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A South African developmental state: the significance of state capacity

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ABSTRACT

This study uses secondary literature and primary sources to explore the significance of state capacity in proposals to build a South African developmental state. Its main aim is to get a deeper understanding of state capacity as a significant ingredient in building a successful developmental state. The analysis is based on the postulation that no country can successfully build a developmental state without the necessary state capacity. The study surveys the literature on developmental states, explores the key attributes/institutional benchmarks of a developmental state and draws out findings about what accounts for a successful developmental state. One of the key conclusions drawn from the literature is that in order for a state to be a successful developmental state, it needs to be institutionally configured in such a way that it possesses the capacity to formulate and implement policies successfully. Using theoretical benchmarks propounded by scholars as a point of reference, the study establishes how we should understand state capacity and shows that such state capacity is a necessary precondition for a successful developmental state. Following from this analysis, it explores how the South African government has to come into grips with the issue of state capacity in its quest to build a South African developmental state. The failure of post-1994 macro and micro economic reform strategies to address the principal challenges of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment indicates that successful implementation of any policy is dependent on state capacity.