

5.1 A Strategic Planning System in the Making

The South African planning system is in the process of being refined. Although much is being done by the national government to strengthen and harmonise planning between and within tiers of government, it will take a while for the government to get strategic planning right. With the local government still struggling to meet their developmental mandates, there is a need for the provincial sphere to be more assertive in its approach to planning. Notwithstanding the challenges such as lack of human capacity, and lack of adequate resources that hinders most provinces from performing and delivering as expected, this particular sphere has a duty to oversee and monitor planning at local level at the same time ensuring that national policies are implemented on the ground (Camay and Gordon, 2005, Oranje, 2002).

Since the creation of new South African provinces in the early 1990s, there has been uncertainty among politicians and policy-makers alike on the role that this particular sphere should be playing (Kihato and Rapoo, 2001; Khosa, 1998). Even to this day, prominent political figures have expressed their concern on the performance of the provincial sphere.¹⁸ Such discontent has been fuelled by the lack of sound public management at provincial level as well as the inefficiency of most provinces in delivering services (Jozana, 2000; Titus, 2002). Give such a track-record the political credence and legitimacy of the South African province seems to be hanging on a thread.

From a new regionalist perspective however, it would be injudicious or inadvisable for one to completely rule out provinces as weak political entities that have to be done away with. What is needed in South Africa therefore, is an understanding of the challenges that hinder provinces from functioning optimally. As pointed out in the case of Netherlands, strategic and pragmatic planning at provincial level can

¹⁸ Mail and Guardian (September-October, 2005)

change not only the socio-economic standing but also the attitude that citizens have on provinces. Using the New Regionalist perspective as a point of departure, this chapter strives to come up with ideas that can contribute to the strengthening of the provincial-scale planning in South Africa. Instead of merely highlighting the weaknesses and challenges faced by provinces, it is worthwhile for development planners and policy-makers to come up with suggestions and constructive criticisms that can help improve the situation.

For provincial-scale planning to flourish [that is within the context of intergovernmental planning] there must be a change in a) the attitude towards provinces in South Africa; b) political leaders, policy-makers and development planners need to be more accountable and responsive when engaging with planning issues particularly at provincial level; c) there is also a need for more a more strategic and realistic approach to provincial-scale planning especially in the formulation and implementation of the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy (PGDS) as well as other provincial planning instruments; and d) efficient and effective communication channels between all three spheres of government must be developed. When fully attended to, these abovementioned issues could lead to a well-organised planning approach at provincial level thus resulting in the refinement of the South African intergovernmental planning system.

5.2 Promoting Provincial Legitimacy

With some South African critics doubting the role relevance and the efficiency of the provincial sphere in delivering services as well in promoting planning (Camay and Gordon, 2004, Jozana, 2000, Kihato and Rapoo, 2001) there is a need for this particular sphere to be more radical and strategic in its approach to developmental mandates.

Instead of being merely a sphere for political influence the province has a potential of defining its own developmental agenda (Kihato and Rapoo, 2001). As Yusuf Patel (Interview, 2005) pointed out, even though South African provinces are a part of the cooperative governance structure, they are by and large a distinctive sphere with their own legislature, their own political leaders [that is the premiers] and most importantly they have enough constitutional power to pass their own legislation. The failure of the provincial sphere to deliver therefore, has much to do with the lack of political will and determination especially of provincial government office-bearers. Thus, political will and self-motivation and particularly on the part of those who run the state apparatus, has a bearing on how planning and service delivery issues are approached.

As highlighted in the Groningen case, strategic planning is one way of legitimising the political existence of provinces (Hague and Jenkins, 2005). Put in other words, effective delivery of services at provincial level is likely to build the citizens' confidence and faith in the government. Lack of clear developmental strategies at any level of government however is bound to result in political apathy (Evans, 1995). The South African provincial government therefore should use the instruments it has namely the PGDS and PSDFs, to try and promote economic development and spatial governance.

5.3 Getting the Provincial Plans Right

Recently, the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) has shown its commitment on promoting strategic planning at provincial level by formulating guidelines that could inform provinces in their adoption of PGDS (DPLG, 2005b). In addition, research institutions such as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has shown unwavering effort in building capacity at provincial level (Meiklejohn, 2005). The institutional and capacity building exercise involves

engaging with planning personnel at provincial levels in issues around the strengthening of provincial planning instruments (Maria Coetzee, Interview, 2005).

