Public policy making in a post-apartheid South Africa: A preliminary perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses public policy making in South Africa since the end of apartheid in 1994, concentrating on 'nation building'. Contrary to the characterisation and conclusions reached by Luiz (2002) and Wenzel (2007), among others, on the South African public service and public policy making and associated 'outcomes', this article concludes that public policy making in South Africa has been undertaken relatively well and that the consequent 'results' are commendable. It presents a preliminary perspective on public policy making in South Africa, describing relevant institutions (including non-state actors) and highlighting some high-level 'outcomes' of the South African policy-making approach, as well as presenting some broad views on developments taking place with regard to nation building.

The article argues that, first at a theoretical level, the obvious next stage in public sector reforms worldwide, after the new public management reforms, is the integrated governance approach (as described by Halligan 2007). Given how public sector reforms have evolved, it would seem that South Africa has just truly entered a phase of integrated governance approach. Further, the article posits that the public policies that are being pursued and the manner in which this is being done (in an integrated governance fashion and partnerships with rest of society) constitute an attempt to mediate the neo-classical economic (or neo-liberal) thinking, including constraints imposed by theories (such as public choice theory) on development. In addition, although the 'integrated governance' system requires further interrogation, the article tentatively concludes that South Africa has established ideal institutions for the policy-making process and encapsulates most of the salient features of a democratic developmental state.

1   INTRODUCTION

This article discusses public policy making in South Africa since the end of apartheid in 1994. It concentrates on 'nation building'. Given that nation building is an important aspect of social policy, the perspective presented here is premised on Mkandawire's (2001) definition of social policy as 'collective interventions directly affecting transformation in social welfare, social institutions and social relations'. It would seem that this is the most comprehensive and persuasive definition of social policy, although there is still no consensus on this definition.[3]

The premise of this article is influenced by views of scholars such as Adesina (2007) who, in his review of African social policy experiences, concluded that most social-policy-making initiatives in Africa were influenced by the 'nationalist' agenda of nation building and (economic) growth. Also, the view that the role played or not played by the state is critical for development or lack of it influences the approach this article takes,[4] especially since it is posited that the South African government has been relatively hands-on in both policy making and implementation or rather that the configuration of government since 1998 or so has lent itself readily to an active developmental state. The notion that politics, as Bahl and Linn (1994) argue in the case of 'central-local governance relations', is one of the most critical factors that determine the nature of governance arrangements is also attractive. Leftwich (1995) also emphasises the role of politics in the context of developmental states. This view could be extended to argue that political dynamics significantly, at least intuitively, impacts on public policy or rather that it would inevitably have some role. After all, the agenda of the public sector is set largely by politicians or influenced by a political discourse and more so by the political manifesto of the party that wins the elections (in democratic states). In fact, Dror (2006:81) alludes to this when he argues that policy and politics 'closely interact, often overlap, and in part cannot be separated even analytically'. Other scholars such as Stone (2001) and Persson and Tabellini (2000, 2006) have dealt with this issue, in different contexts.

2   SCOPE OF THE ARTICLE

To place the discussion in a proper context, it is important to first have a common understanding of concepts such as public policy, human development, nation building, developmental state and state capacity/capability because of their evident relevance. As Howlett and Ramesh (2003) put it, there are many competing definitions of public policy. Enough has been written about definitions of public policy.[5] Most of this literature draws from seminal work of the pioneers of 'policy science', such as Lasswell[6] and from the earlier work of Dror.[7] For the purpose of this article, public policy is defined broadly as all formal and publicly known decisions of governments that come about through pre-determined channels in a particular administration. Properties of this

definition would readily lend themselves to scrutiny but, given limited space and time, this article cannot unpack those. Moran, Rein and Goodin (2006) view public policy 'as the business end of political science, where theory meets practice in the pursuit of the public good'.

Human development, as argued by others, is seen to be associated with people, rather than physical goods and services, as the real wealth of a nation. It is said that the human development paradigm categorises a country as developed only if its people are free and possess choices and entitlements. The concept of human development entails enlarging people's choices in a society. Amartya Sen (1999) is used here in trying to describe human development, which relates to enhancing and expanding human capabilities. Human capabilities, as Sen puts it, refer to a 'set of valued things that it is feasible for a person to do – from dependable access to adequate nourishment to having the possibility of being a respected participant in community life'.

With regard to the notion of a developmental state, many scholars associate this with the state that, in partnership with non-state actors, vigorously pursues developmental objectives, though in many instances the focus is largely on economic development. For instance, Bagchi (2000: 398) defines a developmental state as 'a state that puts economic development as the top priority of governmental policy and is able to design effective instruments to promote such a goal'. Drawing from various scholars in the field, the following definition is proposed: a developmental state is a state that is active in pursuing its developmental agenda, working with social partners, and has the capacity and is appropriately organised for its predetermined developmental objectives.The definition of the World Development Report (1997) that state capacity/capability is 'the ability of the state to undertake collective actions at least costs to society' seems widely accepted and is used in this article.

