

SOCIAL POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA

A call for social re-engineering?

Since South Africa is a country that was heavily “socially engineered” for centuries, the author calls for a **“holistic social re-engineering”** to be implemented in South Africa by the state via transformative social policy:

By Ndangwa Noyoo

2014 marked 20 years of freedom and democracy in South Africa. After more than three centuries of colonial domination and apartheid, all citizens of this country – irrespective of their race, gender, ethnic origin or sexual orientation – were for the first time recognised for their worth as human beings and not because of the aforementioned classifications. This was a significant milestone for the country given its tortuous and painful

past. In the said period, South Africa had been governed by the African National Congress (ANC), which fought against colonialism and apartheid. Although the ANC government made concerted efforts in the last two decades to erase the remaining traces of colonialism and apartheid, as exemplified by, inter alia, high levels of inequality and poverty, unemployment, social and economic exclusion, violent crime and destitution, the living conditions of many South

Africans continue to remain extremely dire. For a period of 23 years, the South African government has implemented a wide array of social policy measures primarily aimed at transforming South Africa and also raising the quality of life of the citizenry, especially and more importantly, those sections of the country that had been excluded and marginalised in the previous colonial-apartheid socio-political and economic dispensation. Nevertheless,

social policy during this period, even though it was focusing on transforming the country and also empowering vulnerable South Africans, has not been able to erase the residues of the colonial-apartheid order.

Given the foregoing, the objective of this article is to interrogate the social policy agenda of post-apartheid South Africa and critique its inability to totally transform the South African society. It calls for the social re-engineering of South Africa via social policy. Therefore, its main contention is that the tools which were employed by the post-apartheid state, in driving the transformation process, were not in all cases transformative and emancipatory in content and outlook. It is observed that the ideal state instrument that can humanely and democratically socially re-engineer the South African social fabric is social policy. It is further argued that social policy has not been able to effectively transform South Africa because it is not couched in a paradigm of social re-engineering.

Notably, the post-apartheid social policy approach only staves off chronic deprivation through palliative interventions like social grants. The cited measures do not have emancipatory capacities, which can build the capabilities of the citizenry and totally transform their lives. Crucially, the transformation agenda was not predicated on the notion of creating a new society altogether, which is taken in this article as something akin to the “good society”. Instead, the post-apartheid state has mostly been preoccupied with the task of trying to erase the remaining traces of the colonial and apartheid order, whilst relying on the inherited institutions, state instruments and political economy from the colonial-apartheid order. Also, it seems as if a variant form of capitalism that stemmed from colonialism of a special type is still in place in South Africa 23 years after the supposed demise of apartheid. For Noyoo (2017) social policy in present-day South Africa continues to reproduce colonial and apartheid socio-economic outcomes due to path dependency and this path dependency has largely been shaped by colonialism of a special type. He further notes:

Before the democratic elections of 1994, South Africa’s social policy and welfare regime were underpinned by the values and ethos of colonialism and apartheid. Given this past, it is worth considering how the country “won” its freedom. It can be said that in the end, the main protagonist against the apartheid state, the African National Congress (ANC), emerged as the sole negotiator for the country’s freedom. Thus, the ANC had to engage with the former apartheid political functionaries of the National Party (NP) and begin laying the foundation for a new post-apartheid society. This process inadvertently resulted in the ANC inheriting the colonial-apartheid state-template from the NP which it then used to create a post-apartheid society. In short, power was not wrested from the apartheid

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rulers, but it was negotiated and then transferred to the ANC, with attached conditions (Noyoo, 2017, pp. 3-4).

Hence, the present social policy approach cannot fundamentally socially re-engineer South Africa into the “good society”. In this context it is transformative social policy that needs to be explored.

Why social re-engineering?

Why should South Africa consider social re-engineering through social policy as a viable option? Arguably, the country’s social policy has to a larger extent militated against the creation of a new society, namely, the “good society”. Indeed, in the post-1994 era, government strategies which were employed to fight against human deprivation did not seek to

radically address the root causes of the country’s many social ills which are deeply rooted in South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past. Such an approach was inadvertently promoted by the government, in what is referred to in government parlance as “quick wins”. With this approach, which was focusing on “quick wins”, social policy became more of a technocratic, bureaucratic and “compliance” related type of intervention, rather than a long term approach that sought to create a new society altogether.