Notwithstanding, the formulation of strategic PGDSs has been a challenge for most South African provinces. Even in well-resourced provinces such as Gauteng, the preparation of a strategic PGDS has been a challenge. As realised by Meiklejohn (2005: 15) part of the challenge is a result of political buy-in. In Gauteng for instance, the Office of the Premier has not played any significant role in the PGDS formulation process. As Needham (1997) pointed out in the case of Netherlands, the involvement of provincial political leaders in planning is important as it gives the planning activity more credence in the eyes of the business community as well as the civil society. Political buy-in becomes even more important for poorer provinces such as the Northern Cape and Free State. For Meiklejohn (2005) provinces with weak economic bases are dependent on sound political leadership. It is the leaders who have to come up with initiatives that can unlock the developmental potential of poorer provinces. As one senior government official commented, strategic plans at provincial level must be an expression of sound leadership (Yusuf Patel interview, 2005).

The shift towards governance has made it almost necessary for the public sector to invite other stakeholders in the decision-making process (Bollens, 2005). Most critics have upheld the participation of other developmental agencies in the planning process as it has proved to promote a sense of ownership among the communities participating in the process (Healey, 2004; Vigar et al. 2000). In most South African provinces, the participation in the PGDS formulation process has been unimpressive. As pointed out by Mahlangu (Interview, 2005) the involvement of the business community and the civil society in the PGDS formulation process has been minimal. Part of the problem lies in the fact that there are no clear-cut channels within provinces that necessitate broad-based participation. At the end of the day, the PGDS adoption process is dominated by junior public officials who do

not have the needed planning experience or the expertise (Interview with Magagula, 2004 and Mahlangu, 2005). This issue is closely linked to the lack of experienced strategic planners in most provinces.

In addition, the lack of broad-based participation stems from the inability of the government officials or the public sector to clearly outline the role that other key role players should be playing. Just to give an example, during the Mpumalanga review process, the role of the business community in the process was not well articulated (Mahlangu, Interview, 2005). There is a need for the provincial politicians, policy-makers and development planners to set out the developmental agenda in a way that would encourage other role players to participate fully. The main idea behind broad-based participation in strategic planning is to get as much input (be it financial or otherwise) as possible from key stakeholders. It takes skill and determination on the part of provincial political leaders and planners to be able to create incentives and conditions that would encourage the business sector and the civil societies to participate and most importantly, contribute to the planning process.

With the levels of illiteracy soaring in most provinces, it is difficult for both the public and private sector to find people with needed skills and expertise (Camay and Gordon, 2004). The failure of most provinces to formulate and implement strategic provincial plans is due to lack of skilled personnel. As noted in the case of Mpumalanga, there are only two provincial IDP Coordinators in that province and two senior strategic planners overseeing the formulation and implementation of the PGDS (Mahlangu Interview, 2005). Getting provincial-planning right therefore can only be fully realised if the capacity-building process is speeded up.

5.4 Making the Provincial Plans more Binding

The weakness of provincial-scale planning in South Africa has been credited to the absence of legally binding strategic plans at this particular level (Interview with Mahlangu, 2005). Making the PGDS legally binding might not automatically lead to strategic planning at this particular sphere; however it can result in more accountability and responsiveness on the part of public officials and planners who are responsible for provincial planning. With no single legislation that binds provinces to adopt and implement the PGDS, provincial planners and public officials have been reluctant to take the PGDS seriously. Judging from the local level planning, the presence of the Municipal Systems Act of 2000 [that binds all municipalities to adopt IDPs] there is evidence that public officials at local level have shown commitment to the IDP adoption and implementation process (Harrison, 2003). Having a legally binding provincial planning strategy is likely to stimulate positive response at provincial level. It is the duty of policy-makers as well as political structures like the provincial legislatures and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) to consider passing legislations that can make the PGDS more binding.

