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INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS:

Assessing the Functioning of the Cluster System of Interdepartmental Coordination

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Public and Development Management

June 2006

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own unaided work. It is being submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg for Masters in Public and Development Management. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

_____

Monde Victor Nkasawe

Signed this _____day of _____2006 in Pretoria

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Abstract

This research focuses on the manner in which the Cabinet clusters, which were formally established in 1999, have worked to synthesize, synchronize and streamline policy as part of their task to facilitate decision-making. It also focuses on how they have interfaced with service delivery programmes, in terms of assessing progress and challenges as a general feedback to decision makers, as well as on how they have facilitated collective decision-making in a context where departments remain individually accountable for the delivery of line function programmes.

Not withstanding the significant amount of work done to ensure integrated governance, government continues to function in a disjointed manner in several areas. One of the reasons for this is that integrated governance is not properly institutionalized. The Cabinet clusters are an ad hoc arrangement to assist the executive in executing its duties. They are, in a sense, an extension of the Cabinet Secretariat. They are a character trait of a managerialist style of government. There does not seem to be a discernible connection between the clusters at national and those at provincial level, and this serves to undermine integrated governance, because it sets the operations of the national executive apart from those of other spheres of government.

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List of Acronyms

ANC ……	African National Congress
BOSS ……	Bureau of State Security
BEE ……	Black Economic Empowerment
DG ..……	Director-General
DPLG ..……	Department of Provincial and Local Government
DPSA …..……	Department of Public Service and Administration
FOSAD ..……	Forum of South African Directors-General
FOSAD MANCO ……	Management Committee of FOSAD
GCIS ..……	Government Communication & Information Systems
IGR ……..……	Intergovernmental Relations
IMC'S ……	Inter-Ministerial Committees
ISRDP ..……	Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme
MINCOMBUD ……..……	Ministerial Committee on the Budget
MTEC ……..….	Medium Term Expenditure Committee
MTEF ..……	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
MTSF ……	Medium Term Strategic Framework
NJMC ..……	National Joint Management Centre
NP ……	National Party
NSMS ..……	National Security Management Systems
PCAS ……	Policy Co-Ordination and Advisory Services
PCC ……..……	President's Coordinating Council
PFMA ……..	Public Finance Management Act
PRC ..……	Presidential Review Commission
SANDF …….……..	South African National Defence Force
SALGA ……	South African Local Government Association
SCC ……	State Security Council
SON …..……	State of the Nation
TYR ……	Ten Year Review
TRC ..……	Truth And Reconciliation Commission
URP …..……	Urban Renewal Programme

1. Introduction

The genesis of the current executive structures in South Africa began with the appointment of the Presidential Review Commission (PRC) in 1997 by the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA). According to the PRC Report (DPSA, 1998, p2), the terms of reference of the PRC were to

> "inquire into the structures and functions of the public service and its statutory bodies; conduct an internal audit and review of each ministry, department, provincial administration, organisational component, office and agency concerning its objectives, structure, function, staffing, financing and related matters; and conduct a review and revision of the systems, routines and procedures of planning, budgeting and financial execution in the public service, to increase public accountability with a view to making recommendations and proposals regarding the transformation and reform as envisaged in the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service, Notice No. 1227 of 1995, published in the *Government Gazette* No. 16838 of 24 November 1995." http://www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/1998/prc98/chap1.htm

Following the extensive work done by the PRC in reviewing all structures and systems of government, the South African government decided to introduce a new system of interdepartmental planning, at the center of which was the system of clustering ministries and departments according to similarities and logical connections in their line function responsibilities. The PRC Report (1998) had, among other things, recommended that the Presidency be strengthened such that it plays a leading role in coordinating policy implementation and monitoring throughout government.

The introduction of the clusters was therefore ostensibly part of restructuring the Presidency in keeping with the PRC's recommendations. Prior to this intervention, governance at Cabinet level resembled the French Cabinet system, which, according to Hayward (1983, p115), was reformed to reflect greater levels of coordination. Before this reform, various units would always jealously protect their own assigned areas of responsibility, and it would take much infighting, patience, determination and cunning "to secure a minimum cooperation and agreement even within ministries that tend to be agglomerations of introverted specialist divisions." Hayward (1983, p115) argues that in the French system there was no legal requirement for coordination, and that the various units in government would always work on a logical basis that says they must be as secretive as possible during the stages when they are preparing a submission to the decision-makers, because, "at this highly politicized level, decisions will not necessarily be made on the merits of the case but in relation to the political weight, expertise and support that the protagonist can muster."

It is now close on to ten years since the clusters were established, and this is the context and backdrop in which this paper evaluates the manner in which they have worked to synthesize, synchronize and streamline policy as part of their task to facilitate decision-making, how they have interfaced with service delivery programmes, in terms of assessing progress and challenges as a general feedback to decision makers, as well as how they have facilitated collective decision-making in a context where departments remain individually accountable for the delivery of line function programmes.

Accordingly, this paper covers a variety of issues, which are related and it sets the context for a critique of the functioning of the cluster system in South Africa. These issues include a description of the previous executive structures under successive apartheid regimes (and the intention here is merely to make a contrast); a description and critique of the current executive structures and systems; a discussion of the concept of integrated governance; a discussion of

challenges faced by the clusters in terms of their coordination role; a discussion of the intergovernmental relations (IGR) context of clusters; as well as a brief discussion of the monitoring and evaluation role of clusters and related challenges.

The general approach taken in discussing each of these issues is that, firstly the clusters are in their nature informal and they are not legally mandated. They are an integral part of a broader process aimed at the strengthening of the Presidency so that it may discharge its tasks in a coordinated and coherent manner. The government's programme of action is in reality the Presidency's programme action, which logically reflects issues that are priorities to various departments. It is not clear how, if at all, clusters assist departments with any of their planning related challenges. What is clear though is that they help the Presidency to plan better in terms of its own mandate.

Secondly the relationship between departments, clusters and the Presidency is often very poorly articulated as to suggest that the role of departments is changing as a result of the introduction of clusters. In fact there is a sharp contrast between clusters and departments in that while clusters are informal and non-statutory, departments are legally and independently accountable entities. It can also be argued that in fact the clusters constitute an added bureaucratic burden on the departments, and as such they are no innovation.

Thirdly, even though the clusters are meant to introduce greater levels of integration and coordination, government activities are in fact still characterized by higher levels of disintegration. Integrated programmes such as the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP) have so far not taken off mainly because of the failure to bring disparate stakeholders together, as well as the failure to secure meaningful levels of funding.

Fourthly the argument for integration is indeed compelling. As the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) of 2000 notes, integrated governance brings together under a single framework activities related to “electoral, parliamentary and budgetary cycles, and ensures that the policy decisions taken by Cabinet inform planning throughout government” (MTSF, 2000, p3). However the clusters have also introduced a certain level of hesitancy among departments. Departments who run ahead of others risk being accused of spotlight seeking and of undermining integration. This is a service delivery disincentive, because when departments fail to deliver, individual culpability is reduced, precisely because integration presupposes collective responsibility.

A fifth point of argument here is that the extent to which there has been improvement in the synergistic functioning of the executive machinery over the last ten years, is limited. One factor in this regard is that executives of democracies are essentially the same, even when they deal with vastly differing types of challenges. The South African Cabinet is still supported by Cabinet Committees – as was the case before 1994 – and these Cabinet Committees are in turn supported by clusters of Directors-General (DGs), which are the equivalent of the previous committees of officials. The difference though is that, unlike in the past, the current executive structures are better organised, better focused and have assumed a more institutionalized character than the previous ad hoc arrangements.

Even though the intention of introducing clusters was ostensibly to enable Cabinet to focus its discussions on strategic policy and political matters, the extent to which this has been achieved is at best debatable. Debates in Cabinet are introduced by Ministers, in their line function capacity and not in any collective capacity. This presupposes that these Ministers have the discretion to choose to table a matter before Cabinet, and can also decide the strategic level at which to pitch their Cabinet memoranda.

A penultimate point is that the clusters are a small but important element of the broader intergovernmental relations environment in South Africa. Inter-spherical linkages however need to be strengthened. For example national clusters have very limited contact with their provincial counterparts, and even less so with local government mayoral committees, even as they may be dealing with the same issues.

Lastly this paper argues that the clusters are uniquely suited to play an excellent monitoring and evaluation function. The fact that thus far, the South African government does not have a comprehensive and integrated monitoring and evaluation framework is a serious indictment. In fact this is a contradiction in terms, because the policy-synthesizing role of the clusters is by definition a monitoring function. The critical challenge here is not so much the national sphere playing an oversight role over the provincial and local spheres, as it is about the strengthening of the decision-making mechanisms throughout government.

Regarding the research methodology deployed in developing this paper, it needs to be noted that firstly the purpose of this research is to assess the functioning of the clusters in terms of how they play a role in setting policy goals, the role they play in quality assurance for the decisions of Cabinet, as well as the weaknesses inherent in how they function. This research is therefore typically an evaluative assessment of the functioning of the clusters at national level, in terms of how they act as policy engines as well as how they facilitate decision-making, and the central question is how they work to synthesize, synchronize and streamline policy as part of their task to facilitate decision-making. It is a qualitative research which is focused on gaining insight from a variety of sources, especially stakeholders and practitioners, on the role played by the clusters in integrated governance in South Africa. Hopefully it will contribute to the development of academic writing on the new executive structural arrangements in South Africa,

as well as on giving more meaning to the constitutional injunction that the three spheres of government are equal and interdependent.

Secondly, the research methodology consist of the following elements, namely an extensive use of primary sources in the form of policy documents, speeches, newspaper clippings, etc; an extensive use of academic literature in the form of books, journals, conference/seminar papers, etc; and several interviews with a range of IGR practitioners, including cluster liaison officers, heads of policy units, academics, etc. The basic criteria used to select people for interviews was familiarity with the functional aspects of the cluster systems, as well as knowledge of some of the underlying conceptual assumptions that underpin this system. Against this background, the following people were interviewed for varying periods, the maximum of which was two hours, namely Themba Fosi, Sylvia McNeal and Nelly Kole, all of whom are Directors responsible for clusters and intergovernmental relations at the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG); and Zam Titus, the former Director-General at DPLG and who was part of a team setting up the cluster system.