For example, it can be argued that social assistance which is delivered mainly through social grants is a government intervention which is only palliative and not transformative. Despite having close to 17 million South Africans depending on social grants for their livelihood, many of these individuals’ capabilities have been built or fortified. Notwithstanding the large numbers of children and the elderly as the main beneficiaries of the social grants, the former are touted by many academics, researchers and politicians as “poverty alleviation” mechanisms. However, the crux of the matter is that these grants have not changed the material conditions of these population groups. Again, in the main, these conditions were carefully crafted by colonialism and apartheid. That is why the numbers of social grant beneficiaries has expanded exponentially in the democratic era. This shows that the root causes of poverty and inequality are not being addressed.

For instance, in 2001 there were 12,494,000 people in employment and 3,993,133 people receiving social grants. In 2016, the number of people receiving grants had increased by 328% while those with jobs increased by only 24% according to the Institute of Race Relations (IRR, 2017).

Twenty three years after the fall of apartheid South Africa continues to be one of the most unequal societies in the world with a Gini coefficient of 0.69. This is a number between 0 and 1, where 0 indicates total equality and 1 indicates total inequality. This value is based on expenditure data (per capita excluding taxes) and income data (per capita including

salaries, wages and social grants). According to Statistics South Africa (2014a) it was calculated in 2011. Furthermore, more than half of South Africans were poor in 2015 (2017a). Unemployment continues to bedevil the post-apartheid government's efforts to develop South Africa. For example, in the first quarter of 2017 the unemployment rate peaked at 27.7 per cent (2017b). Unemployment is one of the major challenges confronting South Africa today and particularly its youth. Approximately 3.4 million (32.9 per cent) of the 10.4 million of the youth aged 15-24 years were not in employment, education or training in the Second Quarter of 2013 (2013). This situation did not improve much the following year. It is also important to underline the fact that youth unemployment is nuanced by a racial dimension. According to StatsSA (2014b), the rate of unemployment among black African youth was 4.1 percentage points higher than that of the youth in the Coloured population group, and as much as 23.7 and 29.8 percentage points higher than that of the Indian/Asian and white groups respectively.

In addition a large number of young people simply drop out of the education system. The majority of the youth are dependent on either the state and its institutions, or families. Also, the approximated overall HIV prevalence rate is around 10%, with the total number of people living with HIV estimated at 5.26 million (in 2013). For the ages 15-49 years, an estimated 15.9 per cent of the population is HIV positive (2013). The phenomenon of child poverty, which is usually underreported or lumped together with adult poverty, by both politicians and policy-makers, is also another very serious societal challenge. In many respects, child poverty has been exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic as parents and care-givers have succumbed to the disease over the years.

Why are many people in this country living lives not dissimilar to those of most people in Sub-Saharan Africa's most impoverished countries when indeed South Africa is materially well off? The answer lies in the socially

and politically constructed barriers of exclusion which then created an exclusive economy for a particular race. The sculptors of this economy were the settlers who carved out a landscape of extreme opulence and privilege in the midst of extreme poverty and human dislocation. This lopsided arrangement was guaranteed by the exploitation of natural resources and African people and then the deployment of profits from the export of resources to the segregated white enclaves. Due to this overt and deviously well-planned project of social engineering, present-day South Africa continues to face a plethora of societal challenges because in the main, the country continues to use the inherited instruments of the state from the previous colonial-apartheid order. The country is failing to break out of the colonial-apartheid mould of

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state formation. The former were not fundamentally and radically altered by the post-colonial government but they were only reformed.

Conceptual premises for the social re-engineering of South Africa

It is emphatically stated in this article that South Africa can only fully benefit from the democratic transition if the government puts in place a resolute programme of social re-engineering which is underpinned by the tenets of social policy. This is because the ANC government was bequeathed a society that was socially engineered, in a very pernicious way, by colonialism and apartheid. It is noteworthy that centuries of colonial rule, which was typified by the European's oppression of Africans and the dispossession of their land, culminated in the passing of

the Native Land Act of 19 June 1913 and the institutionalisation of racism in 1948. The Land Act would have far-reaching implications for South Africa's future and to date, its ramifications are still being felt across the country. After apartheid was formally adopted as a national ideology by the National Party in 1948, it was concretised through policies and legislation in the 1950s and afterwards. Some of apartheid's centre-pieces were:

- The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, No 55 of 1949
- The Immorality Amendment Act, No 21 of 1950
- The Population Registration Act, No 30 of 1950
- The Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, No 52 of 1951
- The Group Areas Act, No 41 of 1950
- The Bantu Education Act, No 47 of 1953
- The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, No 49 of 1953
- The Natives Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act of 1952.