5.5 Moving away from Weak, Empty Provincial Plans

From a research conducted by the CSIR on the current status of the PDGS in relation to local and national planning strategies, it was concluded that most provincial plans lack the strategic element (Meiklejohn, 2005). Almost all PGDSs acknowledge the importance of being “strategic”, “pragmatic” and forward-looking at least on paper, in practice these so-called strategies are not clear-cut. The Mpumalanga PGDS for instance is found wanting particularly in the implementation strategy (MPGDS, 2005). There is a need therefore to move away from broad provincial plans that have vague implementation strategies. A developmental PGDS therefore should move away from merely ‘talking the talk’

[that is simply purporting to be “strategic” on paper] but not ‘walking the walk’ [that is being proactive and practical].

5.6 Incorporating the Spatial Dimension into the PGDS

Any plan that seeks to be strategic must take cognisance of the spatial dimension (Pieterse, 2004). A strategic provincial plan therefore must be informed by the realities on the ground – realities in space. Apart from highlighting the potential development trajectory, a well integrated spatial plan identifies areas that are in need of urgent attention. Given the socio-economic stress and difficulties faced by the majority of South Africans, there is a need for a more holistic and well-targeted planning approach. To achieve a well-rounded and strategic provincial development planning approach, South African provinces need to incorporate the spatial component into the PGDS process. Instead of viewing the PGDS and the provincial Spatial Developing Framework (PSDF) as separate “entities”, there is a need for province to blend and harmonise the two planning instruments (Meiklejohn, 2005; Harrison, 2003). So far, some provinces such as Mpumalanga are still in the process of incorporating the provincial spatial plan into the PGDS. The completion of such a process will certainly transform the Mpumalanga provincial planning system for the better (Andre Britts interview, 2005).

5.7 The PGDS Must Inform all Provincial Sector Plans

The synchronisation of provincial departmental sector plans is a challenging but necessary activity (DPSA, 2003). To avoid the current situation whereby different provincial departments are working in isolation, there is a need for a strong PGDS that can act as bedrock or a common strategic platform where planning decisions can be made and systematically implemented. As Camay and Gordon (2004) have realised, having a well-knit and coordinated planning structure *within* different spheres of government is likely to make coordination and cooperation *between*

different government spheres more practical. Provinces therefore need to ensure that all provincial sector plans are in line with the developmental goals and objectives. In addition, provincial development goals and dreams must be shared by all role players including the community. Such networking and vision-sharing would certainly cultivate provincial democratic governance.

5.8 Cooperation between Provinces

In order to redefine and legitimise their political existence in this post-apartheid era, South African provinces must cultivate a culture of cooperation. From a new regionalist perspective, the strength of sub-national governments lies in their ability to interact with each other (MacLeod, 2001; Keats, 1998). As noted in the case of the Netherlands, the northern provinces of that particular country were able form alliances that enabled them to share information and engage in issues of similar concern (Hague and Jenkins, 2005).

With the recent enactment of the recent passing of the Intergovernmental Relations Act (IRA) (RSA, 2005) South African provinces should try and utilise newly formulated Inter-Provincial Forums (IPF) as arenas for progressive deliberation. As pointed out in the new IRA, the IPFs will function as consultative forums for provinces to discuss and consult on matters of mutual interest. One would assume that strategic planning matters will take precedence in these newly formulated provincial forums. The strengthening and implementation of provincial strategic instruments should also be at the top of the provinces' agenda in such forums.

Cooperation between provinces in this country must include the sharing of skills and expertise first between political leaders as well as development planners. As Wheeler (2000: 1-3) pointed out that NR as a paradigm is built upon and inspired by information sharing resulting in the expansion and flourishing of the knowledge economy. For poorer provinces such as Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape,

cooperation with richer provinces such as Gauteng for instance would prove profitable. Interaction between provinces certainly depends on the existence of an efficient communication system.

5.9 Effective Communication Between all Spheres of Government

Strategic planning between the provincial level and other spheres of government can only be realised if there is a clear communication channel between all government levels. As Rapoo (1998: 1) explains, communication between different spheres of government is a “prerequisite” as it informs public officials of the activities taking place in other government sectors, leading to a concerted approach to decision-making and implementation. Furthermore, an effective communication systems acts as channel that informs citizens about the activities of their political representatives. Such communication is important in promoting democracy as well as strategic allocation of resources.

