adults) government is implementing Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and a Mass Literacy Campaign (MLC). These programmes are primarily geared towards eradicating illiteracy and have been made available to adults seeking to finish their basic education and offers learning tools, knowledge and skills under nationally recognized qualifications.

Further, acknowledging the dire impact of apartheid on special needs education a policy to transform the education sector was effected. During apartheid the segregation of learners on the basis of race was extended to incorporate segregation on the basis of disability so special schools were organised according to two segregating criteria: race and disability. Schools that accommodated white disabled learners were well-resourced, whilst the few schools for black disabled learners were systematically under-resourced, resulting in only 20% of learners with disabilities being accommodated in special schools (Education White Paper on Special Needs Education, 2001). As such, the national department of education continues to drive this policy – outlining how the education and training system must transform to accommodate the full range of learning needs and the mechanisms that should be put in place.

The fourth notable education sub-sector is Further Education and Training (FET) whose transformation was well articulated in as the desire for a “coordinated, comprehensive, interlocking sector that provides meaningful experiences to learners at the post-compulsory phase” (Education White Paper, 1998:10). A clear role was identified for the “new” FET sector within the new economy and this was soon followed by the introduction of the FET Act of 1998.

A lot has been said about the various education and training policies and relevant pieces of legislation since their introduction and their years of implementation. Suffice to say here is that the argument that government has made progress in the expansion of the sub-sectors discussed above is persuasive. This has, according to Kraak (2008), been evident in increased access, increases in headcount enrolments, increased investment by government and the private sector, institutional rationalisation processes and regulation respectively.

Progress is also visible in the different sectors, as presented in the recent review of national policies for education in South Africa by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). For instance, the OECD (2008) notes that what government has been able to achieve in a space of 14 years is commendable and that it's understandable that some of the policy goals have not yet been realized.

Another important area is the one of literacy and numeracy. According to the Development Indicators (2008: 49) there has been a steady annual increase in the literacy rate and "by 2006, 74% of adults were literate". The progress around literary rates is evident in various recent datasets. For instance, calculations based on the 2007 General Household Survey of Statistics South Africa suggest that adult literacy rate is about 87% on average; 89% for males and 86% for females – these figures are lower than those calculated from the latest Income and Expenditure Survey. The last two rows in table one (below) summarize the percentage shares of people within the poorest households who have completed primary and secondary schooling. This implies a long way to, but as table one below shows a lot of mileage is being covered in relation to ameliorating the literacy status of the poor.

Table 1: Literacy

	Adult literacy rate
All	87%
Women	86%
Men	89%
Poorest 20%, primary	75%
Poorest 50%, secondary	83%

Source: Own calculations from the General Household Survey (2007)

Furthermore, it is reported that one of government's flagship literacy campaigns, "Kha Ri Gude" (Let us Learn), is in its first phase of implementation in 2008 reaching thousands of illiterate adults. Notwithstanding the numbers of adults that remain illiterate to this day, this programme is gaining mileage in improving basic literacy and numeracy of a generation of elderly, previously disadvantaged people who would otherwise have had no formal education whatsoever. Even more encouraging is that a share of the youth is able to acquire skills as voluntary teachers for the programme. This should be enhanced by the government target of 4.7 million illiterate adults over five years.

Lastly, with regards to youth socio-economic mobility, education and experience are considered the most important factors that ensure employability; conversely, the lack of education and experience is viewed as a major hindrance to class mobility and improvement in the individual's socio-economic conditions (Gumede 2008b). Education, therefore, remains a key pillar to achievement of youth development.

4. 1. South Africa’s schooling system and higher education sector

Since 1994 the vision for a transformed education system reflective of the values and practices of a democratic South Africa has been articulated in a myriad of policy documents. According to the Education White Paper (1996) on the organisation, governance and funding of schools, for instance, it is stated that the new structure of school organisation should create the conditions for developing a coherent and flexible national system which advances redress, inequity in the use of public resources and an improvement in educational quality across the system.

Through the South African Schools Act of 1996 the main goal of the national department of education was to “deracialise education and create race-blind policies throughout the system”. In addition, it sought to unify the fragmented education departments into one department and to also make education compulsory to all students irrespective of race. In accordance with the South African Schools Act, the Minister of Education has declared deserving schools “no-fee schools”.

Years on, the extent to which all this has generated the desired results is varying according to factors such as: efforts by the national department and provinces to enforce the policies, prevailing governance and management dynamics within different schools in different communities, the nature of schools (public or independent), resources and capacity, prevailing culture and ethos etc. Bloch (2006), among others, is of the view that although a lot of challenges still remain, there have been significant achievements in turning around apartheid education in the first decade of democracy.

