TRANSFORMING SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY THROUGH DECENTRALISATION

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1.   INTRODUCTION

South Africa has undergone a great amount of transformation since the African National Congress government took over power in 1994. After many years of institutionalised racism under the apartheid policies of a National Party government a new constitution (Act 108 of 1996) was adopted in 1996 by the first democratically elected parliament. This constitution paved the way for legislation which would ultimately bring about the transformation of the country. The successful transformation of South Africa depends largely on the government's ability to implement the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and its supporting Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. These documents serve as guidelines for the development and thus the transformation of South Africa. The process of transformation in South Africa is, however, made difficult by the racial, ethnic and economic diversity of society. To effectively deal with the problems of diversity, it is essential that decentralisation of government structures takes place in order to allow government legitimacy at levels where transformation is most needed.

Transformation through a process of decentralisation is not, however, without its problems. One of the greatest stumbling blocks for transformation and development is the lack of institutional capacity at lower levels of government. This is, however, a problem which affects all developing nations. In this regard, Wildavsky, in accordance with Migdal (1988:7), states that "(p)lanners begin by attempting to transform their environment and end by being absorbed into it. This pattern of failure is most evident in the poor countries of the world where glittering promise has been replaced by discouraging performance".

The developmental initiatives in South Africa have created a great deal of expectation which is often unreasonably high. The resulting perceived lack of sufficient delivery by government has resulted in disillusionment of citizens which

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increases the potential for conflict in society. Democratic structures at local level are not enough; these structures have to be equipped with the necessary resources in terms of skills and finances to carry out the developmental tasks needed for the successful transformation of the country.

The research in this regard is exploratory in nature. In terms of this research strategy the article will explore central concepts such as transformation and decentralisation in South Africa. Furthermore, an investigation will take place into the effectiveness of government structures in their ability to carry out transformation. The article, therefore, aims to evaluate the process of transformation in South Africa against the background of the decentralisation of government structures. The following aspects will be investigated in this research:

- Theoretical perspectives
- The need for transformation in South Africa
- Institutional capacity and decentralised government structures

2.   THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Political transformation is a process in which the élites from various political parties and interest groups in society, often in opposition to each other, come together with the aim of negotiating a political settlement which transforms the society from an authoritarian regime to a democracy (Huntington 1991:114). This sequence is often referred to as *"reforma"* by authors such as Linz (1978:35) and *"élite settlement"* by authors such as Burton and Higley (1987:295). The process often goes hand in hand with a process of liberalisation which aims to restore civil liberties which in turn allows for greater social and economic freedom (Huntington 1991:124-132). This is typical of the process which took place in South Africa in which former president FW de Klerk initiated a process of negotiating a new democratic constitution for South Africa (between 1992 and 1994) after a number of political reforms which included the unbanning of political organisations and the release of political prisoners. This process was taken further by the African National Congress (ANC) government after the 1994 elections with the formalisation of the constitution by the first democratically elected parliament, the implementation of the RDP and GEAR and a great deal of legislation aimed at transforming South African society.

Change and transformation are often regarded as being synonymous with each other since change implies a movement, either progressive or retrogressive, away from the status quo. This means that the status quo is transformed into something new. Within a South African context it is change from a non-democratic society to

a democracy, from a segregated to a non-segregated society and from a traditional to a modern society. Some authors, such as Wessels (1998:68), are of the opinion that the process of transformation in South Africa implies a situation in which, should the process be carried out completely, the old (political, social, and economic) order would be replaced by a new order. This would imply a new philosophical approach to society in terms of values, norms, traditions and institutions. The RDP and GEAR documents display the necessary changes in approach in terms of the developmental requirements for the successful transformation of South Africa.