Thirdly, in terms of literature review, I have reviewed a fairly large number of official documents, most of which are part of the conceptualization processes for South Africa's new structures of governance, several academic books and archives, especially pertaining to the old National Party (NP) executive structures, have been reviewed. These include for example, the PRC, the IGR Audit conducted by the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG), the MTSF of 2000, the government Planning Framework, and the Ten Year Review (TYR). Most of the academic literature I looked at is about IGR, in the context of national/local relations. This context is mainly confined in a dichotomy of relations either in a federal or unitary system of government. There is clearly a dearth of academic material on the unique hybrid system of IGR which pertains in South Africa. For example, books such as Grover (1986), Page (1985), Campbell (1988), Peters, 1996), Smith (1988), Ott (1991), Wright (1982), Green

(1994), Cleary (1989), Franklin (1986) are concerned mainly with the description of structural relationships in a federal context. Very few books actually described the Cabinet and executive structures in the manner envisaged in this paper. These would include Hayward (1983), Nijzink (2002), and Daniel (2003). Almost nothing has been written about the provincial executive structures, except for a DPSA (2003) descriptive account of the machinery of government.

Logically, the next chapter discusses in some detail the support structures of the NP government as far back as 1960. This is not a history paper necessarily, but the contrasts are important, especially in view of some of the arguments that are made in this paper regarding basic similarities among executive structures of democratic governments. Subsequent chapters look at the new structures, the concept of integrated governance, the actual functioning of the clusters and related challenges, the IGR context of the clusters, as well as the role of clusters in monitoring and evaluation.

2. The 'old regime'

It is common knowledge that government in South Africa before 1994 was characterised by an oligarchical system of governance, where the majority of citizens were not only excluded from all forms of decision-making, but were actively oppressed using a combination of sophisticated legislative and security measures. For example, in its submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the African National Congress (ANC, 1996, p44) notes that in 1987, PW Botha, as Minister of Defence, introduced the National Security Management System (NSMS) as an instrument to

> "coordinate all state actions and implement reforms in line with 'total strategy'. Over the years the government had built a large network of Security Police and upgraded the police force in general to deal with mass protest. BOSS, the civilian intelligence agency, expanded its operations. Torture, recruitment of activists, employment of agents provocateurs, propaganda against anti-apartheid forces, and the employment of vigilantes became the stock-in trade. The NSMS aimed to achieve maximum efficiency and coordination of these methods and drew in the additional capacity of the SADF, particularly its intelligence wing." (www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/misc/trc02.html)

The ANC (1996, p44) says that the NSMS, and its later versions (see **Figure 1** on page 19), were premised on the belief that "it is possible to manage change through the redistribution of political, military and economic constructs in a manner to the advantage of those who held the levers of state power." As the struggle against apartheid intensified in the 80s, the state security apparatus, represented by the NSMS, assumed responsibility for almost for all executive decision-making. The ANC (1996, p44) notes in its submission to the TRC that as the crisis, brought about by intensified resistance to apartheid deepened.

> "the intelligence services, particularly Military Intelligence, increasingly assumed political influence and even executive control over this shadow bureaucracy, which in some respects duplicated the existing administration and displaced its decision-making structures." (www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/misc/trc02.html)

The ANC (1996, p45) further notes that the State Security Council (SSC) although technically a committee of the Cabinet, "usurped many of the Cabinet's executive functions. The SSC effectively ran the country as a super Cabinet without any such statutory power, giving credence to the notion that a creeping military coup was taking place in South Africa."

This structure was arranged in such a manner that the office the President had the ultimate responsibility for the control of both the NSMS and the SSC, with the President chairing these bodies' meetings. As Figure 1 (on page 19) indicates, the SSC controlled a

> "totalitarian national network which reached into every part of the country identifying anti-apartheid activists, formulating a continuous national security profile, and making decisions on action national and local levels which could then be implemented by the formal law enforcement structures backed by legislation, or by other structures acting covertly." (ANC, 1998, p47)
> (www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/misc/trc02.html)

The ANC (1996, p47) concludes by noting that by the middle of 1986

> "the State Security Council and the NJMC (National Joint Management Centre) formed an apex of state power. These

> committees and their subsidiary networks of coordinated structures that made up the NSMS bordered on constituting a separate arm of government, and became the vanguard of state action." (www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/misc/trc02.html)

The PRC Report (1998) noted that the old state machinery was fundamentally flawed, and that Ministers were functioning as 'quasi autonomous' entities. In a statement to the PRC in 1997, Minister Zola Skweyiya, the then Minister for Public Service and Administration, also shared this view, saying that there

> "is a problem insofar as the coordination of the policy. We inherited a Cabinet Secretary from the old apartheid regime. Literally Comrade Mandela just went into the same office that Mr De Klerk, Mr Botha and their predecessors had previously occupied. There were no changes whatsoever. Completely none. The only thing that really happened there is that the office was divided into three – one for Mandela, the other for De Klerk and the third for Mbeki" http://www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/1998/prc98/chap1.htm

In 2001 the Presidency (2001, p15) issued a report reflecting on progress made in the restructuring of the Presidency, which noted that the

> "inherited system of Cabinet Committees was often arbitrary, unfocused and unwieldy in the allocation of Ministers to particular committees," and also noted that this system was dominated by "sectoral thinking "
> www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2001/presidency01.pdf

Joel Netshitenzhe (2000, p2), the head of the Policy Coordination and Advisory Services (PCAS) in the Presidency, also make a similar observation, saying that in 1994,

> "we adopted existing Cabinet Committees, while the character of and focus of government had fundamentally changed. Critical programmes had to be catered for by all kinds of ad hoc committees. The danger always lurked that a culture could develop that, 'if you support my Cabinet memorandum, I would support yours. This naturally lent itself to duplication."
> www.gcis.gov.za/media/ceo/000128.htm

Furthermore, archival records (SA Archives, 1956-1994) of the previous apartheid Cabinets bear out Netshitenzhe's observation about the ad hoc manner in how the previous regime functioned. For example, between 1983 and 1994 there were six Cabinet Committees, each dealing with Economic Affairs, Constitutional Affairs, Security Affairs, State Security Council, Internal Affairs, and Social Affairs respectively. There were also two "Special Cabinet Committees", namely the Special Cabinet Committee of Constitutional Development, which was clearly set up to lead the establishment of the Tricameral Parliamentary systems established in 1984, and the Special Cabinet Committee on Capital Cases, which dealt with death sentences in terms of deciding whether to commute such sentences or proceeding with capital punishment. In addition, there were also ad hoc "Ministers' Committees", which dealt with special issues (SA Archives, 1956-1994). For example between 1980 and 1994 there were at least four Ministers' Committees dealing with sanctions, security communication, service conditions of political office bearers, and provincial affairs.

Closely related to the Ministers' Committees were "Working Committees", which between 1985 and 1994 were dealing with Cabinet Committees, Constitutional

and Administrative Affairs, Social Affairs, Social and Administrative Affairs, Security and Related Affairs, and Economic Affairs. There were also Working Groups, dealing with Constitutional Affairs, Economic Affairs and Social Affairs (SA Archives, 1956-1994). Furthermore there was a 'Ministers' Council', which was more like an informal version of Cabinet. All of these committees were at Cabinet level, and were supported at the level of officials by the "Committee of Departmental Heads", while Cabinet itself was supported by a "Cabinet Secretariat" (SA Archives, 1956-1994).

By 1994, when the new government was coming into office, there were three Cabinet Committees, which were supported by a myriad of Inter-Ministerial Committees (IMCs). According to Dan O'Meara (1996, p51) the

> "style of politics within the NP institutions, and particularly within its government, was always baronial. While the *Hooflier* commanded great prestige and authority throughout Afrikaner society, his real political authority within Cabinet and caucus depended firstly on the strength of his personal base within his own provincial NP and secondly on his powers of patronage." (O'Meara, 1996, p52)

O'Meara (1996, p52) further says that the "cabinet was the principal site of political horse-trading and the battle for influence and NP barons."

It was against this background and context that the PRC Report (1998) proposed a restructuring of the Presidency whose effect would be a complete break with this past. This restructuring, which spawned the new structures and systems that replaced the old regime, is discussed in the next chapter.

Structures of the NP regime

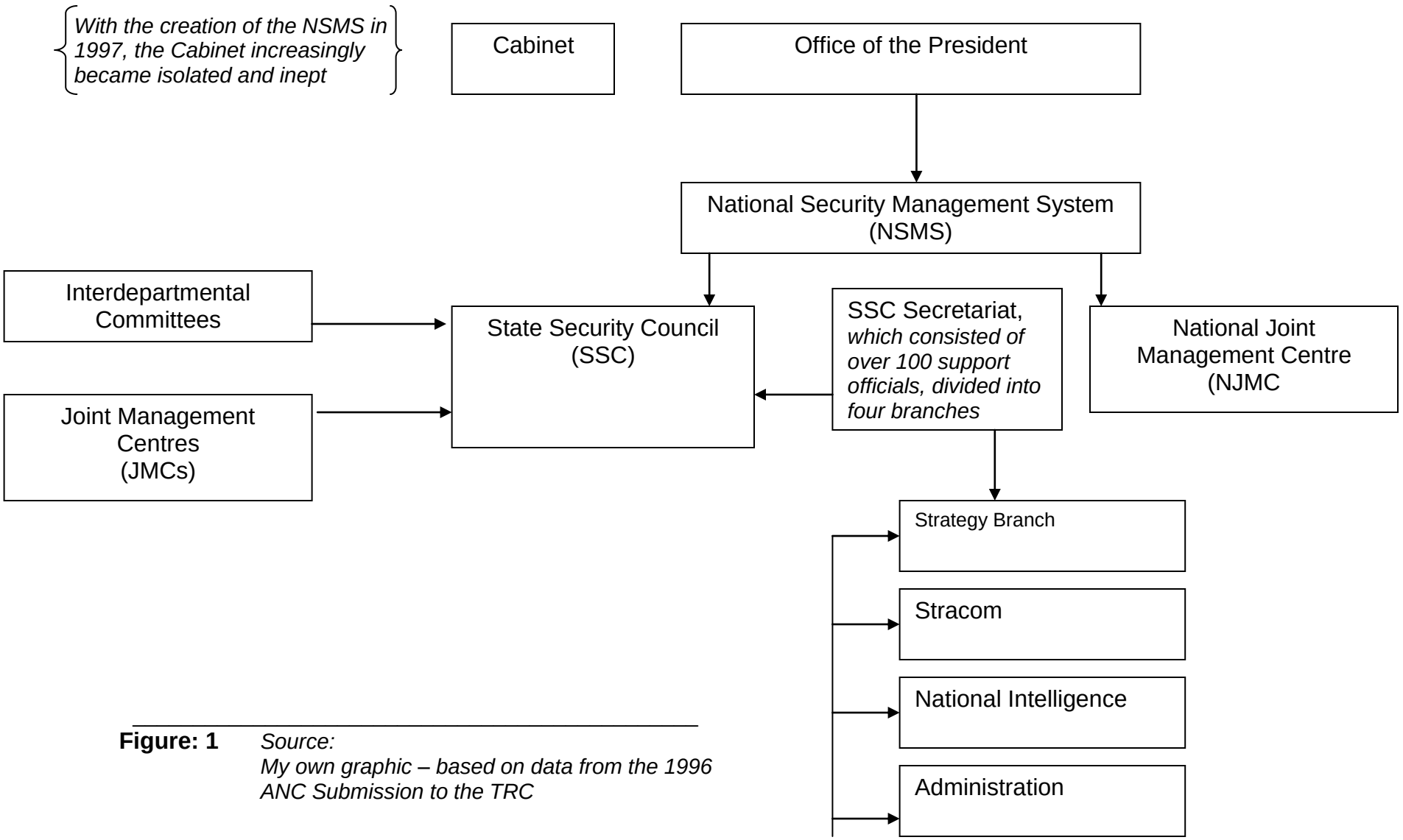


Figure: 1 *Source:*
My own graphic – based on data from the 1996 ANC Submission to the TRC

3. From the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ – déjàvu?

This chapter discusses the advent of democratic governance, the new cabinet structures that were put in place, and the thought processes underpinning the conceptualization of the cluster system.