Data from the Towards a Fifteen Year Review (2008) indicate that education participation has increased since 1994, especially in the case of primary schooling. This is attributed to those interventions geared towards increased access. Table two below shows the growth in enrolments for the age cohort between 7-15 years old between 2002 and 2007.

Table 2: Enrolment in school by age

	2002	2007
Five-year olds	40%	60%
Six-year olds	70%	88%
Seven-15-year olds	96%	98%

Source: *Towards a Fifteen Year Review (2008:23)*

Increases have been at both primary and at secondary level. Table three shows the growth in enrolment ratios (which is the ratio of enrolled pupils to the number of those age-eligible for a particular level).

Table 3: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by level of education

	Primary	Secondary
1994	122	84
1997	125	90
2002	105	81
2005	103	89

Source: *Towards a Fifteen Year Review (2008:23)*

Further corroborating this point, according to the OECD Review (2008) South Africa can be said to be close to achieving universal basic education with 96.6% enrolment for 7-15 year-olds with almost all children of school-going age entering school and the majority reaching the end of grade nine. It acknowledges, however, that in 2007 it was found that there was a high failure rate, repetition and drop-out in grades ten to twelve. In addition, the report notes that in 1995, 88% of the population aged 9 to 23 had attained grade seven. By 2003, this had risen to 93% and 82% had completed grade nine in 2003, up from 75% in 1995. There has been a small increase in the grade eleven and grade twelve attainment rates.

We now briefly turn to the strides that curriculum reforms have achieved to date in respect of the quality of education received and the personal development of a learner as a citizen within a democratic country and towards the broad social and economic development of South Africa. For years now *Curriculum 2005 Outcomes-Based Education (OBE)* has been implemented in school curriculum as a competency based learning and teaching methodology aimed at facilitating strategic and technical skills of learners. Some of the identified outcomes of such a system include ensuring that learners identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking; work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organisation and community; organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively; collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information; communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/ or language skills in various modes etc.

The rationale for such a curriculum within a new democracy does not only make political sense but also economic sense with the country's aspirations to establish itself as a strong globally competitive knowledge economy. Where it has worked, OBE has worked relatively well but generally there have been many challenges with the curriculum due to insufficient teacher training, teacher/pupil ratio, the availability of learning materials and other resources as well as language barriers.

According to the OECD report (2008) it is recommended that such challenges may be addressed through a range of options such as placing more emphasis of curriculum on the provision of learning materials, the professional development of teachers, the development of appropriate assessment tools and early diagnosis and remediation of learning problems, in making decisions about additional testing, ensure that learners have enough time and opportunity to learn what is required, and provide additional chances for learners to obtain essential qualifications.

Lastly, it's broadly agreed that the Dinaledi schools project (aimed at increasing access to maths and science at higher-grade level in underprivileged schools) has contributed to a steady increase in the pass rate in those subjects.

4.2. Higher Education

The higher education (HE) sector has also gone through (and continues to go through) transformation. The Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of the Higher Education System (1997) outlined a framework to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities.

In line with the vision in the National Plan on Higher Education (2001), achieving equity and diversity in the South African higher education system; producing graduates needed for the social and economic development of South Africa; promoting research and restructuring the institutional landscape are stated as important objectives.

Similar to other education sub-sectors, the higher education system inherited from the apartheid era was one characterized by inequity, fragmentation and inefficiency with 36 public higher education institutions (21 Universities and 15 Technikons), separated along racial lines (Breier and Mabizela, 2008). For some reason, government opted for restructuring the higher education landscape through merging institutions. Two phases of restructuring occurred between 2004 and 2005, which saw the emergence of new terms of reference and institutional arrangements for the institutions. For instance, universities that didn't have to merge with any other remained "universities" (like those that merged with or rather incorporated others); technikons were transformed to "universities of technology"; some universities were merged with technikons and became "comprehensive institutions" and national institutes for higher education were established.

In terms of enrollments it is noted that the extent to which the HE system can actually produce highly skilled graduates is predicated on three important factors: the numbers of school "graduates" who qualify for entry into HE institutions, the numbers who choose to enter HE institutions and the number that complete their qualifications (Breier and Mabizela, 2008). However, as discussed in the schooling section above, the "quality" of matric passes leaves a lot to be desired.

Although the enrolment of Africans in HE institutions has increased, detailed analysis of data reveals historical disparity in participation rates between population groups. Table four below shows participation rates in the period 2002- 2004 as follows: for whites 60%, for Indians 50% and for Africans and coloured between 11% and 12%.