The process of transformation is closely linked to development since this implies an improvement of the status quo in terms of the lives of individuals and groups within a society. Kotze (1983:18) defines development as an "integrated change of societal institutions (political, social, economic, cultural) according to collective evaluative preferences which may be executed in an evolutionary manner through conscious human action".[2]

The RDP is a developmental programme aimed at bringing about the necessary transformation through the upliftment of the lives of individuals. The programme is guided by the following principles:

- An integrated and sustainable programme - which brings together strategies to harness the resources of the society.
- A people driven process - which focuses on the people's most immediate needs and relies on their energies to meet those needs.
- Peace and security for all - by transforming the security forces, police and the judicial system to display the national character of the nation and to provide fairness and equality for all before the law.
- Nation building - as a basis on which to build a South Africa that can support the development of the Southern African region.
- Linking reconstruction with development - by integrating growth, development, reconstruction and redistribution into a unified programme.
- Democratisation of South Africa - requires fundamental changes in the way that policy is made and programmes are integrated. Democratisation must begin to transform both state and civil society (ANC 1994:3-7).

Some scientists are of the opinion that the best way to bring about successful transformation and development within a society is through a process of decentrali-

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[2]   Compare Todaro 1989: 620; Coetzee & Graaff 1996: 140; Palmer 1989: 7; and Swanepoel & De Beer 1997: 28-32.

sation. Most theorists argue that decentralisation is important for the process of transformation since it brings political and economic decision-making closer to communities which are affected by these decisions (Litvack et al. 1995:4). Decentralisation may be defined as "(t)he expansion of local autonomy through the transfer of powers and responsibilities away from national bodies" (Heywood 1997:403). Most decentralised systems are federal in nature. Ranney (1996:40) states that federalism is the formal division of power between the national and regional governments which are *legally supreme* in their *own sphere*. On the other hand a centralised system (unitary government) is one in which there is a concentration of power or government authority at the national level (Heywood 1997:122).

In most cases decentralisation can only be successfully carried out if the regional and local authorities are elected by the communities. Since the needs of various local communities differ and the cultural preferences are diverse, the process of transformation in South Africa can only be successful if the communities are serviced by authorities who are sensitive to these needs and preferences. This involves the decentralisation of power to lower levels of government. South Africa has three levels of government namely national, provincial and local. Each level of government is elected by the communities within their geographical sphere of influence.

The term decentralisation implies that powers and authority may be devolved, deconcentrated or delegated to the various levels of government. While the deconcentration of government involves the decentralisation of certain government ministries, the devolution and delegation of government involves various forms of subnational governments. While devolved governments have the authority to impose taxes and fees for services rendered, the delegated governments depend on the central governments for most of their finances (Bird et al. 1995:11-2). In South Africa local governments have the authority to impose taxes and fees for the delivery of services, while the provincial governments rely on the central government for their finances. There is, therefore, a delegation of power and authority to the provinces, which in turn is devolved to the local governments.

3.   THE NEED FOR TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Before it is possible to evaluate the transformation process in South Africa, it is important that an empirical investigation takes place in terms of the need for transformation. This will lay the foundation for a greater understanding of the complexity involved in the transformation process. The diverse needs and aspirations of the various groups in South Africa enhance the difficulty of the process. The National Party (NP), which governed South Africa from 1948 to 1994, implemented a

policy of apartheid (separate development) which separated and alienated the various groups from one another through extensive legislation. The result of this is a society which is racially divided in terms of its social and economic structure. The following table illustrates the country's racial structure:

TABLE 1: RACIAL STRUCTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA 1995

Black	76,7 %
White	12,4 %
Coloured	8,4 %
Indian	2,5 %

(Sidiropoulos et al. 1997:8)

The racial division in South Africa is also an economic division. In 1994 the personal disposable income (i.e. the amount of income available for personal goods and services) of whites was 38,5 % compared to 48,6 % for blacks (Sidiropoulos et al. 1997:28). The disparities are exposed when this is compared to the above table The economic gaps between the various groups are particularly evident when poverty levels are examined. The following table indicates that poverty is most evident among blacks and least among whites.