The new Cabinet structures were not immediately introduced after the election of 1994. In fact Nelson Mandela utilized the old NP executive structures for most of his term. There were of course minor adjustments. For example, even though the old Cabinet Committees were not disbanded, they were nonetheless rationalized and their issues dispersed into the new Committees. For example, according to a Presidency report (2000) on Cabinet structures, functions and systems, there was an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on HIV/Aids, which was merged into the new Governance and Administration Committee. Other IMCs such as the Restructuring of State Assets and Science and Technology which were merged into the Investment and Employment Committee. The IMC on African Renaissance was merged into the International Relations, Peace and Security Committee. The Service Conditions of Political Office Bearers IMC was merged with the Governance and Administration Committee, while the Office on Child Rights, the Office on the Status of Women, the Status of Disabled Persons, and the IMCs on Poverty, Children and Youth at Risk were all merged into the Social Sector Committee. The IMCs such as the Committee on the Budget, the Mandate Committee, and the Non-Conventional Arms Control Council were retained.

Addressing the National Assembly on the occasion of the President’s Budget Debate, former President Nelson Mandela (1998) noted that notwithstanding the commissioning of the PRC to investigate the functioning of government, the restructuring of government was:

> "a continuous and protracted process; and programmes in this regard have not had to wait for the PRC. This applies, for instance, to the sphere of co-coordinating Government activities. A Policy Co-ordination and Implementation Unit has been formed in the Presidency, the Government Communications and Information System is placing our communications and information systems on a new footing; and a Directors-Generals Forum has come into existence."
> www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mandela/1998/sp980421.html

Mandela's comfort in utilizing the old regime's system fundamentally reflects the view that while the agenda of government may change, with the corollary change of systems to suit a specific agenda, the basic structural nature of government nonetheless remains the same. For example the Cabinet system has been a common feature, certainly in the last century, of most governments. According to Jean Blondel (1982, p142) the only instances where there has been a deviation from this would be, say, during a military coup, where the coup leadership (the junta) would appoint a military council. In communist countries you had politburos, which essentially function in more or less the same manner as the Westminster-style 'cabinets'. Of course the similarity is confined merely to the presence of a collective oriented structure at the apex of the state, which takes executive decisions, because whatever the ideological bent of the government of the day, the executive is constructed as a collectivist structure whose primary objective is to support the 'leader' be it a President, Prime Minister, General or King. Furthermore, according to Mackie and Hogwood (1985, p21) in most countries

> "for which information is available cabinet committees are established on an informal basis. Even when the membership of committees is routinely made public by the government of the day

> most committees have no statutory character." (Mackie & Hogwood, 1985, p21)

Mackie and Hogwood (1985) also say that the participation of civil servants in Cabinet committees varies from one country to another. In Netherlands for example civil servants are officially members of the Cabinet committees, and in Canada civil servants can represent their Ministers in Cabinet committee, albeit with limited speaking rights. Laver and Shepsle (1996, p282) also argue

> "the doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility, the notion that all Ministers must either publicly support what is decided in cabinet or resign their post, in no way conflicts with the operation of a decision-making regime effectively based on departmentalism. Collective cabinet responsibility does not specify what the cabinet is collectively responsible for … Much of what is important about substantive policy … is determined departmentally, under the political control of the relevant cabinet minister." (Laver and Shepsle, 1996, p282)

Similarly, South Africa's state is led by a Cabinet, which, certainly in terms of form, is no different from the previous Cabinets that were in charge of the state since the Union of 1910. This is why it is interesting to note that the South African Cabinet system has retained elements of the Cabinet system under the National Party regime. For example there are still Cabinet Committees now as there were under the National Party. The key difference is that there is a different emphasis in terms of tasks. Furthermore, the current DG Clusters are in actual fact the equivalents of the old Steering Committees of Directors General. The difference is of course that they work differently, principally because the contemporaneous service delivery challenges are also vastly different.

Clearly therefore, the need, however, to effect greater coordination and integration at the executive level was both logical and inevitable, especially when viewed in the context of Blondel's (1982, p142) argument that with time, and for administrative and organisational reasons the idea of "increasing coordination by using senior Ministers also gained ground, although it stopped short of a full reorganisation based on 'super ministries'." In South Africa the practical manifestation of the type of coordination that Blondel (1982) is talking about is the fact that the departments of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG), Public Service and Administration (DPSA), National Treasury and the Presidency have been constituted, in terms of the MTSF (2000) as the 'centre of government', which is tasked with managing the three spheres of government, the allocation of state resources, managing the state bureaucracy, and coordinating policy and decision-making respectively. This does not make them 'super ministries', but it does give them considerable clout as departments that drive the overall programme of government. In his lecture notes at the University of Warwick David Baker (2003, p4, www2.warwick.ac.uk), refers to this as 'policy networks', which he says are characterised by a "complex web of institutions, networks and practices surrounding the Prime Minister, counterparts, less formalized ministerial 'clubs' or meetings, bilateral negotiations and inter-departmental committees.

Addressing a Cabinet decision-making workshop, the then Minister for Public Service and Administration, Zola Skweyiya (1998, p2), said that the Cabinet system is based on the notion that:

> "the head of government, the Prime Minister, has to operate in the context of a collegial system in which a group of Ministers fully participates in the decisions in a particular sector. In these systems, while the Cabinet formally ratifies all decisions, many of these decisions are de facto delegated to individual ministers, to groups of Ministers sitting in Committee, or to the Prime Ministers and

some of the Ministers."
http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/1998/98c31_grace9811574.htm

The South African system is derived from a combination of the Cabinet system and the constitutional presidential system. Skweyiya (1998, p2) furthers says that the

> "executive in the constitutional presidential system is hierarchical and not collective. Ministers are subordinates of the President and only responsible to him. In hierarchical systems, individual Ministers are often closely linked to the officials in their Departments. As a result they acquire some autonomous power, especially in instances where Departments naturally form self-contained islands. The executive arm of government is thus atomized and the Presidency needs a large establishment in order to ensure the coordination of government policy."
> http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/1998/98c31_grace9811574.htm

During the Presidency Budget Vote of 2000, Mbeki (2000, p2) further explained the rationale behind the introduction of the new Cabinet system, and said that

> "we inherited a state system substantially ill suited to meet these objectives. The first problem we have to mention is that the National Executive itself operated according to structures and procedures we inherited from the previous political and constitutional dispensation."
> http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/2000/tm0613.html

Mbeki (2000, p2) further said that there were two major problems with this, and these were firstly that

> "it limited the possibility for the government jointly to discuss issues relating to strategy and fundamental policy unless these matters happened to be presented by the individual Ministers. The second was that there were no standing structures designed to ensure the coordinated inter-departmental implementation of programmes that would give effect to agreed policy positions."
> http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/2000/tm0613.html

Mbeki (2000, p2) says that this

> "has resulted in the increase of Cabinet Committees from three to six, with a more effective and rational clustering of the ministries to ensure that we function as a unified government rather than a collection of semi-autonomous ministries."
> http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/2000/tm0613.html

In a report taking stock of the restructuring exercise within the executive, the Presidency (2001, p15) noted that in the

> "previous system of Cabinet Committees, some Committees were insufficiently focused (Committees had too many members) while others were overly dominated by sectoral thinking. The inherited system of Cabinet Committees has therefore bee revised, at the initiative of the Presidency, to cluster Ministers in a rationally integrated manner."
> www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2001/presidency01.pdf

The introduction therefore of the cluster system was meant to ensure that all this structural malaise is effectively addressed. The clusters were to bring about a much more predictable, consistent and transparent system. For example the

democratic Cabinet is now supported, as Mbeki (2000) say, by six Cabinet Committees, namely the Economic Committee, the Investment and Employment, International Relations, Peace and Security – all of which are chaired by the President, as well as the Social Sector Committee, the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Committee and the Governance and Administration Cluster – all of which are chaired by the Deputy President. Each Committee is coordinated by two Ministers (see **Figure 2** on page 31).

The Cabinet Committees are in turn supported by the clusters of DGs, as well as by the PCAS unit in the Presidency. These DG clusters ensure that the deployment of departmental resources keeps step with the agendas being set by Cabinet clusters. The deliberations of the Cabinet Committees are thus kept well informed and able to take coordinated administrative action, while the deliberations of the DG clusters are kept accountable to Cabinet through the relevant Cabinet committee. According to a Presidency report (2000, p3) on the Cabinet structures, functions and systems these Cabinet Committees facilitate "creative, cross-sectoral thinking on policy issues and move away from agendas driven by narrow departmental interests, to an integrated approach to governance." In this approach Ministers and Deputy Ministers are required to focus primarily on integrated, cross-cutting issues in addition to departmental policy development and legislation,

> "and the primary aim is to focus on joint policy development with a view to ensuring alignment of sectors with the national strategic policy framework, the relation between sectors, priorities and budgetary planning and the impact of sectoral policy development and implementation on public service personnel costs" (Presidency, 2000, p3).
> www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2001/presidency01.pdf

The essential function of these Committees is to evaluate and develop Cabinet memoranda relating to policy and legislation relevant in the functional areas of each Committee, and to monitor the execution of policy priorities. According to the TYR (2003) the objectives of the various clusters over the last ten have been, firstly for the Governance and Administration cluster, to ensure political stability, effectiveness of government, regulatory quality and anti-corruption. Secondly the Social Sector cluster was tasked with developing and managing policy in the areas of poverty alleviation, education, health, water and sanitation, electrification, land and the environment. Thirdly the Economic cluster has been tasked with ensuring macro-economic stability, investment, employment, trade reform and industrial policy, small and medium enterprises (SMMEs) development and skills development. Fourthly the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security cluster has been tasked with fighting crime and transforming the judiciary. Finally the International Relations, Peace and Security's main task has been to "transform the foreign, defense and intelligence organisations and functionaries, including appropriately training and equipping South Africa's diplomats to promote the country's IRPS priorities" (TYR, 2003, p57).

