

South African Public Sector Post-Apartheid Economic Initiatives For Human Development: Why Were The Strategies Short-Lived?

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the extent to which the national economic initiatives introduced in post-apartheid South Africa were successful, why they were removed and why they were unsustainable or indefensible. In order to address the research questions, this study used a qualitative design involving the views of government officials who participated in the formulation of national policies. A total of six officials for each strategy (RDP, GEAR, ASGISA, NGP, NDP, and DDM) were sampled purposively in order to generate rich information on the performance of each policy considered and the decision to replace the policy. A semi-structured survey form was developed for this purpose. The study results show that none of the economic strategies were able to change the trajectory of South Africa's economic development decisively. The key reasons are the removal of the economic strategies before they achieved the stated objectives potential, the inability to adjust and refocus strategies continuously, and a lack of implementation and monitoring capacity. The study contributes to the understanding of how South Africa's economic development strategies performed and why they were removed. This informs future approaches to the development and management of economic strategies. The findings suggest that there must be sound and consistent public management to drive and coordinate implementation in order for economic development initiatives to be effective.

KEYWORDS: Development Support, Historically Disadvantaged Individuals, Economic Access, Human Development, Economic Strategy.

ABBREVIATIONS

HDI: Historically Disadvantaged Individual, RDP: Reconstruction and Development Program, GEAR: Growth, Employment and Redistribution, ASGISA: Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa, NGP: New Growth Path, NDP: National Development Plan, DDM: District Development Model; COGTA: Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs; DBSA: Development Bank of Southern Africa.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The apartheid system in South Africa was an oppressive political system that was adjudged globally as being detrimental to Black people and systematically undermined their potential to assume leading roles in the public and private sectors [1]. Only the White minority population was able to participate fully in economic activities related to wealth creation and the upliftment of their standard of living. Furthermore, the apartheid system suppressed freedom of choice for most citizens of South Africa.

When democracy dawned in the country, it brought hope to these masses, who were anticipating "a better life for all," as the African National Congress 1994 voting campaign pamphlet promised. This was when the racial apartheid system formally expired and was replaced by a democratic dispensation [2].

Democracy brought drastic changes in policies and rules, legislation, and personnel serving public and government institutions. Apartheid had made most people poor, so the urgent priority at the dawn of democracy was to develop economic development strategies and initiatives that would facilitate a reduction of poverty and empower the masses to participate in creating better livelihoods that were free from poverty. Strategies and initiatives are used interchangeably in this paper to highlight that while the interventions provided a new way of dealing with socio-economic challenges, they remained comprehensive plans of action to uplift the standard of living for South African citizens. This public stance on national economic development initiatives gave people hope that their lives were about to improve.

Public sector economic development initiatives comprised various financial and non-financial interventions introduced by the democratically elected South African government to support people. This was especially true for those whom apartheid had relegated to poverty and suffering. These were principally the Black people who suffered the most

neglect, then the mixed-race people and Asians, who suffered less neglect [3]. By introducing these initiatives, the democratic government sought to correct injustices for these sections of the population, who were labeled HDIs and still retain this label. These three HDI groups were reclassified as Black people by the democratic government.

All the economic development strategies developed since 1994 had an element of Black empowerment and human development, as they prioritized HDIs equally. The notable economic development strategies launched by the government after apartheid to accelerate economic development include the RDP, GEAR, ASGISA, NGP, NDP, and recently, DDM [4, 5]. These initiatives are discussed below.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 POST-APARTHEID ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Internal and external forces working against the administratively chaotic apartheid regime had been intensifying since the 1970s and culminated in the democratic election of the African National Congress in 1994 [6]. To respond to the lack of social upliftment prior to 1994 and embed this approach in government processes, the democratic government had to develop inclusive economic policies [7]. Social partners, labor, business, civil society, and government would subsequently have many debates about the appropriate economic policy in the years that followed [8]. These debates led to the introduction of many economic development strategies within a short space of time, with very little progress in resolving the socio-economic challenges and a derailment from the original economic inclusivity project [9, 10]. In particular, social grants have emerged as the preferred approach to dealing with poverty, as opposed to facilitating higher levels of inclusive growth and creating jobs [11]. Given the economic business cycles, this preference is unsustainable.

2.1.1 RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The RDP was introduced in 1994. The emphasis of the program was on facilitating institutional development, economic participation, infrastructure development, land ownership, the provision of basic housing services, and the provision of jobs closer to the people [12].