TABLE 2: POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA (PER RACIAL GROUP)

Black	58,1 %
White	1,0 %
Coloured	36,2 %
Indian	4,8 %

(May 1998:5)

The ANC government has been placed under a large amount of pressure to rectify these divisions in society. The problem which the government faces, however, is that although it has political power, since an overwhelming majority of blacks voted for the ANC in the 1994 election, the economic power and much of the country's expertise remain in the hands of the white minority. Economic power and managerial expertise are crucial for the successful transformation of South Africa.

There are also still a great many political divisions in South Africa. Although the ANC won a majority of the black vote in 1994 with a total of 62,6 %, there is still an ethnic Zulu element which is often antagonistic to the ANC. This element

voted for the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which obtained 10,4 % of the total votes. On the other hand the majority of whites and a number of coloureds and Indians voted for the NP, which obtained 19,3 % of the votes (Anon 1997:3). These statistics display the ethnic and racial composition in South African politics. Given the examples of the ethnic tensions in other African states such as Rwanda and Burundi, the country has a great potential for similar conflict with its twelve official languages spoken by a variety of distinctive ethnic groups. At this stage, however, the ANC has managed to obtain votes from across the ethnic spectrum. Much has been done to bridge the ethnic gap, but as long as the economic inequalities persist along racial lines the chances of bridging the racial gap in society remain difficult.

The spirit within which the new constitution was negotiated, however, lays the foundation for the possibility of successfully dealing with the problems of the past. The preamble of the constitution highlights the following principles which form the basis of reconciliation and transformation in South Africa. The constitution aims to:

- heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected before the law;
- improve the quality of life for all citizens and free the potential of each person; and
- build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations (Anon 1996:1).

These attempts were aided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which attempted to expose the evils of Apartheid and reconcile those who had lost their pride and dignity with the perpetrators of the deeds. This commission made it possible for all people who suffered racial or other discrimination to tell their stories. It also served as an opportunity for those people across the political spectrum who committed human rights violations to apply for amnesty for their deeds. This process of healing wounds in society is an important step in the transformation process.

The main driving force behind transformation, however, remains the RDP which consists of five policy programmes which are aimed at bringing about social, political and economic transformation in South Africa. The programmes are:

- Meeting basic needs,
- developing the human resources,

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- building the economy,
- democratising the state and society and
- implementing the RDP (ANC 1994:6-11).

These policy programmes cover the most important aspects regarding social political and economic transformation in South Africa. Much of the transformation, however, relies on efficient provincial and local government structures.

4.   INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY OF DECENTRALISED GOVERN-MENT STRUCTURES

4.1   Constitutional constraints

South Africa has nine provinces and 843 municipalities (Alfreds 1998:1). Each level of government has its own constitutionally guaranteed exclusive legislative competence (Schedule 5) as well as a number of shared responsibilities with the other levels of government (Schedule 4). Provinces are responsible for aspects such as abattoirs, ambulance services, provincial archives, provincial libraries, liquor licences, provincial museums, provincial planning, provincial cultural matters, provincial recreation and amenities, provincial sport, veterinary services and provincial roads and traffic. Local governments, on the other hand, are responsible for aspects such as beaches and amusement facilities, cleansing, control of public nuisances, local amenities, municipal roads, street lighting, and refuse removal. All other aspects are either shared between the various levels of government, or are under the exclusive control of the national government (Anon 1996:146-7).

The most important aspects for development are, however, competencies which are run concurrently by national and regional governments (Schedule 4). These aspects include housing, education (excluding tertiary education), agriculture, population development, trade, regional planning and development, urban and rural development and welfare services (Anon 1996:143-4). The most important functions of government such as finance are, however, under control of the national government. This poses the question as to whether South Africa has a decentralised system or not. Although the provinces are allowed to elect their own legislatures, the executives of the provinces are appointed centrally by the ruling political party within each province (Cresswell 1999:8). It is clear that South Africa may have elements of both unitarism and federalism. In this regard, Faure and Lane (1996:24) are of the opinion that this "middle of the road position has no potential effectively to serve South Africa's constitutional, political and economic needs". The question would then be if it is in fact necessary to maintain nine separate legislative and

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executive entities with their respective bureaucracies since not only do they not have significant policy-making and legislative power but, with the exception of Gauteng Province, they also do not have the resources necessary for financial autonomy[3]. This asymmetry adds to the institutional incapacity of provincial and local governments in South Africa.