All Cabinet Committee meetings take place within the Presidency, either in Pretoria or Cape Town, and according to the head of the Cabinet Office in the Presidency, Dr Anne Letsebe (2004), Cabinet is supported by the Cabinet Office, headed by a Deputy Director General (DDG) (Dr Anne Letsebe). This office acts as a conduit between the Cabinet Committees and the DG Clusters. Together with the DG Clusters, the policy unit in the Presidency (PCAS) and the departmental technical teams all work together to support the Cabinet Committees (see **Figure 3** on page 32).

The technical teams from the various departments provide technical support to the DG Clusters and to Cabinet Committees as and when requested. The Cabinet Secretariat provides secretariat support to Cabinet in terms of recording discussions and other related logistics. The Forum of South African Directors

General (FOSAD) functions as a policy think tank. It brings together all DGs, including the provincial DGs. The core membership of a Cluster is two co-chairpersons, who are either the DG's or designated officials from member departments, Task Team conveners, and a cluster secretariat. Cluster conveners are directly accountable to their own departments in terms of performance. The cluster secretariat plays a more crucial task of organizing and recording meetings of the cluster. However the cluster secretariat is not involved in tracking progress or in preparing cluster work programmes. This is a weakness, because it means that departmental officials who have only line function reasons for being in a cluster meeting get to write cluster reports and track progress.

The Director of Cluster Liaison at the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) Sylvia McNeal (2005) says that FOSAD clusters (DG clusters) report progress on a bi-monthly basis to Cabinet committees and Cabinet. These reports are contained in what are called Cluster Progress Reports, which are normally attached to Cabinet memoranda. McNeal (2005) says that the capturing of information for the Cluster Progress Reports is done through Cluster Report Cards, which normally consist of the following fields, namely: a reference to the project team leading the particular issue being reported on; a description of applicable time frames; a brief report on the level of progress to date; a discussion of challenges encountered; a discussion referring to the relevance of the issue to 'the people's contract'; and a discussion of broader strategic issues.

As previously indicated, one of the tasks of a cluster is to scrutinize departmental submissions to Cabinet. In South Africa these submissions are referred to as Cabinet Memoranda. A Cabinet memorandum (or a Cabmemo) is a most important document that serves before Cabinet. Its preparation is a fairly long and technical process. Cabmemos are processed by clusters before they are tabled before Cabinet. However, Cabmemos come from departments and not from clusters. In fact thus far there has not been an instance where a cluster

actually generated a Cabmemo of its own. Each department tables a Cabmemo to the relevant cluster two weeks before the Cabinet meeting at which it is scheduled to be discussed. According to a Presidency guide (2001) on the drafting Cabmemos, all Cabmemos have a standard structure, which consists of a brief description of the subject matter of the memo; what the purpose of the memo is (for example whether the memo requires a decision or is being tabled for information purposes only); a summary of the issues being canvassed in the memo; a discussion of the problematic, which sets out why the issue warrants the attention of Cabinet; a discussion of the organizational or personnel implications, financial, communication and constitutional implications; a discussion of the consultations undertaken with other departments; and recommendations.

However, notwithstanding these processes, Cabinet memoranda still reflect narrow departmental perspectives. Most of these memos are submitted late, and there is still poor consultation.

As part of preparations for the January Cabinet Lekgotla, which reviews the government's programme of action and the MTSF, the Presidency sends letters to Ministers and DGs asking for reports "on progress made against priorities within the sphere of your responsibility, updating any previous reports submitted" (Chikane, letter to Ministers and DGs, 2003). Elements of information required in these reports include the following, namely a brief statement referring to progress and problems generally; a statement indicating the extent to which each department's activities are integrated with cluster priorities, actions taken arising out of issues raised by the President in his preceding State of the Nation Address, as well as the extent to which departments have put in place "effective mechanisms to track output, outcome and the impact of these on people's lives." (Chikane, letter to Ministers and DGs, 2003); a very brief statement relating to the procurement of goods and services and the extent to which such procurement has facilitated Black Economic Empowerment (BEE); a brief

statement indicating what each department would like to see in the President's SON address; and a statement identifying

> "two to four critical communication events for the calendar year 2004, which in relation to cluster priorities best promotes inter-active governance and an integrated approach to implementation" (Chikane, letter to Ministers and DGs, 2003).

In terms of a few international comparisons, according to a Queensland Government report (2002), New Zealand has a Cabinet system, which is very similar to South Africa's in many respects. The key difference though is that unlike South Africa, New Zealand does not put much emphasis on integration. Instead, more importance is attached to consultation with fellow Ministers before a matter serves before Cabinet. Furthermore New Zealand does not put much stress on the role of officials, even though there are ad hoc 'officials committees', which are the equivalent of the more tightly organised DG clusters in South Africa.

Another key difference is the setting of agenda for Cabinet discussions. In New Zealand Cabinet discusses a matter when the relevant Minister tables a discussion paper in that regard, whereas in South Africa the cluster system is designed exactly to avoid this. Cabinet memos are generally viewed as a "policy advice to support effective decision-making from a Minister or cluster to the Cabinet collective" (Queensland Government, 2002, p12).

As the principal object of introducing the clusters is said to be about ensuring integration and coordination, the next section looks the concept of integrated governance in some detail.



Figure 2 *Source: Slide presentation by Dr Anne Letsebe, Head of Cabinet Operations*

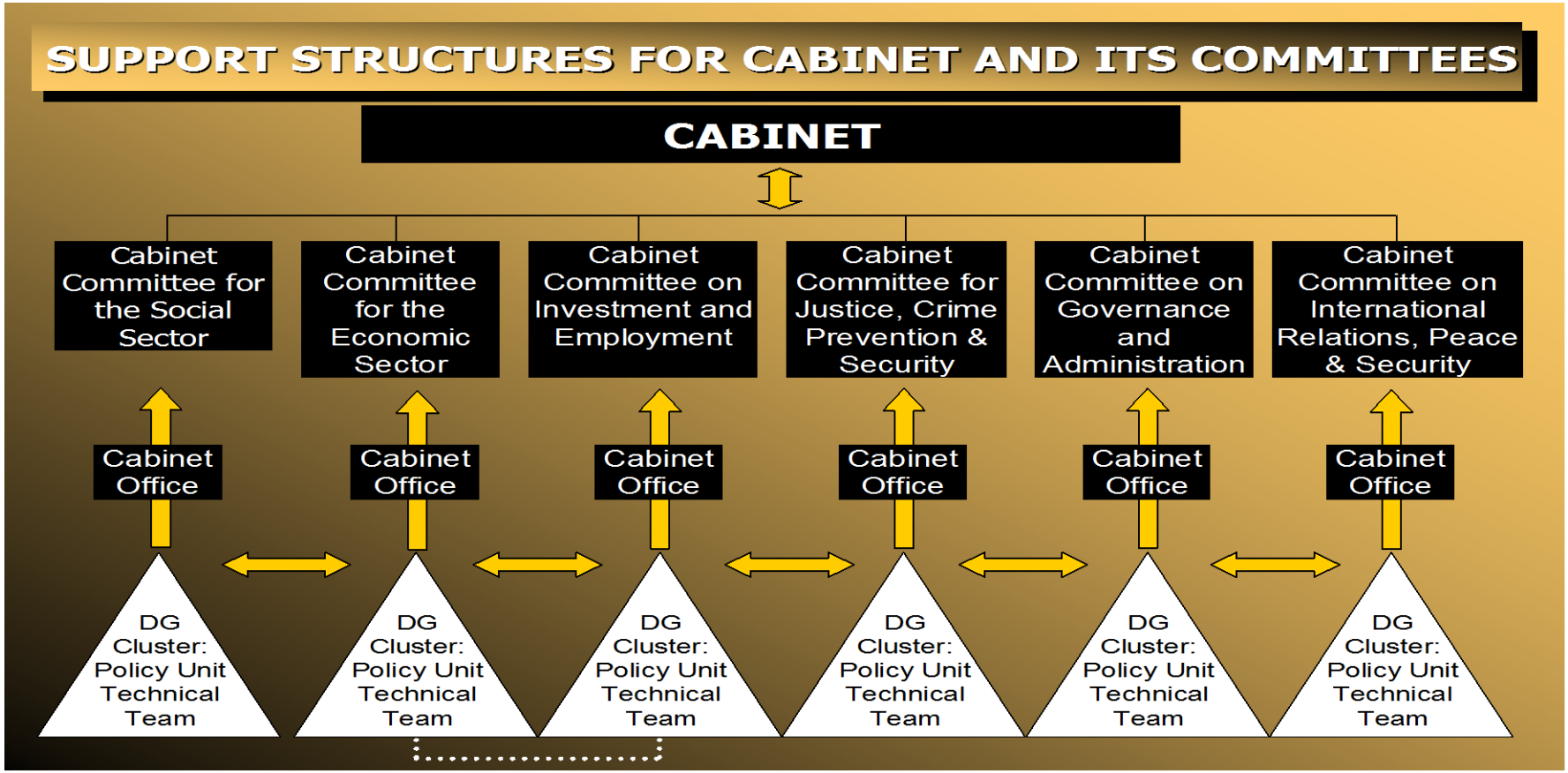


Figure 3 *Source: Slide presentation by Dr Anne Letsebe, Head of Cabinet Operations*

4. Integrated governance, the planning framework and the clusters

This section discusses integrated governance as a concept, as well as the tools that have been developed to give it conceptual and practical effect. In this regard particular attention is paid on the first MTSF of 2000 and the government-wide Planning Framework.