Table 4: Gross Participation rates in higher education, by population group, 2002 and 2004

	Population Group	Public HE enrolment	Population 20-24 years	Gross participation Rate (%)
2002	African	405 914	3 544 596	11.4
	Coloured	38 965	353 661	11.0
	Indian	48 717	102 236	47.7
	White	181 999	294 030	61.9
	Total	675 595	4 294 523	15.7
2004	African	453 639	3 940 965	11.5
	Coloured	46 090	381 805	12.1
	Indian	54 315	108 111	50.2
	White	188 957	317 611	59.5
	Total	743 001	4 748 492	15.7

Source: *Human Resource Development Review (2008:283)*

On the other hand, Breier and Mabizela (2008) also note that graduation rates have of recent been declining. Although strides in encouraging access are yielding some positive results, graduation numbers and rates show a continuous decline. This is starkly reflected in graduation ratios by field of study in relation to national targets. They estimate that if 2004 graduation targets were to be consistent with enrolment targets, the percentage ratio of graduates for human sciences, commerce and science, engineering and technology should have been 40:30:30. However, the ratio was 48:25:27.

The seemingly declining trend of graduation rates is largely attributed to the difficulty of subjects, depending on the preparedness of individual students by the schooling system. Importantly, however, it has been noted that HE faces a serious challenges of student attrition. It is reported that 30% of the year 2000 first-time entrants into the system dropped out within the first year while 20% dropped out after two/three years of study. 50% of the group was out of the system before attaining their qualification (Breier and Mabizela, 2008). This is obviously worrying in light of the country's unemployment challenge. Also of concern is that even qualified graduates are struggling to find employment. For instance, Moleke (2006) found that the majority of the unemployed are under the categories of Africans, females, those who studied humanities and art and those who studied at historically black universities.

Overall, it remains to be seen whether the approach adopted with restructuring the higher education landscape was appropriate or not. One issue seems loudly clear though, that the challenge facing our higher education sector is that of self-definition. This has resulted to associated complications such as imbalance between university numbers and those in

technical universities and Further Education and Training colleges. It could be argued that further education will not flourish and benefit the society until appropriate structural features have been put in place. In the same vein, the quality of leadership in the South African society and economy is going to be decisive if we are to build a society united in its diversity and an economy that can sail the tumultuous global seas to prosperity for all. Clearly, the quality of the leadership South Africa develops is dependent on the quality of the institutions developed and more particularly on the educators within all levels of the education system. To fully achieve the developmental state, the education system – especially the higher education sector, of course benefiting from an appropriate general education system – has to address a number of philosophical and practical questions.

The OECD report also alludes to this as it is asserted that more attention should be paid to the management of the change process in terms of detailed planning, budgeting and monitoring of change and dealing with change resistance and that comprehensive universities be revised to perhaps become “specialised” by focussing on particular “knowledge niches”. These are all issues that further studies would have to gauge and determine. The Higher Education Monitor (2007) by the Council of Higher Education reflects on a number of pertinent issues pertaining to the challenges confronting the South African higher education landscape. Overall, the picture is not a good one but there is some progress.

5. Concluding remarks

We conclude that the reforms that have taken place in South Africa's education system since 1994, in the context of reforms in the public sector, were necessary for a newly democratic country that had inherited a racially segregated and dysfunctional education system. These reforms have happened at many levels; early learning and development, general schooling, further education and training, basic education and training, tertiary etc. The focus here was on policy making processes, with education as a case study.

Our conclusion is that the changes have resulted in great strides. However, the implications have in some instances been dire. This is evident in varying degrees in the performance of all sectors of education. We contended that in light of the unemployment challenge, and other fundamental socio-economic challenges and the objective of launching a democratic developmental South Africa as a formidable globally competitive economy, it would be important to highlight the serious challenges within the schooling and higher education system as the key direct areas of interface between citizens and labour market/the economy. We conclude that attention should be paid especially to not only improving access but the quality education. This is particularly with regards to teacher training, the "new" curriculum, access to information for parents and learners and the national goal with regards to matrics. We also conclude that the immense administrative/organisational, academic and funding challenges in the higher education sector, as well matters relating to identity, are important to consider so that South Africa can take a sober reflection on its stance as an actor within the global economic system.

In essence, the implication of this paper is that a possible second phase of reforms in the education sector may be ideal. In fact, it could be argued that reforms undertaken since 1994, though they have accomplished intended objectives, have not gone far enough. So even though the policy making process and institutions for policy making are relatively sound, the specific sectoral reforms warrant another look if South Africa is to be fully a developmental state.

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