The program acknowledged that alleviating poverty and inequality was critical to achieving the required transformation from apartheid to democracy. Similarly, it was deemed important to reconcile reconstruction and development with economic growth through the development of infrastructure and human capital. The RDP was developed to provide a new economic order aimed at transformation by developing democratic institutions, ensuring participation and a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist society, and creating sustainable economic growth. In other words, both economic growth and redistribution were to happen simultaneously.

The RDP was a necessity because the South African economy was built on a segregationist approach at all levels in both the public and private sectors. The key tenets of the RDP were meeting basic needs, developing human resources, building the economy, democratizing the state and society, and implementing reconstruction and development [13]. Various administrative and political structures were set up to oversee and coordinate the implementation of the program.

The RDP Fund was established to finance the program, with the source of funding envisaged as being fiscal allocations, the sale of state assets, lotteries, and domestic and international grants/donations. Close to R2 billion was set aside for the initial lead projects, as shown in Table 1.

It is postulated here that if the RDP had proved to be a successful development support initiative, it would have been celebrated, run for an extended period and perhaps upgraded to ensure more success – but not replaced. This view is also held by Lodge [14], who argues that minimal economic improvement was seen, with most of the projects suffering from numerous design flaws and generally following the apartheid economic architecture. Even though the program was canceled, its objectives surfaced in subsequent initiatives, signaling that the objectives were unmet and indicating the glaring failure to resolve difficulties with planning and implementing projects. This initiative lasted for only 2 years before GEAR (discussed below) was introduced.

2.1.2 GROWTH, EMPLOYMENT, AND REDISTRIBUTION

GEAR was introduced in 1996 to replace the RDP strategy [15] just 2 years after the latter was implemented. It was argued that GEAR was not a replacement strategy but was introduced to build on the RDP, as it was already evident that the growth trajectory of about 3% was not making a dent in unemployment, not expanding social service delivery, not making enough headway to enhance equitable distribution of income and wealth [15]. In reality, the introduction of GEAR was the beginning of the drift away from focusing on solving the original economic development challenges identified in 1994. The rapid introduction of macroeconomic targets through GEAR undermined the need to advance both growth and redistribution as envisaged by the RDP [16].

Table 1. RDP initial lead projects.

R million	Budget 1994/1995
Rural water provision	59.5
Land reform pilot projects	26.6
Land restitution	23.8
Land redistribution	2.1
Small-scale farmer development	4.0
Urban infrastructure investment	1.5
National urban reconstruction and housing	20.0
Extension of municipal services	500.0
Urban renewal	304.6
Culture of learning	100.0
Primary school nutrition	472.8
Capacity building	18.0
Free healthcare	25.0
Public works	250.0
Provincial project preparation facilities	28.3
Provincial projects	100.0
TOTAL	1936.2

Source: Republic of South Africa [12].

According to the South African National Treasury [15], GEAR emphasized the provision of administrative and welfare services, including the following matters:

- fiscal reform
- a measured relaxation of exchange controls
- reforming trade and industrial policy, including small business development
- restructuring public sector assets
- expanding investment in public infrastructure in the social and economic sectors
- providing flexibility in the collective bargaining system
- fostering a social agreement to support wage and price moderation.

After a thorough assessment, Streak [17] deemed the policy legacy of GEAR to have been dismal development outcomes but excellent macroeconomic policy outcomes. For example, inequality and poverty remained high while the government deficit and the general economic liberalization improved. Compared to the RDP, GEAR lasted close to 9 years, which is 4.5 times that of the RDP and ASGISA.

2.1.3 ACCELERATED AND SHARED GROWTH INITIATIVE FOR SOUTH AFRICA

ASGISA came into effect in 2005, replacing GEAR. It lasted for about 6 years, three times the lifespan of the RDP but 3 years less than that of GEAR. By this time, the government had largely developed its policy-making capacity and was relying less on external parties in this regard. ASGISA focused on attending to the second economy through public procurement as one of the key interventions [18]. Employment creation, economic access, asset acquisition, and equitable distribution of income were among the key matters to be addressed in the second economy.

Grossman [19] defines the concept of a second economy in terms of production and the exchange that takes place for private gain that is often done in a manner that undermines legislation. Without emphasizing the notion of breaking the law, Gábor [20] takes a similar view and refers to the second economy as using the capacity to work and income redistribution outside of standard socially recognized sectors and norms. In addition to these definitions in the South African context is the marginalization of the second economy.

Masters [21] states that ASGISA yielded mixed results. For example, notable progress was made in growing the economy, tracking government projects, increasing the output of artisans, introducing competition, and strengthening

municipal operational support. At the same time, poverty and unemployment levels remained high, with inadequate funding for ASGISA projects and weak coordination/implementation, which was exacerbated by insufficient reporting and monitoring.