The DPSA (2003, p35) says that "in order to give effect to the objective of integrated governance, the programmes of government's 39 departments are grouped in cluster committees dealing with similar sectoral challenges." http://www.dpsa.gov.za/documents.asp

The clusters therefore clearly play a crucial role in making sure that integrated governance is about addressing the need to ensure that executive decisions are not only taken after thorough consideration, but their implementation is effectively followed up. Some of the key strategic objectives of integrated governance include, according to an internal DPLG Discussion Document (2003, p3), a resource allocation process that is led by:

> "strategic policy priorities agreed through careful deliberation across government, including public entities and local government; a lean and effective intergovernmental decision-making system with focused institutions that work well as the heart of the national planning process; increased opportunities for more strategic application of resources towards cross-departmental and cross-sphere programs of action; increased capacity to monitor the effective (and not simply the efficient) use of public sector resources, and to take corrective action through improved decision-making where resources are not being used well; Increased profile and impact of service offerings and development initiatives across

> all of government, through seamless delivery and improved access." (DPLG, (2003) Discussion Document (Version Seven): Proposals on Improving Integration within Government)

According to the PRC (1997), the principal object of integrated governance is to

> "(i) formulate policies which meet the needs of the people, and which are well-founded on relevant data, coherent and well-coordinated, fully and prudently costed to ensure value for money, and prioritized within available resources and (ii) to facilitate the efficient and effective implementation of such policies and to ensure that they are regularly monitored and reviewed."
> http://www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/1998/prc98/chap1.htm

Accordingly the transformation and development of governance in South Africa "requires a radical re-appraisal and management of the Office of the President, taken together with the Office of the Deputy President, to ensure greater direction and coordination in government policy at all levels" (PRC, 1997).
http://www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/1998/prc98/chap1.htm

According to a UNDP Human Development on South Africa (2003, p58) there are

> "several reasons why a strategic policy framework is necessary. First, by establishing a comprehensive set of goals and priorities (and ensuring that policy proposals fall within these parameters), decision makers are able to pursue their common agenda more coherently. Second, the centre can use the strategic framework as a tool to orient policy development in line ministries." (UNDP, 2003)

The UNDP (2003, p58) further notes that a “collective priority-setting exercise provides the head of government with an opportunity to reinforce the cohesiveness of Cabinet.”

The January Presidency Report on restructuring (2001, p14) makes the point that every

> “policy area confronts governments with unavoidable trade-offs among conflicting priorities. The most obvious example is budgetary – whether to spend on houses or hospitals, for instance. But proper co-ordination can sometimes mean that seemingly inevitable trade offs can be avoided. To take an oversimplified example: if the housing delivery infrastructure is still being consolidated while the health care delivery is up and running, one can bias the spending towards health care first, until housing catches up over a specified planning cycle. This achieves win-win solutions. A major task of proper co-ordination, therefore, is to discern and eliminate false trade-offs (a false trade off would have occurred in the example above if one ignored the short-run capacity constraints in housing, allocated budget to housing in disregard of those constraints, consequently budgeted for less health, and then found that the housing budget was rolled over, while it would have been spent well). This can only really de done if a clear and holistic framework and cycle exist.”
> www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2001/presidency01.pdf

It is clear from the above quote that the principal logic of integrated governance is the idea that government should plan and work together in order to achieve greater levels of coherence in service delivery and development. Secondly, integrated governance is about promoting and projecting the notion that government is an indivisible union and not disparate entities within it. Some of

the elements of integrated governance include convergence among the many processes and systems for resource allocation, intergovernmental decision-making systems, the development of cross-departmental and cross-sphere programs of action, effective systems for monitoring and evaluation, and the rise in the profile and impact of service delivery.

According Mbeki (1999, www.info.gov.za) integrated governance is meant to assist in bringing the notion of collective leadership to the level of administration, because government activities

> "cut across sectors, functions and departments, and for this reason a high degree of coordination at the political and administrative levels of government is required to ensure integrated governance for the country as a whole."

Mbeki (1999, p) further says that

> "equally, the manner of clustering of national Ministries is intended to promote integrated governance at the political level, to shorten lines of communication between line functions and to create greater synergy between planning, budgeting and implementation activities. These clusters will also facilitate communication by government, and as a consequence, create greater public awareness of government's institutions, its successes and the challenges it faces."

Integrated governance clearly sets itself as a counter to the old system, which was characterised by narrow, predominantly departmental thinking, and the clusters are a critical instrument with which this is meant to be achieved. In keeping with this new integrative thinking, in June 2000 the government introduced the first medium term strategic framework (MTSF) as part of ongoing

attempts to integrate various elements of the work of government, including bringing together strategizing and budgeting issues under one broad planning framework. This particular MTSF introduced a comprehensive planning framework for government, which sought to link the “electoral, parliamentary and budgeting cycles” as well as ensuring that “policy decisions taken by Cabinet inform planning throughout government” (Presidency, 2000, p3)

The Presidency MTSF (2000, p3) itself is an annual instrument aimed at establishing a “limited but focused set of medium-term strategic objectives that are shared by all spheres of government and inform the expenditure planning process.” It introduces a new planning framework, which is intended to focus particular attention on aligning governance cycles and procedures, aligning policy and budgetary processes, and to improve planning in government.

The Presidency MTSF (2000, p3) is also aimed at ensuring that resource allocation processes are improved, as well as ensuring that the strategic objectives government sets for itself during each term of office are

> “constantly held in view by all its institutions; and that its strategies, expenditure trends and high-level decision-making processes are aligned and managed towards the building of a united, democratic, nonracial and non-sexist society.”

Accordingly, the planning framework calls for the sequencing of a range of decision generating and decision-making activities, where departments, the cabinet clusters, the FOSAD and Cabinet are involved in medium term strategic planning. For example, the President’s SON address in February sets the annual policy priorities. The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) communicates these policy priorities to the public. Between February and March an MTSF document containing the policy priorities announced by the President is drafted and consulted upon with the provinces

and local government through the Budget Council and Budget Forum. In the same period, departments start a review of their programmes and budgets and draw up business plans, which are aligned to the MTSF. At the end of February the national budget is presented to the nation in Parliament. **Figure 4** (on page 40) shows the planning process. It should be noted that there are no 'breaks' in the planning process. It is constantly rolling. In March the preparation of the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), based on the MTSF begins. In May budget priorities for the following financial year are considered by the Ministerial Committee on the Budget (MinComBud). In June departments submit budgets to National Treasury. In July a mid year Cabinet Lekgotla is convened, and its task among other things is to review the MTSF and budget priorities. In September a national Medium Term Expenditure Committee (MTEC) convenes to make final budget allocations for the next MTEF. In October clusters begin to engage in a midterm review and planning. In November cluster priorities are submitted to FOSAD, which in turn drafts a new MTSF. In December the clusters and ministerial Cabinet Committees review the MTSF drafted by FOSAD. In January a Cabinet Lekgotla convenes to consider, among other things, this new MTSF as well as submissions to the President's SON address.

A key weakness of this planning framework though is that it is entirely focused on the operations of the national sphere of government, and does not acknowledge the possibility of planning related links with the provincial and local spheres of government. The planning framework, and the manner in which it is designed, is meant to support the Presidency and the centre of government departments (Department of Provincial and Local Government, Department of Public Service and Administration, National Treasury and the Presidency). All other inter-sphere planning is left to ad hoc arrangements such bilaterals, the MINMECs and the PCC, and through fiscal intergovernmental relations such as the fact the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) is a member of the Budget Forum.

Integrated governance is a principal reason for the creation of the clusters, albeit with a narrow focus on the national sphere of government. This chapter has sought to describe the structural elements of this integrated governance. However, the next chapter looks at the challenges that the cluster system has had to contend with since its inception.

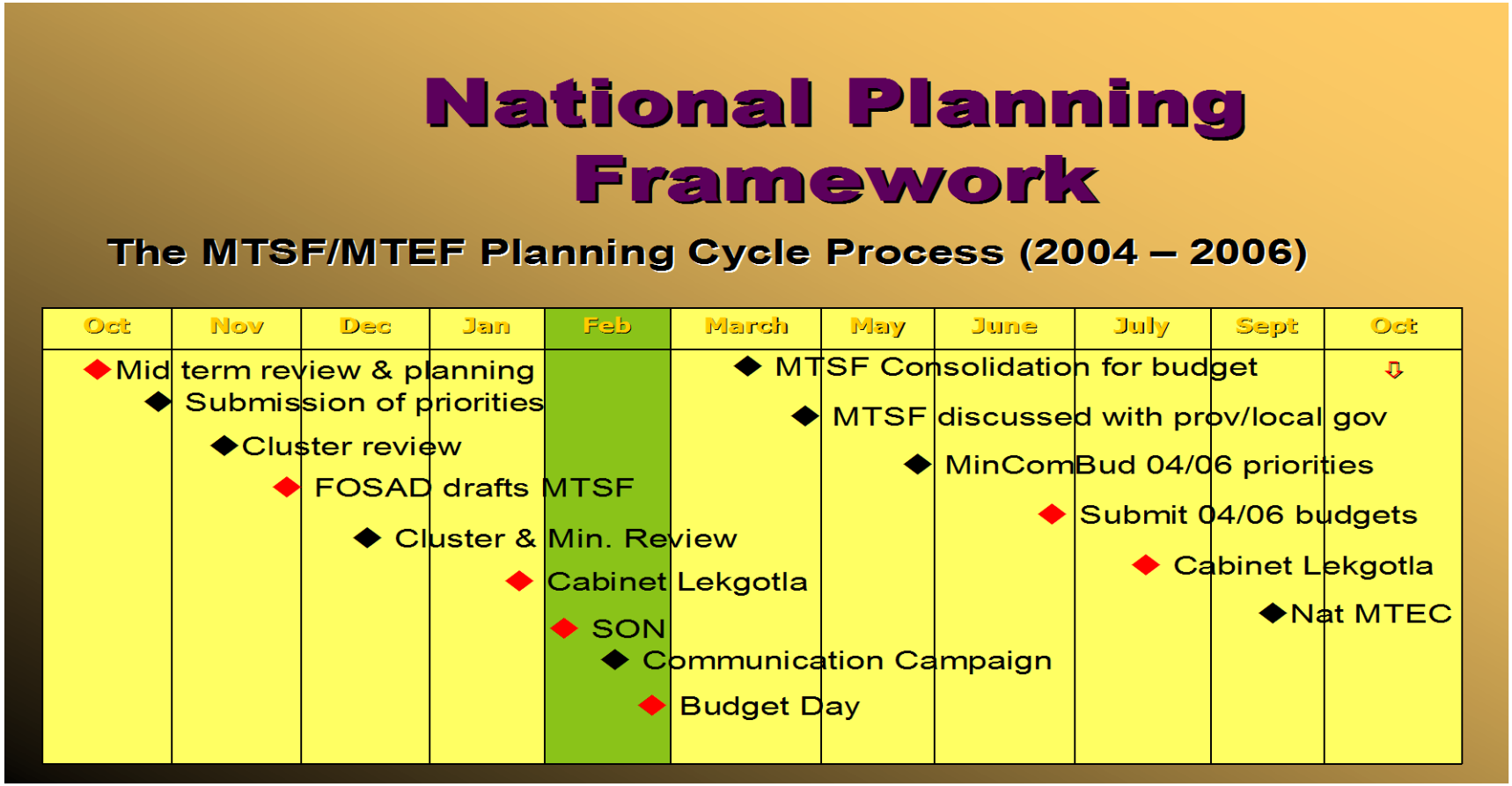


Figure 4 *Source: Slide presentation by Dr Anne Letsebe, Head of Cabinet Operations*

5. The operational challenges of the cluster system: a critique

Having discussed the issues pertaining to integrated governance and planning, attention now turns to a thematic critique of the cluster system. The particular themes in this regard relate firstly to the improvements brought about by the cluster system, secondly to the teething problems insofar as coordination is concerned, thirdly to the increasing gravitational pull of the centre, finally to the resilience of a silo departmental mentality, which is referred to here as the rear guard action of departments.