Instead of tinkering with the socio-economic outcomes of colonialism and apartheid with approaches that are palliative, this article calls for the social re-engineering of the South African society. This stance takes cognisance of the fact that post-apartheid South Africa is still a socially engineered society altogether. Hence, it needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed and social policy can play a key role in this arena.

However, this agenda can only be driven by actors who have intellectual depth and have conceptual clarity in regard to the way social re-engineering will be implemented. Social re-engineering cannot be undertaken by actors with mediocre intellectual capabilities or those who lack moral courage. For this discussion, social policy must be able to transform the South African society. Therefore, the social policy approach which will propel the social re-engineering process is transformative social policy. According to Adesina, (2010) transformative social policy plays multiple roles of redistribution, protection, reproduction, social cohesion and

nation-building. In this regard, it also recognises the symbiotic links between social policy and economic policy.

Hence, economic development that is supported by this type of social policy would combine growth with structural transformation of the economy and social relations, whilst reinforcing the norms of equality and social solidarity. In this sense, social policy would not only be an expression of normative values, but will also serve as a major transformative instrument in the process of development (Adesina, 2010). Transformative social policy is defined by universal membership and coverage in provisioning. Therefore, its instruments range from education to health-care, agrarian reform, child-care, old-age care and to fiscal instruments. Its development outcomes filter through to social and economic development (growth with structural transformation), and also political development. Transformative social policy has the potential to enhance both labour market efficiency and innovation (Adesina, 2010).

Social policy must be guided by a transformative social policy thrust that has built-in mechanisms of social re-engineering. This social re-engineering should aim at creating the “good society”. In presenting a case for the good society, Lippmann (1937) points out that when we delve into debates of the good society, we (that is those who accept that the good society is indeed attainable) have to first and foremost accept that freedom is a cornerstone of the good society. What this means is that a prosperous and peaceful society must be free. If it is not free, it cannot be prosperous and peaceful. This then supposes that the good society should be led by a certain calibre of rulers. *If this is so, then the good society should demand from its rulers that they sacrifice their personal ends to the interests and general welfare of the people* (emphasis added).

For Plato and his colleagues, a society was well-ordered when the people who governed it knew what they were doing and this “knowing what they were doing” was linked directly to finding and serving the public good (Huard, 2007). It would also be helpful if such a society could be regarded as

a community. However, the concept of a community is only viable if one treats it not as a given but as a variable. That is, some societies are much more of a community than others and their communal quality changes over time. In such a community we should therefore be concerned with *greatly reducing inequality, rather than having equality as the end state* (emphasis added) (Etzioni, 2002).

A good society would not only secure a “generous minimum” for all its members, but would also strive to cap inequality by slowing down increases in the slices of the total resources gained by the higher strata. Crucially, *in order to ensure broad and genuine adherence to values, a good society should rely on the moral voice* (emphasis added) – the informal

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controls members of communities exert on one another – rather than law (Etzioni, 2002). In this regard, any useful identification of the good society must therefore take into consideration the institutional structure and the human characteristics that are fixed and immutable. In this way, they make the difference between the utopian and the achievable, between the irrelevant and ultimately the possible (Galbraith, 1996, p. 3). Hence, a good society must have a *good economy* (emphasis added). An evident purpose of a good economy is to produce goods and services effectively and to dispense the revenues therefrom in a socially acceptable manner. It must have substantial and reliable increase in production and employment from year

to year. Finally, a good society must have a strong international dimension. The state must live in peaceful and mutually rewarding association with its trading partners on the planet (Galbraith, 1996).