The Government Communication and Information Service (GCIS) is the main government information system designed to promote the culture of communication and subsequent accountability between and within government structures (Camay and Gordon, 2004). It is unfortunate however that the GCIS has been blamed for being an ANC ‘mouth-piece’, a “political tool rather than an objective source of information” that seeks to legitimise the ruling party’s political ideologies (Camay and Gordon, 2004: 335). The ‘hijacking’ of the central information system by a political organisation is not only detrimental to the development of this country but it also negates the democratic values that hold the society together.

The success of intergovernmental planning therefore will depend on the strengthening of the intergovernmental communication channels such as the GCIS. The independence of the GCIS is critical as it guarantees its objectivity and subsequent efficiency. Effective communication between and within government

spheres would result a more coordinated decision making process leading to a more harmonised intergovernmental planning system in South Africa.

5.10 All Strategic Plans must Talk to Each Other...

One of the challenges facing the current planning system is the coordination and alignment of planning instruments. Recently, the national government has embarked on a mission to try and align the PGDS with the municipal IDPs and these instruments must be informed by the national spatial *perspective*, the NSDP (Mohamed *et al.* 2004). Being a complicated process, the harmonisation of planning instruments will take skill, strategy and dedication from all three government spheres.

To make an analogy, strategic planning instruments, just like musical instruments need to be understood, fine-tuned and harmonised. Most importantly, there must be a 'bass-line' or a common theme that holds the whole process together. In strategic planning the 'bass-line' that gives rhythm and melody to the whole 'concert' is the vision – a common national objective that informs planning at all government levels. The invitation of other stakeholders such as the business community and civil societies to the concert might lead to strategic planning.

Many authors have identified the importance of getting the budgetary instruments right (Harrison, 2003). The Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) are the two prominent budgetary tools that can realise the implementation goals of the PGDS as well as other local and national planning projects (DPSA, 2003). For all the above planning tools to work however, all three spheres of government should set their priorities right thus making it possible for planning to be coordinated between all three spheres.

Being a part of complex government machinery, provinces in South Africa are dependent on other spheres of government to function optimally. If there is a glitch at local or national level, then provincial-scale planning is bound to be negatively affected. For Tewdwr-Jones (2003) a functional “planning polity” relies on constant interaction between all spheres of government. Given the complex nature of the government system, confusion and uncertainty about the roles that each sphere needs to play is bound to exist. What makes all the difference however, is the manner in which those uncertainties are dealt with. For a relatively new planning system like the one in South Africa, there is a need for compromise and understanding between and within different spheres of government. A clear definition of planning roles between the provincial, local and national government would be a leap towards integrated planning.

5.11 Sound Financial Management

For strategic provincial-scale planning to take root, there is a need for the national government to play a role in ensuring that there is sound financial management at sub-national level. Given the cooperative governance structure and the national government’s control of financial issues there is a need for provinces to be more strategic in their financial expenditure (Ahmad, 1998). Although the devolution process in South Africa was not accompanied by fiscal decentralisation, provincial political leaders have the responsibility to spend their grants more responsibly.

Some social scientists have blamed to failure or weakness of provinces in this particular sphere’s lack of power to raise revenue (Titus, 2000; Ahmad, 1998). The issue of fiscal autonomy is indeed a sensitive one. However, given the fact that most South African provinces are actually failing to spend the money they get from the national government, what needs to be emphasised at this point in South African politics, is the efficiency of government officials to manage finances. As some critics pointed out, in 2002 South African provincial governments failed to spend R4.4

billion (Camay and Gordon, 2004). Such under-spending is linked to lack of sound and strategic financial management at provincial level. It is the onus of the national government and provincial political leaders to ensure that provinces are capacitated and staffed with competent people who have a strong understanding of finances.

The idea of having provinces with revenue-raising powers might be appealing. Given the institutional as well as the socio-economic profile of most South African provinces, fiscal decentralisation leads to the further marginalisation of poor provinces (Oranje, 2002). In fact, the debate on the pros and cons of fiscal decentralisation in South Africa still needs to be investigated. Suffice to point out however that the advancement of strategic planning at all government levels relies on sound financial management system.

5.12 Good Governance as a Key to Strategic Planning

Before concluding, it is worthwhile to state the importance of good governance and accountability in any public sector activity. Good governance (Figure 5.1) emphasises the importance of ethics and responsibility of those holding public offices (Evans, 1995). With provinces such as Mpumalanga and the Western Cape characterised by corrupt government officials, the credibility and reputation of the provincial sphere becomes tainted (Camay and Gordon, 2004). The misuse of public resources by corrupt government officials does not only slow down the development process, it also lead to political apathy (Callaghy, 1993).