The innovation introduced by the cluster system

The clusters allow Cabinet to concentrate on policy and political matters, and not to be bogged down by technical detail of policy implementation. They give practical effect to the notion that the basic principles of integration include policy analysis, leading to processed information for political leadership to make strategic choices/interventions, planning for optimal use of resources, and facilitating effective monitoring and evaluation. They play the role of making sure that all policy trade-offs take place before matters are tabled before Cabinet, and they promote a 'joint work' ethos.

The central task of the clusters is to synthesize, synchronize and streamline policy in order to facilitate decision-making. They interface with service delivery programmes, in terms of assessing progress and challenges as a general feedback to decision makers, and are meant to facilitate collective decision-making in a context where departments remain individually accountable for the delivery of line function programmes. In a sense, they play a legitimizing role for Cabinet decisions. For example, decisions taken at committee level are more than likely to be endorsed by Cabinet. There are very few instances where a recommendation of a cluster committee is rejected by Cabinet.

According to the Presidency Report on restructuring (January 2001, p15) the cluster system has

> "contributed to the fluency of decision-making and to the efficient conduct of Cabinet business. The Committees have also reduced the fragmentation of governance and have ensured that each hand knows that the other is doing. Clustered Ministers are well-placed to ensure that concerted action is taken towards speedy and thorough policy implementation."
> www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2001/presidency01.pdf

According to a transcript of an extended Cabinet Committee workshop involving Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Premiers (2004), departments and Ministers continue to introduce 'add-ons' to existing plans, and this has a disruptive effect. The planning process is supposed to contribute to a shared strategic vision. For example the DG clusters are expected to "synthesize the strategic priorities identified by departments" (Extended Cabinet Committee Transcript, 2004, p20).

Challenges of Coordination

However, notwithstanding the improvements, a number of difficulties have been experienced with the cluster system, and chief among these is coordination between and among various functional elements in government. These include coordination between DG clusters and Ministerial Cabinet Committees, and the priority setting processes of the clusters. Sometimes this mean that departments will tend to regard their own line function work as wholly part of the clusters priorities Cluster priorities are not always aligned to departmental priorities. In some instances departmental priorities are simply converted into cluster priorities with no attempt to integrate them. For this reason it is also not always clear what is or is not a cluster issue. This clearly demonstrates that the physical

management of integrated governance is also a challenge. During the extended Cabinet Committee workshop, a number of Ministers noted for example that there are no relationship protocols between and among the various clusters themselves. In fact some clusters are propelled more by the force of character of the personalities involved than by clearly laid out procedures. This dominance of cluster programmes and discussion by the 'strong' departments is actively facilitated by the department that 'chairs' the cluster. Even though in many instances two departments have the responsibility to co-chair a particular cluster, it still happens that one co-chair is more assertive while the other is less so. The practical manifestation of this is reflected in the set of issues each cluster deals with. A strong department will push all its issues through the cluster system to Cabinet.

The agenda setting process itself is not always clear. Ostensibly, cluster agendas are meant to be informed by the SON, MTSF and the Planning Framework. Sometimes there is no synergy between what the DG clusters discuss and what the Cabinet Committees of Ministers discuss. According to a Governance and Administration Cluster report to Cabinet (2001), meetings of the clusters often had to be cancelled at short notice because of poor attendance by the Directors-General and their representatives, maybe because there are just too many meetings for DG's to attend. This has had a negative impact on the agenda of the clusters, because issues coming from those DG's who are consistently present will then tend dominate the overall agenda of the Cluster. Furthermore, departments have continued to want to put matters on the agenda of Cabinet at short notice, which clearly indicates a certain level of frustration with the clusters.

The gravitational pull of the centre

The extended Cabinet Committee workshop involving Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Premiers (2004), noted that the cluster system seems to depend more on the Presidency's role in assisting ministers to organize themselves. They further

noted that the cluster system does not support those departments who do not have concurrent functions, in terms of effective intergovernmental relations with stakeholders from other spheres of government.

The Mbeki presidency, which introduced the cluster system, is often contrasted with Mandela's presidency. Whereas Mandela was a reconciler and nation-builder, Mbeki's administration is seen as "centralised, decisive, even authoritarian" (Mail & Guardian, 30 April 1999). This view is owed largely to the reorganisation of the presidency and the introduction of the clusters. These clusters are a perfect centralizing machinery in terms of which literally all government activities are coordinated at the centre. The strengthening of the centre of government, which the Presidential Review Commission (1997) called for, is in fact an expression of the African National Congress (ANC) ideological view that the state should primarily be unitary, even when some powers are devolved to other spheres. In fact according to the National Treasury's Intergovernmental Fiscal Review (2001, p2), South Africa has "a unitary system with three spheres, and significant decentralization of powers, functions and budgeting."

According to the South African Constitution (1996) all executive authority is vested in the President. This means, among other things, that the President has the sole responsibility to hire and fire Ministers and Deputy Ministers. It also means that the President bears the ultimate responsibility for policy initiation and implementation. The basing of the clusters within the Presidency, and their orientation towards supporting the President (as opposed to Ministers) is a tacit recognition of, and deference to the Constitutional authority of the President. The power to appoint and dismiss Cabinet Ministers has further been augmented by the President's legislative power to appoint Directors-General (DGs) in all national ministries. These DGs are a critical element of the cluster system. Furthermore, as head of the ANC, the President has the power to appoint Provincial Premiers and mayors of metropolitan municipalities. Clearly there is a

gravitational pull to the centre, and the clusters are a manifesting aspect of this tendency.

Of course the state itself makes very compelling arguments for this centralization. For example, even though the DPSA (1997, p4) noted in a Provincial Review Report, that new "policies are often set at national level without due consideration to the organisational, financial and service delivery implications in the provinces" and that many "national and provincial departments are not monitoring the performance of service delivery activities", it still made the point that probably

> "the most important concern relating to the existing integrative structures in South Africa is the apparent lack of a strategic centre in national government. As a result, there is no institutional vantage point from which the coherence and consistency of anti-poverty policies can be examined."
> http://www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/1997/provrept.htm

According a Presidency (1998) report on poverty and inequality in South Africa, the cluster system also reflects a tendency where the overriding concern of the national government has tended to be that its own national priorities should be addressed by the other spheres of government, in almost total negation of the constitutional injunction that the spheres are 'equal'. The neglect of provinces in the planning systems demonstrates a subliminal belief that the provinces are no more than just the sum total of local authorities, and as such they are more tolerated as a constitutional reality than as a necessary arm of service delivery and development.

The rear guard action of departments

According to Hayward (1983, p115), various units in government will always jealously protect their own assigned areas of responsibility. It takes much in

fighting, patience, determination and cunning to “secure a minimum cooperation and agreement even within ministries that tend to be agglomerations of introverted specialist divisions.” Where there is no requirement for coordination, the various units in government work on a logical basis that says that they must be as secretive as possible during the stages when they are preparing a submission to the decision-makers. This is because, according to Hayward (1983, p115), at

> “this highly politicized level, decisions will not necessarily be made on the merits of the case but in relation to political weight, expertise and support that the protagonist can muster.”(Hayward, 1983)

This gave rise to the need for coordination of policy at the centre, hence to development of ad hoc ministerial committees. Hayward (1983, p115) says that at first

> “there are interdepartmental committees composed of senior civil servants, held at the Prime Minister’s residence at Matignon, usually with a member of the Prime Minister’s personal staff as chairman.” (Hayward, 1983)

The inter-ministerial coordination process is supported by technocrats “whose minimal function is to prepare the data on the basis of which the fundamental choices are made.” Hayward (1983, p117)

Clearly the establishment of the clusters has not been accompanied by a reconceptualization of the role of departments. Clusters have had to contend with policy initiatives that pull in opposite directions in a context where departments tend to see coordination and integration as an opportunity to improve the impact of their own department-specific services. Interaction with other departments

revolves around notions of complementarity and reciprocity. These challenges are sometimes manifested in interesting and nuanced ways. For example the extent of the disjointed manner in which government sometimes operate was reflected more starkly on 17 March 2005, when the Ministers of Education and Sport and Recreation, issued a joint media statement stating, among other things, that a Framework of Cooperation involving the two Ministers, and which would "govern the coordination and management of school sport in public ordinary schools" had been signed. On the face of it there did not seem to be anything strange when two Ministers commit themselves to working together to enhance the impact of service delivery in their respective fields. The oddity of their media statement though lie in the fact that these two Ministers and their departments belong to the same Governance and Administration Cabinet Committee (Ministers) and the Governance and Administration Cluster (Directors-General) respectively. This media statement reflected on a style of government management that preceded the current cluster approach. What the two Ministers were essentially saying (even if they were not sufficiently conscious of it) was that they are individual entities, with cooperation happening by agreed prior protocols. This totally negates the premise on which the current cluster system is based.

Departments continue to view integration more as a policy or strategy and not as a culture. These are some of the practical manifestations of disintegration. For example the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) has struggled to define its coordination role with respect to service delivery at local level by various national entities. DPLG's hesitancy in projecting its coordination role is not necessarily as a result of internal organisational weakness, but rather as a result of other line function departments who want to protect their own service delivery profiles. This is because, not withstanding attempts to integrate, departments still exist as independently accountable entities.

