

Kiru
Naidoo



COMMENT

THE State of the Province address (Sopa) presented by Premier Willem Mchunu last Wednesday was a comprehensive statement of our achievements and challenges as a province. It laid considerable emphasis on land and infrastructure development, more especially the catalytic projects which are central to the Human Settlements and Public Works portfolio.

The speech also had synergy with President Cyril Ramaphosa's State of the Nation address (Sona). The focus on economic and development issues was a deliberate posture consistent with the model of a developmental state. That approach is key in pushing back the frontiers of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

It finds expression in the commitment to grow our economy, fight corruption and transform our society. Even though we had a change of the guard in the Presidency and the cabinet after the 54th conference of the ANC, the premier was firm in expressing government's continued, collective commitment to advancing radical socio-economic transformation.

The emotive subject of land restitution lies at the heart of this radical approach to transformation. It is instructive to quote the words of Frederick Douglass, a 19th century African-American social reformer and abolitionist: "Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organised conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe." Government's task is to carry all our people, in all our diversity on this path but our bias

KZN LONG-RANGE DEVELOPMENT PLANNING



MEC for Human Settlements and Public Works Ravi Pillay inspects a housing development under construction for a beneficiary under the province's Operation Sukuma Sakhe programme aimed at eradicating poverty.

poor, the majority of whom are African.

It is also useful to be reminded of Ramaphosa's commitment: "We will accelerate our land redistribution programme not only to redress a grave historical injustice, but also to bring more producers into the agricultural sector and to make more land available for cultivation.

We are determined that expropriation without compensation should be implemented in a way that increases agricultural production, improves food security and ensures that the land is returned to those from whom it was taken under col-

onialism and apartheid."

That well thought-out sentiment formed the backdrop to the parliamentary vote on land which was carried in the National Assembly this past week. Land is an essential tool for transformation and achieving a developmental state.

In the Sopa, the premier stressed growth depended on the multiplier effect of infrastructure programmes. The province has an infrastructure master plan that charts long-term development projects. This plan guides the work of the Provincial Planning Commission and the department of Public

Works which is the implementing agent of choice in KZN.

The premier made direct reference to eight catalytic projects estimated to cost R22 billion over a 12-15-year time frame.

While the majority of these are in eThekweni, there are also large-scale projects in Emphangeni, Ilembe and Newcastle.

Projected investments include eThekweni Phase 2 at R4.2bn, Kwamashu Bridge City Urban Hub at R6.3bn, the Umlazi Regeneration Project at R2.9bn, the eThekweni Inner City Regeneration Project at R1.8bn and R3.3bn for the Amaoti

Greater Housing Project.

This is a direct response to rapid urbanisation. We need to be alert to the National Development Plan (NDP) projection that there will be 7 to 8 million more people in our cities by 2030 and a further 6 million by 2050.

Government has a special concern about mushrooming informal settlements pushing the housing backlog to over 740 000 units. Housing delivery is a moving target. In spite of KZN being awarded the Govan Mbeki Human Settlements best performing province award for an unprecedented four consecutive years and consistently spending its full budgets, backlogs remain a challenge. KZN Human Settlements has in the past two financial years also received unspent housing funds from other provinces.

Our persistent refrain is that were we to have a higher budget, we could have a higher output of housing opportunities. Objectively speaking, that is unlikely given the economic and financial climate and the need to direct funds for free higher education for the poor among other priorities.

We must however remain optimistic and give our people hope.

It is always a joyous sight when citizens receive title deeds to their homes, enabling them to effect improvements and have a better quality of life. The verification process before handing over title deeds is tedious but we must go through that exercise to ensure the correct beneficiaries receive the documents. One of our key objectives is to expedite title deed handovers in the year ahead.

The Sopa commits us to "leading with integrity towards growing an inclusive economy". Government is mindful of the enormity of the developmental challenges we face but is equally optimistic that we are up to the task.

● Naidoo is a spokesperson for the Ministry of Human Settlements and Public Works in KwaZulu-Natal

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