4.1 Institutional incapacity

One of the problems in developing countries like South Africa is that the state is expected to play the leading role in development. In this regard, Swanepoel and De Beer (1997:61) state that "(i)f the infrastructure is lacking, the state must provide it. If the health situation is worrisome, the state must rectify it. If development costs money, the state must provide it." The emphasis which is placed on the state to bring about and sustain development, and thus transformation, is often hampered by the state's inability to carry out this responsibility. In most instances the state does not have the social will or the resources, both human and financial, to carry out this tremendous task (Linz 1978:42).

The "failure of the state" (Hyden 1996) and the "weak state" (Migdal 1988) concepts try to explain the state's inability to fulfil its own expectations, as well as those of civil society. This phenomenon is most prevalent in the Third World. In most instances the reasons for this weakness lie within the structure of states' institutions, and more specifically their inability to carry out their tasks effectively. In this respect, Migdal (1988:22) states that social control within a society rests on the ability of the state to subordinate the "people's own inclinations of social behavior or the behavior sought by other social organizations in favor of the behavior prescribed by state rules". Effective management and administration of state institutions and the maintenance of law and order are the cornerstones of state control over society. As far as this is concerned, Todaro (1989:563) states that "the lack of managerial and administrative capability is the single scarcest resource in the developing world". In many Third World states, the state has become infested with corruption. For many government officials the accumulation of personal wealth and status takes precedence over the needs of society. This is as much due to the ignorance of state administrators as to the inherent evil of the perpetrators of corruption.

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[3]   This is an international phenomenon in developing countries where certain programmes of national concern are implemented by local governments which are responsible to the central government for achieving nationally specified outcomes. This often leads to the failure of the state to undertake programmes deemed important to central government. This was apparent in health programmes in both the Philippines and New Guinea (Litvack et al. 1998: 25).

In most instances the state is weakened by the fact that institutions based on ethnic, religious, social, criminal or other structures are able to offer groups and individuals greater social, political and/or economic protection than the state. These alternative institutions are the greatest threat to the state in the Third World (Migdal 1988:29). Tribal structures in Africa, in which traditional leaders undermine the states' attempts at modernisation, are often a burden to development. Many individuals feel safer within traditional structures which supply greater security than the transitional society. The transitional society is known for its ambiguity in which attempts to replace traditional values with modern values often leave the society with no consensus over an acceptable value system. Most transitional societies are characterised by a lack of consensus over acceptable rules of behaviour. In such a state it is easy for other institutions, many of which are criminal, to replace the intended values of the state with their own.

As one of many transitional societies, South Africa has an international reputation for its "culture of violence". The levels of crime in the country, especially violent crime, have assumed "critical proportions" (Visser 1998:2). The government has been forced to deploy troops in some areas such as KwaZulu-Natal in an attempt to control the political and criminal violence. Businesses employ their own armed guards to protect their interests and citizens are forced to mobilise their own vigilante groups for protection. While some theorists would argue that it is still too early to evaluate the ANC government's performance, it would appear, judging from the fall of the country's currency, the increase in crime and illegal immigration, rising unemployment, and the high rate of maladministration and public corruption, that the country is suffering from a weak state syndrome. The RDP and GEAR, which are meant to transform the society have, so far, had little effect on any of these factors. While the country has the best infrastructure in the region, strong financial institutions, and an abundance of natural resources and expertise, the government has been unable to mobilise these elements in society to reach its developmental goals.

The transformation process in South Africa must be evaluated within the context of the weak state. Attempts at modernisation are greatly hindered by the fact that, although the motives of the developmental programmes are to transform and develop the society, the government has been unable to access that area of society that needs development the most. Poverty remains high and it is estimated that unemployment may reach 37 % by 2000 (Schoombee 1997:16).