Figure5.1 The National Council of Provinces Chambers – the central decision-making body within the provincial sphere, and equally critical to promoting good governance.

Source: Jon'a Meyer © 2003 from <http://sociology.camden.rutgers.edu/jfm/sa-2003.html>

Corruption at provincial government level (or any level of government) might also pave way for patronage politics which is characterised by the employment of unskilled people. For Camay and Gordon (2004) employing unsuitably qualified officials with political connections and the excusing of their poor performance results in the wastage of state resources. To avoid maladministration, South African provinces should appoint people on merit. People with planning qualifications from accredited institutions for instance must be appointed to fill vacant positions in this country's provinces.

5.13 To Conclude...

This report sought to outline the importance of provincial-scale planning in this era of global socio-economic restructuring. From the case studies examined, it becomes

apparent that sub-national governments have a purpose and a role to play in fostering strategic planning. Though countries examined in this report [that is the United Kingdom (and Wales in particular), the Netherlands and India] have different administrative structures as well as different economic and political contexts, their quest for a sound strategic planning system indicates the importance of planning activity.

Only a decade into democracy, the South African planning system is still in the process of being refined and remoulded. All three levels of government are still striving to carve their niche in this new planning system. With the third round of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) just around the corner, the South African local government is geared towards adopting more implementable and practical strategic IDPs. The success of the IDP process at local level however will depend not only on the human capacity and financial resources that district and local municipalities have, but also on the ability of provincial sphere to monitor and inform strategic planning at local level.

Faced with the task of overseeing ensuring that national planning objectives are met at provincial and local level, the provincial government finds itself in a rather challenging position. From a new regionalist perspective, it is the responsibility of the provincial government to become developmental and strategic in its planning activities. As Needham (1997) highlighted in the case of the Netherlands, provincial-scale planning goes beyond monitoring planning activities at local level, but it also compels provinces to be more assertive, developmental and strategic in their approach to planning. The South African provinces therefore are yet to prove themselves as functional spaces that can promote economic growth and spatio-political governance.

With critics doubting the role of South African provinces in service delivery as well as in promoting strategic planning, the Provincial Development Strategy (PGDS)

and the Provincial Spatial Development Framework (PSDF) pose as promising planning instruments that can redefine and reaffirm the role of provinces within the South African planning system. Strategic planning therefore becomes one way of unlocking the provincial development potential.

Like most sub-national governments in developing countries, South African provinces are faced with challenges ranging from lack of skilled personnel to fill in strategic posts; minimal (or lack of) political buy-in in the planning process; right up to the lack channels that promote broad-based participation in planning (Harrison, 2003; Oranje, 2002). Consequently, the adoption of strategic provincial plans is a daunting exercise for most South African provinces. As Meiklejohn (2005) pointed out the planning instruments at provincial level are less strategic, vague and lack a clear-cut implementation strategy.

Despite the abovementioned challenges, South African provinces have a place in the new planning system. It will take innovative provincial political leaders, policy-makers and development planners, civil societies and the business community to make planning more strategic at provincial level. As some critics pointed out, getting provincial plans right will be determined by the ability of key role players to negotiate and redefine the role of provinces in a complex system of cooperative governance (Bollens, 2005; Ahmad, 1998).

The future of provinces and provincial-scale planning in South Africa is not bleak. Efforts are being made by the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG), the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) as well as by provinces themselves to try and make planning at this level and in the country as a whole, more strategic and responsive to South African needs. With top government officials questioning the cooperative governance structure and some clamouring for the “softening of boundaries between spheres of government”¹⁹ one wonders if there

¹⁹ See Appendix B.

would be any significant change in the current administrative structure. With the sub-national government in South Africa struggling to meet the developmental needs of the state, one wonders if a change in the administrative structure will lead to a more hierarchical administrative structure. If a three-tiered government structure is put in place, will it result in more autonomy given to the provinces or will it mean more power to the local government? What are the implications of having a hierarchical administrative system? All these questions need to be grappled with as they have an impact on the country's planning system.