2.1.4 NEW GROWTH PATH

The NGP replaced ASGISA. It was adopted by the Cabinet toward the end of 2010 and launched in 2011. It provided the strategic focus for just 1 year before the NDP was introduced. The NGP underscored the need to attend to spatial inequity through infrastructure development, investment and coordination of government efforts [22].

Fine [23] states that the NGP was riddled with weaknesses and inconsistencies, such as calling for economic trade-offs in an economy that does not operate at full capacity, not addressing the financialization of the economy and ignoring capital flight. The adoption of the NGP also exposed the classical smokescreen approach with policy adoption in South Africa, with the underlying factors that policies are meant to address remaining unchanged, even though the policy is argued to be the required response. After the adoption of the NDP, the NGP was relegated to obscurity, even though one or two government departments continued to refer to it.

2.1.5 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The NDP emerged in 2012 and replaced the NGP. The emphasis of this plan was on the creation of jobs and encouraging business activity closer to townships and rural areas [24]. As an economic blueprint, the NDP continues to be referenced in public sector documents. However, even though the government claims to be implementing it, it is obvious that the targets will not be met in their current form within the timeframes indicated.

As far as human development is concerned, the NDP sought to enhance transport networks and connections between urban centers and peripheral townships; facilitate new ideas, creative designs and alternative proposals by residents; inspire bulk buying and the creation of economic hubs to sustain local spending; emphasize training and development.

A review of the NDP done by the National Planning Commission [25] shows that the economy has lost significant capacity over the past decade or so and has made no meaningful progress toward the aspirations of the NDP.

2.1.6 DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT MODEL

After finally realizing that interventions in the township and rural areas remained largely uncoordinated and showed no impact, the government introduced the DDM in the fourth quarter of 2019 as a tool to revitalize rural and township economies [26]. The DDM was introduced parallel to the NDP, and it was argued that the DDM was informed by the NDP and designed to improve cooperative governance and build a capable developmental state.

The responsibility for establishing this strategy was delegated to the deputy president of the country, who coordinated all the work done in this regard through the Ministry of COGTA. A multi-party Task Team was set up in the office of the deputy president to contribute to the conceptual exercise. The Task Team process sought to achieve consolidation, alignment and scalability of government programs in townships and rural areas [27]. Due to a lack of capacity, COGTA signed a memorandum of understanding with the DBSA in March 2020, for the DBSA to develop a DDM blueprint from the three piloted districts, i.e., OR Tambo, eThekweni, and Waterberg [5]. Although the blueprint from the three pilot programs has been developed, it appears that the government does not have the capacity to roll out the model effectively and with speed to the other district municipalities in South Africa.

2.2 PERFORMANCE OF THE INITIATIVES

In order to appraise the initiatives detailed above, a reference lens should be used to gauge the level of progress or achievement. This is provided here.

After 1994, the South African government introduced several social grants to assist poor people who were not earning income, with the hope of terminating the grants when people started earning income. Ideally, a growing economy would support a higher level of employment and address the homelessness and poverty levels. In turn, this would lead to a reduction in the payment of grants and their ultimate removal. The successes achieved with the economic initiatives should be viewed in terms of these ideals.

Each initiative was introduced with every new president of South Africa; thus, the initiatives were implemented approximately in line with the public administration 5-year periods. When the RDP came into effect, many people hoped to receive housing, but there was no indication that most homeless people had been given proper housing when it was removed. Furthermore, according to several authors [28, 29], there was limited success in developing citizens and indigenous people. Moreover, the economic interventions implemented by South Africa's democratic government have not fully addressed the development challenges for individuals and businesses in townships and rural areas due to a lack of capacity and organization within the government [30, 31].

The key challenges identified by these initiatives, and which remain largely unresolved, include low economic growth, high unemployment, lack of access to finance, regulatory and administrative constraints, structural inequality, lack

of recognition of diversity, limited reach of government support to designated groups; inadequate demographic representation of certain interest groups; and a lack of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation.

3.0 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

It seems that most of the economic initiatives introduced in post-apartheid South Africa were not in place for the intended period, nor did they fully achieve the objectives they were designed to achieve. Applying the notion of “no one replaces a working machine” or “coach keeps the winning team,” it seems that the policies did not show effectiveness. The authors postulate that had any of the policies showed enough merit, they would have been retained and improved. The scrapping of most of them is an indication that they did not produce the expected results. Thus, the problem that this study investigated was why the policies were not sustainable and what the level of effectiveness of each one of them was. The hypothesis was that these policy initiatives achieved very little in terms of economic development progress.