South Africa's transformation from a non-democratic system (or restricted democracy) to a democracy is enshrined in the Bill of Rights (chapter two) of the constitution. This makes provision for freedom to "make political choices"

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and to take part in "free and fair elections" (Anon 1996c:9). The democratic elections on all levels of government brought democracy to the country and placed the ANC in power, while the Bill of Rights realised its ideal of freedom. Corruption, crime and moral decline of the country, however, point towards a situation in which the ANC government enjoys political power, but has very little control over its own institutions or its citizens. This control is vital for the success of any development programme and even more vital for the successful transition from a traditional to a modern society. Migdal (1988:6-7) states that the difference between strong and weak states lies in their ability to carry out their policy objectives. In this regard it is clear that South Africa is becoming increasingly weak. This also places a further burden on the economy. With a growth rate of 0,2 % in 1998 and an expected growth rate of 1,5 % in 1999 the prospects for economic transformation are not good (Schoombee 1988:19). Linz (1978:42) explains the link between lack of social control and economic decline by stating that: "(t)his desire to achieve fundamental changes in a society by legislative fiat is not matched by the resources to implement such changes. Any change of regime is likely to have some disturbing effects on the economy, and not infrequently this leads to the withdrawal of public credit, evasion of capital, and reduction of investment."

The lack of institutional capacity on the part of provincial and local governments has been the greatest stumbling block for effective transformation and development in South Africa. In this respect Lynman (1995:3) states that "the RDP, no matter how well designed at the national level, will not reach the people satisfactorily until both the provinces and the local governments are able to function effectively".[4] This is emphasised by the financial status of these institutions. Although local governments are allowed to generate their own revenue, they have not yet been able to recover this income from residents resulting in 100 bankruptcies among municipalities across the country (Alfreds 1998:1).

The local governments do, however, still receive a grant from the central government for the provision of basic services. The Division of Revenue Bill (No 27 of 1998) divides the national budget so that the central government receives 78,5 billion rand, the provinces 88,1 billion rand and the local governments receive just over one billion rand (Loxton 1998:2). The provincial governments share their allocation according to the provincial revenue sharing formula. The following aspects are crucial in this formula:

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[4]   Todaro (1989:563) agrees with this by stating that "the lack of managerial and administrative capability is the single scarcest resource in the developing world".

- A national minimum standards grant to give provinces resources to meet "nationally established service standards" in primary and secondary education and district health care,
- a spillover grant which targets those provinces facing additional costs associated with maintaining academic hospitals and other unique health services,
- a fiscal capacity equalisation grant to compensate those provinces that have a smaller tax base,
- an institutional grant which is an equal amount for each province to help defray the cost of basic legislative and administrative costs; and
- a basic allocation to the provinces based on their population with additional weight being given to people living in rural areas (Sidiropoulos et al. 1997:702).

The provincial governments, however, often find themselves in financial crises which force the central government to intervene. Both the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces have had section 100 (1) of the constitution imposed on them which allows the central government to carry out corrective action in provinces which are not able to carry out their responsibilities regarding national standards or service delivery (Anon 1999:1).

Basic services in the form of water and sanitation are aspects which were emphasised within the RDP prior to the elections in 1994. Basic services fall mostly under the authority of local governments, where institutional capacity is at its worst. They also have the authority to charge fees and impose certain taxes for services. The slow delivery on the part of local governments, however, has heightened the deprivation gap within society. The lack of basic services places further burdens on the health sector which has to deal with the illnesses resulting from inadequate sanitation. The socio-economic backlogs are great since 90 % of rural households (4,5 million) have no running water in their dwellings and only 15 % have electricity. In urban areas, only a quarter of blacks have phones in their homes and in rural areas that figure is 1,9 % (Kane-Berman 1996:25). -