Lastly, in the South African government, emanating from various studies, 'nation building' and/or 'social cohesion' as descriptive terms refer 'to the extent to which a society is coherent, united and functional, providing an environment within which its citizens can flourish' (HSRC 2000: 227). As this definition implies, there is a close link between social cohesion, social capital and social networks. In essence, 'nation building' is a process aimed at ensuring cohesion among different peoples in a particular nation-state. Works of scholars such as Robert Putnam (2000) and Benedict Anderson (1983) are seminal on these issues. Nation building and social cohesion are used interchangeably, although nation building has a broader agenda, rather than narrowly creating bonds among South Africans.

Given that this article is a precursor to a detailed analytical enterprise of/on public policy making in South Africa, it is not in a position to present profound conclusions and lessons. It simply details the processes in public policy making and highlights the outcomes of the approach adopted/adapted and policies implemented. This assists in formulating a broader perspective on whether South Africa is on course in meeting the objectives and targets it set for itself.

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There are many empirical and political economy questions that this article does not address.

The next section focuses on the description of institutional mechanisms for policy making and implementation as well as associated outcomes. Prior to concluding, there is a brief section, on a case of nation building, which discusses the nature and extent of cohesiveness of the South African geographic and state entity.

3   INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS IN POLICY MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION

South Africa's history, like that of many African countries, is dominated by colonialism, racism, apartheid, sexism and many repulsive policies whose legacy remains severe. As a result, in every sphere of the society today, whether economic, social, political or cultural, South Africans are confronted with serious challenges to which public policies must respond. The era of apartheid, its legislation and institutions through which the ideology was implemented, produced and left a legacy of persistent poverty and extreme inequality that spans 300 years. So, the society is confronted with massive 'accumulated disadvantages', particularly for the majority of South Africans, which can only be sustainably addressed collectively. A number of inherited challenges remain. A review by the HSRC (2006) on democracy and human rights over the first decade of the Constitution reflects on these challenges to include:

- The impact of apartheid, which stripped people of their assets, especially land, distorted economic markets and social institutions through racial discrimination, and resulted in violence and destabilisation

- The undermining of the asset base of the majority through ill health, over-crowding, environmental degradation, mismatch of resources and opportunities, race and gender discrimination and social exclusion

- The impact of a disabling state, which included the appalling behaviour and attitudes of government officials, the absence of information concerning rights, roles and responsibilities, and lack of accountability by the then government

These challenges have shaped the nature of South Africa's society and economy, and represent apartheid's legacy of inequality, poverty and lack of national unity. Within the context of what Mkandawire (2001) terms 'political contexts' of social policies in 'developmental contexts', South Africa embarked on a concerted process of redressing these inherited imbalances, with the focus on dismantling apartheid social relations and creating a democratic society based on its constitutional principles of equity, non-racialism and non-sexism. Significant challenges facing the democratic government included rebuilding the institutional mechanisms, and initiating and implementing legislation and policies that are in line with the Constitution to usher in a new era of a developmental state. This journey of transformation can be described as a trajectory

of redress, reconciliation, nation building, reconstruction, redistribution and growth, and indeed a holistic and integrated process in which political and economic forces interact in dynamic and diverse ways to improve the living standards of the people. This is clearly discernible in the policy and political discourse of and by government, especially in the last five years or so.

This section briefly depicts the policy-making process, and the role played by various institutions, with added attention to non-state actors. One of the key institutions, besides parliament, is the Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Services (Policy Unit) in the state presidency. It not only deals with policy making and its various components (such as policy analysis, policy coordination and policy advice), but also leads to medium- to long-range planning as well as government-wide monitoring and evaluation. In brief, the Policy Unit provides research, analytical, advisory, policy, project/programme and strategic support to the presidency and government as a whole on matters of socio-economic development, justice, governance and international affairs. It comprises five main policy sectors: economic, social, justice, crime prevention and security, international relations, and governance and administration. There are three additional units: monitoring and evaluation; planning; and special programmes (which deal with issues related to gender, disability and children's rights). There is also a youth desk, which deals with youth development issues. Mirroring policy sectors are the five Forum of South African Directors-General (FOSAD) clusters. The Policy Unit works very closely with the FOSAD clusters and acts as a link between them and cabinet committees.

At the highest level, as in many countries, the national legislative authority in South Africa is vested in parliament, which consists of two houses: the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP). The Constitution describes the NA as a body elected to represent the people and to ensure government by the people. While its functions include holding the executive accountable; fulfilling the judicial role; and those relating to its own activities; and considering public petitions from the members of the public, the most important purpose of the NA is to pass legislation. In exercising its legislative power, the NA may consider, pass, amend or reject any legislation before it, and/or initiate or prepare legislation, except the Money Bill.[8] The NA is required to provide for mechanisms to ensure that all executive organs of state in the national sphere of government are accountable to it, and to maintain oversight of the exercise of national executive authority, including the implementation of legislation, as well as that of any organ of state. The NA is also required to facilitate public involvement in its legislative and other processes and its committees, conduct its business in an open manner, and hold its sittings and those of its committees in public. Reasonable measures may be taken to regulate public access, however, including access by the media.

