

PLANNING FOR THE YEAR 2000

by

W.F. VISAGIE

1. LONG-TERM PLANNING

In September 1975 the Planning Advisory Division of the World Bank published an updated list of National Development Plans. This list included the plans of some 88 sovereign nations and of a few overseas territories. An analysis of this publication shows that in 1975 only a handful of countries had development plans which extend as far as 1980 while only one country, South Korea, went beyond the present decade, and then only to 1981. I mention this to indicate how loath governments are, and also how difficult it is, to make official, concrete planning proposals beyond the short-term.

On the other hand, we observe that the literature of virtually every discipline is burgeoning with long-term projections and scenarios of the future. The majority seem to find the year 2000 a most satisfying target date for their extrapolations, a date which is sufficiently far ahead for the more pessimistic disciples of the Doomsday school to paint such a bleak and dismal picture of the next century, that perhaps it would indeed be better if things did go bang at midnight on the 31st December 1999.

Fortunately there are others who believe that notwithstanding the obviously grave problems which the world will have to face, man is here to stay for a very long time to come and that we can and must plan to improve the quality of life for those of us living today, but equally important, for the generations who will follow us.

2. WHAT ARE THE GOALS?

Almost every individual and certainly every discipline will define a set of long-term goals which will differ, often considerably, from any other set. A list of goals would almost certainly include such items as sustained economic growth; job opportunities for all; high standards of health and medical services; adequate housing facilities; an educational system that affords talent maximum scope; cities that we want to live in rather than flee from — and so forth.

Unless we recognize and accept the real long-term goals of society, planning is an illusion and though it may keep many of us occupied, it is unlikely that we will ever reap the fruits of our labour.

Thus when we discuss planning for the year 2000, the dialogue will have most value if it centres around issues which really matter to the people as well as to the planner. It seems that there are so many planning problems which people generally are aware of and are concerned about, that planners would be wise to concentrate on these. The timing of planning proposals is probably more important in their implementation than is the excellence of the plans.

3. LEGISLATION

Planning has for some time been focussed on decentralization. In order to give momentum to the decentralization programme, legislation was enacted for the purpose of controlling the zoning of land for industrial purposes as well as the establishment of industrial townships on land previously zoned for that purpose. The Environment Planning Act, 1967 as amended in 1975, also requires that written approval be obtained from the Minister of Planning and the Environment to establish or extend factories and that a permit be required for the purpose of processing any mineral in any manner.

These were the so-called negative measures designed to avoid the huge unplanned and generally dehumanized urban concentrations which are the running sores of so many countries throughout the world. Parallel to the formulation of statutory measures, the planners were attempting to establish where future growth could be accommodated, taking into account the relative advantages and the problems to be contended with in different parts of the country. This approach of where, rather than simply how much and in what sector growth should occur, was new and strange to some planners and the whole concept was consequently fairly slow in gaining ground.

4. THE NATIONAL PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

By 1973 progress had been sufficient to make a tentative demarcation of development regions for the whole of the Republic and to establish a preliminary hierarchy of growth centres. It had always been felt that if any delineation of regions was to be meaningful and lasting, it should have the backing not only of officialdom but particularly of the representatives of the various institutions of the public sector which are concerned and affected by regional development. Fortunately the whole country was covered in one way or another by regional development associations in which all sectional interests are represented e.g. agriculture, mining, commerce, industry, tourism, local authorities, cultural organizations and so forth.

A series of congresses were arranged at which planning goals, methodology and proposals were discussed and delegates encouraged to comment and to criticize. This was followed up by visits to the associations where all members could be present and where again frankness and new ideas were sought. As a result a number of changes were made to the proposed regional boundaries but the most important result was that all the regional development associations amended their boundaries to coincide with the final demarcation and are now aware of and sympathetic with the long-term spatial planning objectives as formulated in the National Physical Development Plan. (N.P.D.P.)

During the 1975 Parliamentary Session the Minister of Planning and the Environment tabled the National Physical Development Plan and the document received a great deal of attention during the sitting. The following paragraphs taken from the N.P.D.P. give a clear indication of what the purpose of the document is and how its acceptance and implementation will affect the growth pattern in the Republic.

“The Government’s responsibility is not confined solely to the promotion of economic progress; it also pursues social and ecological goals and takes factors into account which may influence the pattern of population distribution and the location of activities and which may have far-reaching economic implications.

If a laissez-faire approach to spatial settlement were to be adopted it would mean that the market mechanism alone would determine where development and concentrations of population would take place.

If, however, it were decided to control the establishment of economic activities, this would probably be in conflict with the South African economic system. The direct increase in costs which would result from such action would have to be weighed against the indirect benefits which occur in the ecological, social or other spheres.