Nonetheless, the term “social engineering” is not a new term. It comes from the field of social control. Social engineering can refer to the process of redefining a society – or more correctly, engineering society – to achieve some desired outcome. The term can also refer to the process of attempting to change people’s behaviour in a predictable manner, usually in order to have them comply with some new system (Berti & Rogers, 2003). The eminent social scientist, Karl Popper, recognised the fact that most social institutions are more the product of gradual evolution or adaptation than any conscious design. From a functionalist or instrumental perspective, institutions may be designed or may be redesigned to more efficiently attain desired ends. Efforts to reform human institutions may be regarded as social engineering (Hayes, 2001).

According to Popper, social engineering can take on two distinct forms, which he termed: “holistic social engineering” and “piecemeal social engineering”. “Holistic social engineering” aims at remodelling the whole society in accordance with a definite plan or blueprint, by taking control of key positions and extending the power of the state until it becomes commensurate with society. From these key positions, the state can arrest the course of historical forces or foresee their course and adjust society to them (Hayes, 2001). By contrast, although piecemeal social engineers may cherish certain ideals that apply to society as a whole – social justice, for example, or the general welfare – they will reject as impractical any attempt to remodel society as a whole. Whatever their ends, they try to achieve them by small adjustments which can be continually improved upon (Hayes, 2001).

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implemented in South Africa by the state via transformative social policy:

Perhaps no other country has experienced as much and as detailed socio-political engineering as apartheid South Africa. The apartheid project impacted people's lives at every level, always with the goal of creating a set of parallel but grossly unequal spatial realities with almost no meaningful contacts between the population groups. This apartheid era legacy is one of enormous inequalities reflected in landscapes of separate, ethnically determined social worlds filled with despair for non-White South Africans (Domingo, 2011).

After proffering arguments for social re-engineering in South Africa the next section puts forward practical ways of how this can transpire.

Starting the re-engineering process

The following can serve as pillars of transformative social policy in South Africa that will support social re-engineering. They are not exhaustive but serve as mere pointers to how social re-engineering can be achieved in the country in a humane way as opposed to the colonial and apartheid social engineering project which was extremely corrosive.

Instituting a progressive labour regime

South African labour practices are still reminiscent of the colonial-apartheid order. Labour relations are still underpinned by the archaic migrant labour system. This outmoded labour system still militates against the transformation of the South African society. Hence, a progressive labour regime, which intersects with transformative social policy, would abolish the migrant labour system forthwith. This labour practice is not only just a labour related problem, but one that has negative consequences for other sectors of the South African society, for example, the African family. While economists are busy talking about "flexible" labour laws, not many are mentioning the content and character of this labour system and its deleterious effects on the country's social fabric. According to the Green Paper for the Family:

The migrant labour system, based on the carving up of "African reserves" which, in turn, guaranteed a steady supply of cheap labour to the emerging industrial and capitalist enclave, was a direct product of industrialisation. This form of labour was regarded as temporary and connected to the reserves. The main assumption of both the political establishment and business at the time was that migrant labourers would be guaranteed social protection by their extended families and that they would return to their communities, once their labour was no longer required. However, this system led to the manifestation of various social problems in the country that had a direct bearing on family life. One such problem was the absence of able-bodied men

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in African villages, which greatly undermined the extended family in many ways (Department of Social Development, 2011).

Another aspect of this sector that would require state intervention is the area of absorbing large pools of unemployed and lowly skilled South Africans into productive ventures. Usually, this role is not for the private sector. Thus large reserve armies would need to be channelled into for example, agriculture, manufacturing and the construction sectors. However, these sections of the economy need to be deliberately tailored to engage in labour-intensive economic activities until such a time that some of these individuals would have been skilled and graduated to the next sector. Therefore, a labour regime that will be up to the

task of "socially re-engineering" South Africa must be multi-tiered. It must be noted that employment avenues must be created and guaranteed by the state and not left to the markets. It should be directly linked to an education sector which has been universalised.

Putting in place a country-wide programme of universal and high quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the poorest communities

Transformative social policy would help to define the rolling out of universal and high quality ECD in South Africa in the poorest communities. If well planned and managed, ECD which is driven by transformative social policy has the capacity to create a new South African citizen two decades from now. The issue here will be to "catch them whilst they are still young". Competent and highly trained ECD facilitators should be recruited for this endeavour and deployed to mainly rural and depressed areas of South Africa. Inculcation of certain values and a progressive ethos into the young minds would also ensue. This is where issues of gender relations, respect and national service, would begin to be inculcated into the minds of young South Africans.