This study investigated the extent to which the policies identified were successful and in what way; why they were replaced by others (i.e., what they offered and what they lacked); what factors rendered the policies unsustainable; and in what way were they indefensible.

4.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper was of a qualitative design [32], which requires non-numeric responses to address the research aim. A qualitative research approach was necessary to gain a deeper, holistic understanding of the policies and what impact they had on the lives of the people they were introduced to serve.

The people who participated in the process of formulating the policies were from the various government departments and the private sector. This meant that it was difficult to locate the decision-makers who ruled on discontinuing earlier policies while facilitating the introduction of newer ones. Therefore, the sampling method used was snowballing [33], which entails using purposive sampling starting with one identified person who knows a good deal about the phenomenon under study. Then, additional participants are identified by requesting that person to identify the next ones. As it was a qualitative study, a large number of respondents were not needed, as a sample is considered adequate when the saturation point is reached, i.e., when no more new information emerges from additional responses [34]. Therefore, in qualitative research, the sample size does not have to be large in order to gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon.

This study focused on understanding the underlying reasons for discontinuing one policy and introducing another; therefore, the sample included individuals who were involved in either the establishment or the discontinuation of the policies. Creswell [33] and Mason [35] state that saturation can be reached with as little as three participants. This means the minimum sample size required to reach the saturation point is three. However, Morse *et al.* [36] state that a sample size of six enables the saturation point to be reached. In this study, 36 officials (six in each group: RDP, GEAR, ASGISA, NGP, NDP, and DDM) were sampled purposively in order to generate rich information on the performance (successes and failures) of each of the policies and on the decisions taken to replace these policies. Targeting an equal number of respondents for each initiative was done in an attempt to compare the various initiatives in an equivalent way. A semi-structured survey form was developed for use in the study.

5.0 FINDINGS

The difficulty of reaching role players kept the overall response level low, at 36%. However, there was at least one informant who responded fully to the questions in terms of each policy initiative. The key points derived from the survey responses are summarized in Table 2 below.

6.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the dawn of democracy, it was clear that apartheid had diminished the ability of many South Africans to participate usefully in the economy. This meant that an economic development strategy that would facilitate economic growth, employment, the reduction of poverty, and the empowerment of people was required. Since 1994, several initiatives have been introduced, i.e., RDP in 1994, GEAR in 1996, ASGISA in 2005, NGP in 2011, NDP in 2012, and DDM in 2019. While the NDP and the DDM are still in operation, none of these strategies fully achieved what they were designed to accomplish. The study results show that:

- Although national budget spending was refocused away from the apartheid objectives in the RDP strategy, the program required elevated levels of spending, and the newly reformed fiscus was unable to cater to this.
- GEAR stabilized the economy but was unable to generate growth so that more people could benefit.
- ASGISA was unable to take off meaningfully and was ultimately thwarted by the turnover of political and administrative officials, as well as fragmentation in state institutions.

Table 2: Survey outcomes.

		RDP	GEAR	ASGISA	NGP	NDP	DDM
1	What was the policy initiative intended to achieve?	Focus on social infrastructure in Black communities to drive the socio-economic development mandate of the democratic state and disrupt the budget spending patterns of the apartheid state.	Intended to rebuild, stabilize the economy and ensure economic growth.	Simultaneous pursuit of higher rates of growth, and economic inclusion of Black people, including redistribution.	Central concern was improving the economy's employment outcomes.	Took a long-term, broad, cross-cutting, independent and critical view to define South Africa's development path to solve the country's socio-economic challenges.	To help government departments across all three spheres plan together at a district level through a framework called the One Plan.
2	How did it perform against this intended goal(s)?	Overwhelmed by a skewed apartheid development that deliberately marginalized black people. The RDP refocused the budget spend.	Achieved its main goal of stabilizing the macro-economy but was unsuccessful on developmental goals.	Did not quite take off, due to loss of political continuity and weak/fragmented institutional mechanisms.	Implementation suffered from political/administrative leadership turnover and institutional weakness.	Deadline not reached yet, but key milestones have been missed.	The development of a blueprint for One Plan and their implementation has been achieved, but the full roll-out of the model to all districts remains to be seen.
3	What warranted the discontinuation of the policy initiative?	Required high levels of expenditure from a fiscus that was constrained with high levels of debt.	Needed a policy that would both grow the economy and ensure that more people can benefit socially, once the economy was stabilized.	Discontinuity in strategic planning and focus by the political and administrative leadership of government.	Increased misalignment in ideological dynamics at political and policy-making levels.	Not discontinued as the government continues to reference it; however, the continued lack of coordinated implementation means its performance remains dismal.	Not discontinued; however, the lack of enthusiasm in its implementation is attributed to its being heavily bureaucratized with less focus on the actual delivery of services/projects.
4	Was its substitution an addition or an introduction of a new initiative?	Unlike the RDP, GEAR was an austerity program with a focus on debt reduction to meet certain matrices that the capital markets relied on to measure economic stability and sustainability.	GEAR and RDP were different initiatives – the former an economic policy and the latter a development program, but GEAR incorporated the social objectives of RDP.	The assumption was that the strategic thrust and priorities of ASGISA would be accommodated within GEAR's, but this proved wrong.	Partly an addition, because the NGP also had an interventionist approach, but also a re-orientation toward a sector focus and job creation approach.	The NDP was regarded as a separate long-term economic vision for the country, while the idea that the NGP was envisaged to be its economic strategy was short-lived.	A new initiative – the NDP is a long-term plan, and the DDM focuses on intergovernmental relations in implementing interventions.