Departments have clearly struggled to fit the cluster process with other management processes within their traditional line function responsibilities. For this reason, the FOSAD has had an interesting relationship with political office bearers. According to the IGR Audit (1999), FOSAD predates the cabinet clusters, and its role was to bring together Directors-General at both the national and provincial levels, with a view to strengthening coordination of intergovernmental activities. However, the IGR Audit (1999) notes that with the establishment of the President's Coordination Council (PCC) and the major restructuring of Cabinet structures,

> "FOSAD's seminal role has diminished. Furthermore, the creation of a Cabinet Office for each of the six cluster committees, each with its dedicated technical team, concentrated in a cluster policy unit and headed by a Director-General, makes its initial role redundant. This is particularly so, if duplication of effort and resources is to be avoided." (IGR Audit, 1997, p57)

Not withstanding this view, FOSAD continues to exist, and its current role provides an interesting insight into how departments have resolutely protected their identities and turf. When the clusters started, only DGs could attend their meetings. However there has been a gradual juniorization of the cluster membership, to the extent that at the moment even Directors can attend cluster meetings.

A critical determinant of successful integration is the human factor, and in this context, the tension between clusters and the role of DGs was perhaps not surprising when viewed against the backdrop of fraught relations between Ministers and their DGs, especially during the early years of the new democracy. When FOSAD was established, Ministers were less enthusiastic about its role, and according to the IGR Audit, suspiciously regarded it as "bureaucratic cabinet" of DGs or a "DGs trade union" (IGR Audit, 1999, p57).

The interface between elected persons and officials was characterised by hostile and animus relations, resulting in the high turnover of DGs by 1999. At the core of this tension was the issue of accountability. In terms of civil service regulations and the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA), financial accountability rests with the DGs as 'accounting officers'. Accordingly many DGs, perhaps correctly, assumed that financial accountability presupposes a certain level of functional autonomy. On the other hand, the understanding of political office bearers was that their task is to direct not only broad aspects of service delivery policy, but also to transform the instruments of delivery.

This was remedied, to an extent, by the Cabinet adoption of a protocol setting out the parameters of the DG/Minister relationship. This protocol, which was developed by DPSA (1998, p2), noted, among other things, that in broad terms a Minister

> "makes policy upon the advice of the Director-General, who in turn is required to implement the policy. The policy-making process and the interplay between policy and implementation are of course more complex than is suggested here. Directors-General are expected to be active participants in the policy-making process by providing sound professional advice to Ministers on policy options and their implications. Likewise, Ministers are not precluded from taking an active interest in the implementation of policy decisions." (DPSA (1998), The Relationship between Ministers and Directors-General: Protocol on Good Practice)

In fact a Presidency presentation to FOSAD (2004) forcefully asserts that even though clusters set policy priorities, they do not have a budget function. This role of the clusters is, according to often confused with an implementation role.

Clusters cannot implement or account for performance. Implementation is a departmental function.

The issues canvassed in this chapter clearly indicate that even though it has been ten years since the inception of the cluster system, this approach to planning and coordination has still not been sufficiently internalized, especially at a departmental bureaucratic level. The next chapter discusses more of the cluster challenges and focuses especially at the IGR context of clusters.

6. The IGR context of clusters

This chapter mainly argues that there does not seem to be a discernible connection between the clusters at national and those at provincial level. This serves to undermine integrated governance, because it sets the operations of the national executive apart from those of other spheres of government. If, as the DPSA (2003) says, the government clusters are part of the intergovernmental system in South Africa, alongside other coordinating bodies such as the President's Coordinating Council (PCC) the Ministerial and MEC Committees (MINMEC), as well as cross-cutting programmes such the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP) and the Urban Renewal Programme (URP), then it goes without saying that there should also be stronger links at the level of operations as well. Even though the clusters are principally meant to be structures supporting the national executive, they are nonetheless located in a context where government as whole has to be seen to be working together. The efficiency of the national sphere does not make any sense if planning linkages with the provincial and local spheres are ignored – as they are at the moment. Clearly therefore, there is an important intergovernmental relations role for the clusters.

Of course there is today a maze of institutions and structures, which are meant to give practical effect to this notion of integrated governance. These include the PCC, which was established in 1999; the MINMECs, the Cabinet clusters, the annual MTSF, and the Budget Forum and Budget Council, which deal with the division of revenue and intergovernmental fiscal policy and whose principal task is to prepare the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) (see **Figure 5** on page 56)

The PCC is perhaps the most important IGR structure because it brings together all the three spheres of government. According the Democracy at Work report of the Presidency, it

> "boosts the constitutional principle of co-operative governance and compliments these pre-existing entities, by providing direct interaction between the President and Provincial Premiers together with the Minister of Provincial and Local Government and all related Directors-General"
> www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2001/presidency01.pdf

Shilowa (2004) also says that even though relations across the spheres of government have been characterised by poor communications in the past, the introduction of the PCC and provincial intergovernmental forums has however improved this. The challenge however remains the coordination of activities and programmes. Shilowa (2004, in Service Delivery Review, p26) says that this problem can be "attributed in part to lack of protocols governing joint planning, funding and implementation of integrated development projects and services that involves all three spheres of government."

There are a number of aspects to IGR, such as cooperative governance, which is mandated by chapter 3 of the Constitution. IGR also calls for all government institutions in all the three spheres to support , consult and share information with one another. Cooperative governance also calls for the coordination of all government activities, as well as for the establishment uniform standards for monitoring and evaluation. According to Watts (1999), one of the fundamental conditions for effective IGR is the "establishment of a political culture of cooperation, mutual respect and trust."

Reddy (2001, p22) also says that IGR is about the "mutual horizontal and vertical relations and interactions between governmental institutions." Reddy (2001, p22)

says that IGR is an integral part of a “wider field of public administration” and that in this context the “political and management component has a pivotal role to play in terms of facilitating policy development, implementation and analysis within a defined framework and the context of service delivery.” Reddy (2001, p30) further says that it is generally accepted that the “successful coordination of IGR in any country requires political clout at the highest level.” In fact Reddy (2001, p30) also notes that the Presidency has been restructured and capacitated to “coordinate the activities of government through cabinet clusters…”

The Governance and Administration Cluster (G&A Cluster) has noted during the last Cabinet Lekgotla that the capacity of the state to implement integrated programmes is also very limited. Elements of this capacity include internal capacity as it relates to policy framework, human and financial resources, leadership, and institutional capacity, as well as external capacity, which relates mainly to community participation.

The IGR in South Africa is largely characterised by informal relationships among a variety of structures. The new Intergovernmental Relations Act is meant to address this weakness. However other weaknesses will also have to be addressed, including, the need for the harmonization and alignment of planning instruments across the three spheres of government. According to Zam Titus (2002, p4), the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) is the main point of contact between government and the local sphere of government, especially on matters pertaining to the

> “assignment of responsibilities to local government by legislation, planning requirements, labour relations, regulations in terms of the Municipal Systems Act, standard draft by-laws, regulations in term of the Municipal Finance Management Act, implementing planning

regulations, limiting municipal tariffs, rates and taxes, etc, and National Traffic Law Enforcement Code."

Titus (2002) further says that SALGA is a member of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) and participates (when invited) in discussions of the Portfolio Committee on Provincial and Local Government. In addition, there are a number of statutory IGR structures in which SALGA participates, including the "Budget Forum, Finance and Fiscal Commission, Committee for Environmental Coordination's shareholders meeting" Titus, 2002, p5)

IGR is aimed at making sure that Government, in its entirety, works as one, in an integrated and co-coordinated manner. This is a constitutional imperative, and the clusters, as an instrument of executive administration, are crucial in making sure that this is realized. At its most basic, IGR refers to the sum total of systems, structures and the strategic deployments in all of Government, and clusters deal with all aspects of IGR, especially pertaining to planning, policy development, performance management and coordinating the efforts of a wide array of managers. It is therefore crucial that IGR begins to reflect, thoroughly, a deeper understanding of all the key programmes of Government as well as the work of all the clusters. Consequently the physical management of IGR has to be more than just an intellectual exercise. It has to focus sharply on all integrative aspects of government policy. For example the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) has to be able to say whether or not the provincial and local spheres of government have adopted, and to what extent, the cluster approach to governance, whether this is a strategic objective for all the spheres, and what work is underway to achieve it.

Writing for the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE), Ran Greenstein (1999, p5) argues that, the main areas of deficiency in IGR include the following, namely :

> “the absence of an overall shared vision; the existence of an inherited bloated bureaucracy, combined with excessive centralised control, top-down management structures and a work ethic that is not primarily oriented towards service delivery; the tendency to formulate national initiatives without considering provincial plans and capacities to implement them; the absence of an appropriate communications strategy, between and within spheres and departments, as well as with the public; the absence of clearly defined roles and responsibilities, particularly between politicians and civil servants and bureaucrats; the absence of effective monitoring and evaluation systems, particularly in relation to fiscal expenditure; the absence of an information management system and implementation plan (which results in outdated financial information systems, lack of co-ordinated approach to information); problems with human resource development (HRD) at all spheres, but affecting provincial government in particular (lack of strategy, absence of effective monitoring and performance management systems, inappropriate training and education and low prioritisation of HRD); turf battles between departments, resulting in the duplication of functions between national and provincial departments; the lack of specific time-frames for approval of programmes and plans across departments, resulting in ‘bureaucratic loops’; a high degree of unnecessary procedural and legal complexity; and unfunded mandates, resulting in a gap between policy commitments on the one hand, and the financial and administrative capacity to implement them on the other.” (Ran Greenstein, 1999, Intergovernmental Relations and Provincial Government.)

Legislation is now in place, the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act, which formalizes key executive structures, and which provides for structural

focus on the implementation of policy priorities. Hopefully these structural weaknesses are going to be addressed. Hence in the next chapter the cluster role in monitoring and evaluation is discussed.