Although the demand for basic services is large, there is a culture of non-payment within many communities in South Africa. South Africa has a history of resistance to government. During the apartheid era there was a boycott of rent and service charges which formed an integral part of the struggle against apartheid. The aim was to make black townships ungovernable. The boycotts were so successful that by 1987 the total arrears owed to black local authorities amounted to 387 million rand (Davenport 1991:440). Since 1994 various attempts have been made to change the attitude of local communities towards the payment of services. The Masakhane project was instituted to try and remedy this situation and thereby

aid the RDP delivery. Surveys in areas around Pretoria have shown that 57 % of consumers of municipal services did not understand their accounts, whilst only 34 % partially understood them. Furthermore, less than 50 % of consumers were satisfied with the municipal services in their areas, and an average of 41 % had no idea where to report faults or complain about service. Surveys in Mamelodi and Atteridgeville revealed that more than half of the residents had no idea how to use electricity safely and economically. The fact that 90% of residents supported the idea of having a customer service centre in their area shows that customers have a desire to obtain information and be educated in municipal matters (Smit et al. 1996:12-4). The RDP allocated 850 million rand to the programme of municipal service normalisation, while it has been projected that it will take at least 50 billion rand to provide all South Africans with an acceptable minimum service standard (Ngcobo and Malongete 1996:4). The lack of both funds and education prove to be major obstacles in the success of the Masakhane campaign. A catch 22 situation has developed: no payment due to insufficient service, and insufficient service due to lack of funds.

Some progress has been made in meeting the demands for basic services. Shaw (1996:8) states that business plans worth more than 8 billion rand have been approved by the RDP steering committee and 1,6 billion rand has been allocated to 14 Special Integrated Presidential Projects on Urban Renewal that are to be paid out over a five year period. The aim is to economically uplift the country's cities and repair their physical and social fabric. Uplifting the cities implies the eradication of squatters, which make up a large part of the urban population, by building them houses. Until the housing backlog has been considerably decreased, it remains important that basic services continue to be delivered in order to maintain basic requirements for sanitation and health.

5.   CONCLUDING REMARKS

South Africa is in need of a great deal of development in order to facilitate the necessary social, political and economic transformation within the society. The decentralisation of government institutions is one of the most important tools in the transformation process since it enables the government structures to be close to those local communities which are most in need of development.

South Africa has decentralised certain government structures to make provision for a transfer of certain powers to provincial and local governments. These powers are, however, of such a nature that the provinces have very little policy or legislative decision-making power. The aim of this transfer is to bring the process of transformation closer to the people and to speed up the implementation of the RDP and

GEAR. Although these structures are in place, it is clear that the capacity of government to implement policy and legislation at local level is obstructed. The high levels of crime and corruption, the slow economic growth, the high rates of poverty in society, and the lack of basic services are examples of this. It is clear that the provincial and local governments do not have the ability to penetrate society and thereby carry out the necessary social control needed for the successful implementation of policies aimed at dealing with these issues (as is evident in the refusal by many citizens to pay for services). There is, therefore, a lack of institutional capacity at these levels of government. The greatest cause of this incapacity is the lack of sufficient managerial expertise and decision-making power over developmental issues (housing, education, welfare, etc.) at lower levels of government. The financial crises in which many of the provinces and municipalities find themselves are a direct result of this. The decentralisation of expertise is, therefore, as important as decentralisation of power and authority in South Africa's transformation process.

Basic services and poverty alleviation are the most important indicators of transformation in a society. This is where South Africa will have to concentrate its efforts if the principles and programmes of the RDP and GEAR are to be realised. On the one hand, this implies a new look at provincial and local government in terms of training and skills development of government officials. Only when professional levels of service are apparent at these levels of government will faith be restored in government. This faith in government is a basic requirement for the legitimacy needed in order to carry out the necessary social control for the successful transformation of South African society. On the other hand, the country will have to decide if it is in fact necessary to maintain nine provinces which have so far proved to be ineffective in terms of decision-making and institutional capacity.

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