		RDP	GEAR	ASGISA	NGP	NDP	DDM
5	What were the determined weaknesses of the initiative before this one?	N/A	Although the timeframe was short, RDP did not uplift the economic performance and did not outline broad fiscal prudence.	Emphasis on macro balance and fiscal prudence in the implementation of GEAR overshadowed economic transformation issues and did not provide the required stimulus to growth and investment.	Poor job creation outcomes.	The NGP proposals were considered to be potentially disruptive at the time and would have entailed difficult trade-offs between a consumer-led and an investment-led economy. Also, socio-economic ills were not getting resolved.	The DDM does not replace the NDP, but is another tool to foster inter-governmental relations and ensure that government departments do not duplicate efforts.
6	What were the anticipated merits of this new initiative introduced?	To drive the socio-economic development.	A focused economic policy framework aimed at stabilizing and growing the economy and resolving unemployment.	Interventionist, and targeted several development binding constraints.	The job-creation goal was given a degree of sectoral breakdown and granularity, while attempts to specify numerical targets were also made.	Presented a long-term vision on creating conducive economic development conditions and a plan on how the vision can be achieved.	To ensure that government programs are responsive to challenges on the ground and departments do not duplicate interventions.
7	Any other information regarding this initiative?	With the fiscal headroom in the mid-2000s, the government should have returned to the RDP strategy to pursue employment and distribution.	GEAR probably needed to be tweaked after it had achieved macro-economic stabilization by revising its targets to focus on inclusive growth to benefit more people.	It became clear during the first year of review that the envisaged targets were not going to be met.	No deliberate step change in interventions; business as usual was monitored and reported.	Even though its targets require review, the NDP vision remains relevant.	Bureaucratization and heavy political presence are the biggest shortcomings of the DDM.

Source: Authors' summary.

- Implementation of the NGP continued to suffer from political and administrative leadership turnover and institutional weakness, which created misalignment in ideological dynamics at political and policy-making levels. This eventually relegated the NGP to the sidelines.
- The NDP continues to be a long-term reference document for the government, but the unachievable targets and lack of coordination with its implementation are rendering the plan irrelevant.
- The intention of the DDM to coordinate government departments across all spheres in order for them to plan and intervene together is germane. However, bureaucratization and a heavy political presence are threatening the continued existence of the initiative.

Given the average levels of economic growth, unemployment, poverty and inequality recorded from 1995 to 2021 (about 2%, 25%, 51%, and 70%, respectively), it is clear that these economic strategies were unable to ensure a decisive change of trajectory in the economic development of South Africa. Key among the reasons for this are economic strategies being removed before they reach their potential, an inability to adjust and refocus strategies continuously, and the lack of implementation and monitoring capacity.

7.0 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study achieved a low informant response due to difficulties in locating government officials who had participated in the development and discontinuation of economic strategies. A larger sample would have assisted in gathering more details on the establishment and discontinuation rationale for the strategies.

8.0 CONCLUSION

The paper assessed the extent to which the economic strategies that have been implemented in South Africa since 1994 were successful and why they were removed. The factors that rendered the initiatives unsustainable were investigated, and it was found that the following played a major role: removal of economic strategies before they reached their full potential, inability to adjust and refocus strategies continuously, and a lack of implementation and monitoring capacity. The review showed that none of the initiatives fully achieved their goals. This was confirmed by the purposive survey undertaken to supplement the review.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

ZN adapted from the doctoral research study, and designed and carried out the full study.

WL provided supervision, guidance, and a review of the study.

SS provided supervision, guidance, and a review of the study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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