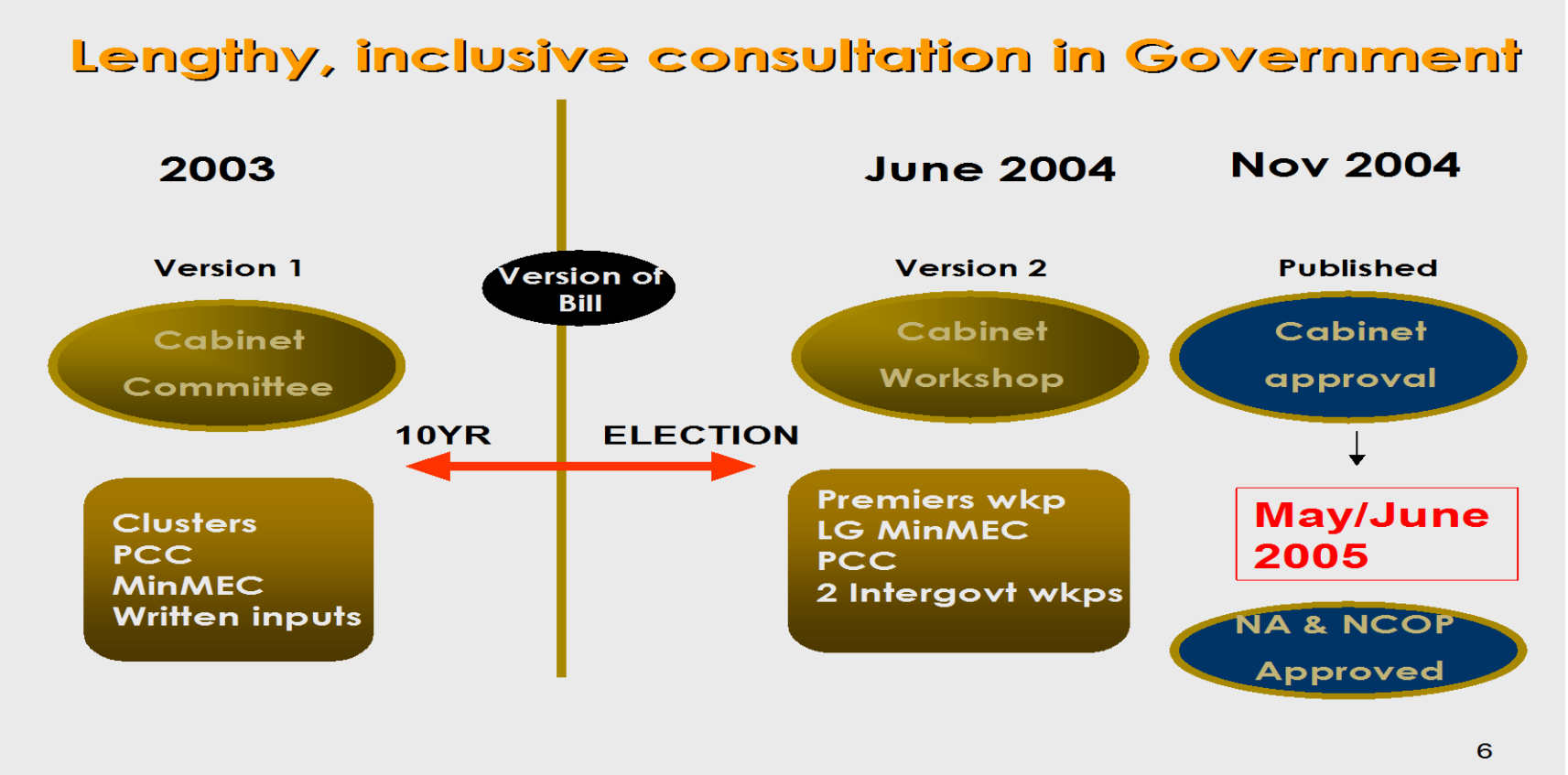


Figure 5 *Source:* Themba Fosi, PowerPoint Presentation on the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Bill/Act, Provincial Intergovernmental Relations Coordinator's Workshop, 11 August 2005

7. The clusters as a monitoring and evaluation mechanism

The clusters are of course uniquely suited to play an excellent monitoring and evaluation function. The fact that thus far the South African government does not have a comprehensive and integrated monitoring and evaluation framework attests to the continued disjointedness of governance. This chapter accordingly follows up on this point, by arguing that for the national sphere of government, the clusters are in effect a monitoring and evaluation mechanism, but have not adequately played this function.

A government discussion document on improving integration within government notes that monitoring support and intervention

> "functions are fragmented and improved coordination in the monitoring of provincial and local government is therefore necessary. An example in provinces where adequate capacity and systems exist is that duplication of provincial monitoring initiatives by national departments results in confusion and uncoordinated support to municipalities." (DPLG, 2003, Discussion Document (Version Seven): Proposals on Improving Integration Within Government, p6)

The MTSF (2000, p7) says that the corporate strategy of government should be reviewed

> "at mid-financial year (in regard to the government programmes and expenditure), at financial year-end (in regard to the evaluation of annual business plans and service delivery performance) and at mid-term (in regard to the policy priorities of government)." (MTSF, 2000)

To this end, the Cabinet Lekgotla plays a pivotal role. It is supported by a range of other IGR structures such the FOSAD, MINMECs, the PCC, etc. However, the functional monitoring systems of each department play a clearly overriding role at this stage. The Management Committee of FOSAD (FOSAD Manco) plays a leading role in monitoring and evaluating the successful or otherwise implementation of the MTSF. Some of the evaluation factors FOSAD Manco looks at include the

> "match between objectives and the programmes put in place to achieve them, … the extent to which indicators were achieved, … the capacity of departments to measure performance and report accurately against their indicators." (FOSAD Report, 2005, p3)

Yet, ironically, after its recent Lekgotla, Cabinet also resolved to develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for government. This is not withstanding the fact that in December 1999 the PCC had instructed that a "coordinated national framework for monitoring, support and supervision" be developed (IGR Workshop Document, 2001). The Portfolio Committee on Provincial and Local Government had also noted in its report to the National Assembly in 2001 that there "needs to be more specific indicators by which improvements in the IGR can be measured" (Portfolio Committee Report, 2001, p2).

In August 2004, Cabinet (4 August 2004)

> "agreed on a broad framework to underpin Monitoring and Evaluation of policy development and implementation across all spheres of government. This is aimed at developing a comprehensive system that will help in facilitating speedier implementation of government programmes."

Following the Cabinet Lekgotla of 20 July 2005, Cabinet resolved to institute a new monitoring and evaluation for government, whose date would be drawn from each department and would be based at the PCAS in the Presidency.

Various departments have developed their own specialized monitoring and evaluation systems. According to a discussion document released by the then Department of Constitutional Development (now DPLG, 1998, p20) monitoring in the context of IGR would relate to four areas of government activity, namely determining

> "whether executive organs of state in the three spheres of government are able to and are exercising their constitutional powers and performing their functions effectively and efficiently; determining whether the conditions exist for the exercise of specific constitutional powers, such as the power of intervention; ascertaining the quality and effectiveness of policies, programs, activities and laws; and determining the quality of performance rendered by intergovernmental structures as measured against their strategic purposes" (Presidency and DPSA, 2005; Proposal and Implementation Plan for a Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation, p5)

The new proposed government wide monitoring and evaluation system is intended to enhance the capacity of the Presidency, according to the Presidency and the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) (2005). The Presidency and DPSA (2005, p5), say, in a paper presented to the Cabinet Lekgotla of 20 July 2005, that this government wide monitoring and evaluation system is defined as a

> “continuing managerial function that aims to provide managers with regular feedback and early indicators of progress of lack thereof in the achievement of intended results and the attainment of goals and objectives.” (Presidency and DPSA, 2005; Proposal and Implementation Plan for a Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation, p5)

Furthermore, the Presidency and DPSA (2005) note that monitoring

> “involves reporting on actual performance against what was planned or expected according to pre-determined standards. Monitoring generally involves collecting and analyzing data on implementation processes, strategies and results, and recommending corrective measures.” (Presidency and DPSA, 2005; Proposal and Implementation Plan for a Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation, p5)

How this system differs in content and form from the work already done by the clusters remains to be seen, because, by definition clusters perform a monitoring function. The initiative for the creation of a government wide monitoring and evaluation system indicates that the present intergovernmental system has failed the key task of ensuring coordinated and integrated governance, and has not effectively facilitated workable decision-making mechanisms.

8. Conclusion

The main elements of argument in this paper are the following, namely; a description of the executive structural arrangements, which the new democratic government inherited when coming to power in 1994; the conceptualization and establishment of the new cluster system following recommendations of the PRC in 1998; an analysis of some of the challenges and nuances relating to the actual functioning of this cluster system; the IGR context of the clusters; as well as their role in monitoring and evaluation. Indirectly this is a study of the South African Presidency as a key element of the Centre of Government. A number of sub-arguments are made in this regard, which are perhaps best illustrated in the following manner.

Firstly there has been a description of the origins of the mandate for restructuring of executive structures in South Africa, as well as the conceptualization of integrated governance. For example, it has been argued that the PRC (1998) recommended the strengthening of the centre of government in order to improve coordination, integration and efficiency in government. The recommendations of the PRC (1998) were later given practical effect through the establishment of the cluster system in order to improve the operations of the executive. The Presidency, together with DPSA, DPLG, and National Treasury have since been constituted, through the MTSF of 2000, as the centre of government, and are charged with engineering integrated governance throughout government. A number of instruments in this regard have been developed, including the national Planning Framework.

Secondly, this paper has argued that the clusters are an informal network of structures aimed at enabling the centre to discharge its responsibility for policy coordination more effectively and efficiently. To this end, the cluster system has largely succeeded in this regard. However, that there are still critical

weaknesses. One of these is that the traditional bureaucratic entities, the state departments, have struggled to come to grips with the integration imperative that motivates the cluster system. As a result, integrated governance has not been fully realized. Thirdly, the introduction of the clusters may brought about a sharper focus on the strategic tasks of the democratic government, but elements of the executive infrastructure of the NP regime still remain. Fourthly, clusters are meant to promote the notion of collective leadership. However, it is still possible to for a silo approach to prevail in policy making.

This is the milieu of the Cluster system in South Africa, which firmly establishes the principle, as Blondel (1982, p153) argues that "policy making and coordination should be located within a newly 'institutionalized' presidency." Viewed against this background, it is no coincidence that following the report of the Presidential Review Commission, a 'new' presidency, well placed to take charge of policy-making and coordination, emerged.

South Africa has opted for a network of parallel interdepartmental committees of civil servants, which have specific links with the Ministerial Cabinet committees, and where the Clusters are an integral part of an informal policy making network which supports the operations of the Executive. The cluster system has contributed significantly to the strengthening of the Presidency, in full compliance with the recommendations of the PRC Report (1998). It has brought about high levels of efficiency in the conduct of Cabinet business and operations.

It is however clear that the other spheres of government have lagged behind in putting in place systems that support effective decision-making. Furthermore, the centralizing tendency of the cluster system is clearly evidenced by the heavy bias of cluster work towards the Presidency – and not individual line function departments. Of course this is understandable, because integration would not make any sense if it was not anchored on the highest office in the land. The

consequence of this though is that the accountability of departments for the delivery of services is subordinate to the performance of the cluster as a whole.

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