In selecting points where growth is to take place it is important to bear in mind that, if left to free-market factors optimum location will occur mainly on the basis of "the cost pattern of the individual enterprise, without account being taken of the total additional cost which has to be borne by the community as a whole. This approach would therefore mean that a location pattern will crystallise which is based on maximum economic benefit for the entrepreneur as opposed to the optimal pattern for the community as a whole.

It is also necessary to guard against the opposite extreme, namely, where the selected settlement pattern is so idealistic that it completely ignores economic principles. The result may then be that location costs are so high that success will be unlikely and this will not be in the national interest, economically or otherwise.

To achieve the ideal location pattern it is necessary to reconcile economic and social goals.

The aim of the N.P.D.P. is to indicate what the basic physical development pattern for the future will be and to rationalise the infrastructure. Points where growth can and should take place are identified in advance so that development can be directed towards those points and unnecessary duplication and overlapping of public services can be avoided. In this way priorities for the provision of services and the investment of public funds at specific places can be determined.

The N.P.D.P. will ensure that the infrastructure at the micro-level will be integrated with regional and national requirements. This will ensure that facilities such as schools, hostels and hospitals are built in accordance with the growth potential or requirements of the various centres and that these facilities will be fully utilised, now and in the future. On the other hand, in the N.P.D.P. due consideration is given to those parts of the country which have the labour, mineral and other resources required to support a large population, but which, owing to the historical development of the country's infrastructure and settlement pattern, cannot develop to maximum potential without positive Government assistance".

The N.P.D.P. has been received with exceptional enthusiasm by all sectors and it would appear that the most general reaction has been one of satisfaction and a feeling that here at last was an official document which made it clear, at least in physical terms, what the structure of the country was likely to be at the turn of the century.

5. PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING

Criticism leveled at the N.P.D.P. was in the main that it did not go far enough, did not include programmes of development for all or at least some of the regions and growth centres, and, did not give sufficient information regarding the position of the Black Homelands.

These two points are certainly well-founded and are closely related; it will assist in clarifying the approach which was adopted if the last point is dealt with first.

The South African Government has consistently followed a policy aimed at leading the separate nations living in Southern Africa to self-government. This course was set when the British granted political independence to the former protectorates of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland. Although these countries were and still are economically integrated with the Republic, they are, as sovereign states, responsible for their own planning and would, no doubt, object most vigorously to the planning of their own particular areas by outside agencies, however well-meaning these may be.

The Black Homelands are on the road to independence and their leaders have repeatedly stated that they do not want South Africa to plan for them but with them within the broader Southern African context. The Homelands have their own internal planning organizations which are at present actively engaged in preparing their own national physical development plans and it would therefore clearly be an affront to them, besides being a pointless exercise, to include planning proposals for the Homelands in a South African plan. What should occur and which I believe will develop in time, is a Southern Africa physical development plan which will embrace all the nations in the sub-continent and thereby integrate physical development as has been the case in the economic field.

The impression should not be gained that the different agencies are now all planning in isolation and that only after each has completed his own portion as it were, do they come together. There is continuous consultation and exchange of information, ideas and proposals. The vital ingredient for success is to be continually aware that nations, and particularly new emerging nations, have their own aims and objectives, their own norms and mores, and, that these must be respected and become part of the whole. To ignore this would mean that the human and physical potential of Southern Africa will not be fully realized and perhaps generate such tensions that the year 2000 will indeed be a bleak and gloomy prospect.

It is this approach, namely, that planning must, whenever possible, stem from the region in which development will take place, which is responsible for the N.P.D.P. being published without a development programme for each region. What was needed to begin with was an authoritative indication of where development could take place if major structural problems were to be avoided over the long-term. The next step was to activate each region to make its own evaluation of its potential and problems. From such evaluations regional development plans are emerging which are in sympathy with national and regional objectives and are acceptable to all concerned since all have an active part in the planning process.

6. CONCLUSION

If we are to define our real future goals and priorities, and this may well ultimately entail re-directing public spending to place emphasis on the creation of a more civilized society, we must develop planning machinery that taps all of man's ability and makes every citizen a part thereof.

To influence the powerful groups and attitudes which are at present shaping the future, and to make long-term planning decisions which will be free from prevailing moralistic postures and the vicissitudes of politics, will require bold leadership and a consensus among men of good will. A platitude though it may be, it is nevertheless true to say that the future is in our hands. We live in a world of rising expectations for individuals and nations but for whom economic problems are becoming more pressing while leisure time, which is steadily increasing and has already become a problem for many, is being filled with artificial needs. We must make use of the opportunities this presents by showing that planning is a living and vital aspect of our everyday lives and that homo sapiens was not necessarily born to be a GNP-worshiper but can in fact use his talents at all levels to help solve really important issues, and, in so-doing, ensure a better Year 2000-