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WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF SASSA AND OTHER'S LACK OF CAPACITY AND INCOMPETENCE?

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“This Court and the country as a whole are now confronted with a situation where the executive admitted that it is unable to perform its constitutional and statutory responsibilities to provide social assistance to its people. And in the deepest and most humiliating irony it places its hopes in a private corporate entity to get out of this situation”

- Justice Johan Froneman the Black Sash pronouncement, March 17, 2017

“The problem is that Hlaudi on went a campaign to appoint freelancers on a permanent basis. Now we are left with an exorbitant wage bill... They do not know what to do with all these people, because they do not have the skills to be moved to critical areas such as television and sales”

- Unknown senior SABC employee, *Rapport* March 19, 2017

Add to these two examples Eskom, Transnet and SAA, and the common denominator is what is called in mild terms, “lack of capacity” or more strongly, “complete incompetence”. In some cases, corruption is also involved, but incompetence further opens the door for corruption and misappropriation.

Of course there are thousands of competent and dedicated public servants employed at all levels. However, too many government institutions, national departments, and provincial and local governments cannot do what they need to do, because of a “lack of capacity”.

Where does this “lack of capacity” come from?

The Public Service Commission, tasked with the review of the functioning and capacity of the public service, already provided the answer in a draft discussion document for a workshop at the end of 2014: the main reasons for poor service delivery by the State are affirmative action and cadre deployment. In the 2016 “cash-for-jobs” report on corruption in the Education Department, the finger is also pointed at cadre deployment.

The ruling party has a longstanding and elaborate strategy to capture all the levers of power (also in the private sector and non-governmental organisations), in its bid to improve the plight of black South Africans in general, and *Africans* in particular. To get these levers of power under its control, the aim is to get all organisations at all levels of society to be *demographically representative*. This means that the staff structure of every single organisation, or part thereof, should reflect the current and future national racial composition: 80% African, 9% white, 9% coloured and 2% Indian.

The mechanism to achieve this, is to use this formula as a quota system in the application of affirmative action, employment equity and black economic empowerment codes. For example, it not only means that 80% of all civil servants in the country should be black (which would be in line with the constitutional guideline of “broadly representative”), but in each section of the public service or in companies (however small and wherever they are



situated in the country) the same should apply. It is also called “transformation”. The ANC government has managed to establish it as the dominant ideology of our society.

One of the biggest problems with the implementation of this ideology is that our education and training system failed miserably and there are simply not (yet) 80% skilled and competent African candidates to appoint across the country in all organisations. To achieve the set quotas (sometimes referred to as “targets”), managers find themselves between the devil and the deep blue sea. The result is that there are literally thousands of vacant posts in the public service, or weak or incompetent persons are appointed. Add cadre deployment, where people are appointed for political or corrupt reasons, to this mix and the result is a deadly, toxic brew - for service delivery, efficiency and sound financial management.

The outcome is seen in SASSA, SABC, Transnet, the Gauteng Health Department - and almost every local authority. “Lack of capacity” is not an accident of history, and weak and incompetent government officials don’t “happen” accidentally. It is the outcome of the ANC’s own ideology of demographic representivity, exacerbated by the corrupt example of its own Zuma-controlled leadership. Indirectly, it is also the result of the failure of the education and training system.

The successful implementation of the 80-9-9-2 formula has three definite consequences:

- It racialises South African society again, and does nothing to help bring about substantive equality as envisaged by the Constitution.
- It disadvantages poor South Africans most, because they are dependent on service delivery by the state (as the SASSA case proved).
- It alienates non-African minorities more and more from their country of birth and their feeling at home.

Obviously, affirmative action, employment equity and black economic empowerment were and are important strategies to redress imbalances of the past. And hundreds of thousands of black South Africans have benefited from this, inside and outside the public service. But the manner in which this ideology is being implemented at present causes both the empowerment of the previously disadvantaged and the functioning of the state to fail - and the SASSA case highlighted this in spectacular fashion.

It will not be easy to turn this state of affairs around.

As with any negative phenomenon in organisations, there is also a tipping point for incompetence and corruption. If enough people are part thereof or participate in it, it becomes endemic and the whole organisation becomes incompetent and/or corrupt. Unfortunately, we have reached that tipping point in numerous public institutions. And what makes it worse, is that it is not even possible for the President of the country to fire the incompetent Mayor of a rural municipality. In addition, we are living in a highly emotionally-charged time, where “white monopoly capital” and “white privilege” are being blamed for



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almost everything. Any criticism on the 80-9-9-2 formula is easily seen as an attack on black empowerment.

The governing party will (hopefully with new leadership) have to come to the realisation that this ideology does not work and that it has more disadvantages than advantages - especially for the black and poor majority. In the medium and long term, the education and training system will have to be put on a sound footing. In the short term, the best available skills will have to be utilised in the public service - irrespective of race. These skilled people will have to be given the task to train and coach and help build experience - for those civil servants who are committed and are willing to serve in the spirit of *Batho pele* - the people first.