The home situation is not always the best for nurturing young people in South Africa and the state can play a decisive role here. Parts of the Cuban ECD model could be emulated here by creating better conditions for the socialisation of young South Africans at ECDs. Cuba provides an excellent example of a population-wide programme that takes a preventative approach to foster the health, education and development of children from the earliest stages. A critical player in the country's successful approach to maternal health and early childhood development is what Cubans call Polyclinics. These establishments ensure the integration of science, knowledge transfer, parent education, primary healthcare and community mobilisation. They are multidisciplinary and focus on prevention; regularly undertake universal screening initiatives and strongly encourage immunisation (Senate Subcommittee, 2008).

Rolling out Universal high quality education from ECD to tertiary levels

Now that the South African government has endorsed the policy of free tertiary education for the first time since 1994, there must be more thinking put into this noble undertaking. For starters, free tertiary education needs to be anchored in a transformative social policy paradigm. Otherwise this type of education may not reap its intended dividends. To this end, free tertiary education should not be the ultimate goal of the ANC government but this type of education should begin at ECD level. In this regard, it would hinge on a resolute and expansive recruitment drive of competent, highly trained teachers and lecturers across the country, who would be working in rural areas.

The first phase of this agenda would see the building of new primary and secondary schools of excellence, and agricultural colleges in mainly rural areas. Many of the highly qualified teachers would also be paid “risk allowances” and provided with more incentives such as housing, and car allowances. This is to make sure that market-based salaries and other benefits “lure” highly competent teachers to the deep rural and poorest areas of South Africa. In a way, this approach would also serve to stem the rural-urban migration tide. Such approaches had been attempted in several post-colonial African states, especially during the successful first decade of independence. In fact, one issue that needs to be stressed here is that universal education is self-sustaining and must be seen as an economic imperative and not regarded as a drain on the economy. Those who have gone through this system would need to pay high taxes in later years that would in turn buoy up this type of education. An educated and highly skilled citizenry is less of a burden on the state.

Fostering high levels of social solidarity across all sectors of South Africa

Transformative social policy cannot be implemented in a fragmented and racially divided society such as this one, where most of the country's wealth is still in few white hands.

After two decades of democracy, there still seems to be not one South African identity, but arguably, the same colonial-apartheid classifications define the essence of being a South African. The national question has not been answered in its entirety in this country. Many citizens still seem to prefer their laagers. The notion of “I am my brother's or sister's keeper” is still not embedded in the national psyche. Therefore, lessons can be learnt from the nationalist agenda in the early years of independence in some post-colonial African states. For instance, such countries had made sure that refugees and freedom-fighters from Southern Africa, especially South Africa, were looked after in countries like Tanzania and Zambia, and benefitted from these countries' free and high quality education, among other benefits (Noyoo, 2010). This solidarity needs to be fostered from ECD all the way to tertiary level. The education curricula at primary and secondary levels should also be tailored in such a way that they respond to the national question.

Furthermore, business, labour and government still have to arrive at a social compact, which seems not to be there despite the existence of the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). Labour and especially the unions must be conscientised over the fact that violent and protracted strikes are not good for business and conversely, big business or the private sector must be responsible enough to know that archaic labour practices such as the “dope system”, slave wages and the migrant labour system etc., are also bad for business. Equally, the government needs to create an enabling environment that is conducive for all parties to benefit so that the tax base is expanded and that the collected revenues are able to shore up the aforementioned universalised education sector. All the foregoing can be defined and guided by transformative social policy.

Conclusion

To conclude this article, it can be asserted that even though South Africa is said to be the most advanced economy on the African continent, countries with

lesser resources have done better than this country in past epochs in regard to how they managed to raise the quality of life of the previously colonised and oppressed African masses. South Africa can learn from countries like Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe that managed to transform themselves ten years after independence. Nevertheless, social re-engineering can only be effected in South Africa if there is a clear vision on the part of the government, politicians and policy-makers, and more importantly, if the former are guided by a clear ideology. The implementation of social re-engineering in South Africa by the government is necessary because the country continues to be a product of the colonial and apartheid project of social engineering. Therefore, for South Africa to begin to aspire to become the “good society”, it must be socially re-engineered. It was noted that the most democratic and humane state instrument to effect such a process of social re-engineering would be social policy and specifically transformative social policy. ■

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