The NCOP ensures that provincial interests are taken into account in the national sphere of government. It carries out this mandate by participating in the national legislative processes and providing a national forum for public consideration of issues affecting the provinces. In exercising its legislative power, the NCOP may consider,

pass, amend, propose amendments to or reject any legislation before it, and initiate or prepare legislation falling within a functional area. The NCOP is also required by law to facilitate public involvement in its legislative and other processes and its committees in a regulated manner.

Overall, the process of making law is a lengthy one, involving a number of structures. By the time the draft legislation reaches parliament, where it is tabled as a bill, it will have gone through a specific standard process. The process generally begins with a discussion document, called a Green Paper. This is drafted in the ministry or department dealing with that issue, with the aim of demonstrating the way in which the ministry or department is thinking on a particular policy. The Green Paper is then published, so that anyone who is interested and/or affected can give comments, suggestions and ideas. The Green Paper process is followed by a more refined discussion document, a White Paper, which is a broad statement of government policy. This is drafted by the department or a task team designated by the government minister of that department. Comment may again be invited from interested parties. The parliamentary committees may propose amendments or other proposals, and send the policy paper back to the ministry for further discussion and final decisions. Once approved by the Law Commission and cabinet,[8] the White Paper is sent to the state law advisers, who assess the legal and technical implications of the draft law. It is then introduced in parliament as a bill. At that stage the bill must have already gone through public participation process where organs of civil society, other bodies and the general public are given an opportunity to input during drafting. To ensure public consultation, departments must list the bodies consulted in drawing up the bill in the explanatory memorandum.

Although the law is passed by parliament in sittings of the two houses, , it is only at cabinet committee level that the details of the draft law are examined. The South African cabinet committees were established in order to:

- Review and deliberate on the identified short-, medium- and long-term priorities in an integrated way for their particular sectors, and to agree on areas that require substantive discussion

- Facilitate integrated cabinet decision making and the cooperative approach to governance

- Discuss substantial political and policy matters to inform memoranda that come to cabinet for decisions on policy matters

- Engage in creative and collaborative interaction on issues affecting their sectors relating to policy development and legislation for the sector

- Deliberate on capacity and systems development for integrated planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation

The functioning of the cabinet committees is supported largely by the Forum of South African Director-Generals (FOSAD) clusters (above).

At provincial level, the legislative authority of a province (a 'state' in some countries) is vested in its provincial legislature, and confers power on the provincial legislature. A provincial legislature is governed only by the Constitution, and the constitution for its province (if it has been passed), and must act in accordance with, and within the limits of these constitutions. In exercising its legislative power, a provincial legislature may consider, pass, amend or reject any bill before the legislature, and initiate or prepare legislation. A provincial legislature must provide for mechanisms to ensure that all provincial executive organs of state in the province are accountable to it; and maintain oversight of the exercise of provincial executive authority in the province, including the implementation of legislation, and any provincial organ of state. As in the National Assembly and the NCOP, a provincial legislature must ensure public involvement in the legislative and other processes of the legislature and its committee, in a regulated manner.

Lastly, the local sphere of government consists of municipalities[10] which have been established around South Africa. The executive and legislative authority of a municipality is vested in its municipal council. A municipality has the right to govern, on its own initiative, the local government affairs of its community, subject to national and provincial legislation, as provided for in the Constitution. Municipalities have the right to exercise their powers without the national or a provincial government compromising or impeding their ability or right to exercise their powers or perform their functions. In addition, municipalities may make and administer bylaws for the effective administration of the matters for which they are responsible.

At this level, public participation forms a cornerstone of the administration processes. There is provision for public participation in all spheres of government and its policy-making processes. However, it is mainly the local government sphere that is a product of a conscious policy and institutional design to ensure accessibility of government to communities and citizens. Among the objects of local government section, 152 (1) of the Constitution includes providing for a democratic and accountable government for local communities; ensuring the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner; and encouraging the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government. This mechanism is meant to allow the public and citizens to be active participants in the policy-making process, as expected of any democracy.

In addition, the governance arrangements are enacted in the supreme law of the country – the Constitution. South Africa has what some call 'quasi-federalism'. The political discourse remains very robust on this issue because some argue that the current governance arrangements constrain effective service delivery owing to limitations imposed on the central government in determining and shaping the affairs of provincial/subnational governments. The Constitution does provide some recourse in

extreme cases, however, such as breakdown in the workings of a provincial/subnational government.

A significant element of the policy-making and implementation process in South Africa is the involvement and/or participation of non-state actors – what public policy literature refers to broadly as quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations ('quangos'). The South African policy-making process provides ample room for participation of the public, in its various forms. This approach is in accordance with the democratic nature of the government, giving voice and respect to the governed from various sectors, and from all walks of life. In a quest to achieve impartiality and independence of views of the public, government, as mandated by the Constitution, has put in place several Chapter 9 institutions to strengthen constitutional democracy. These institutions account to the NA and include the Public Protector, the South African Human Rights Commission, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities, the Commission on Gender and Equality, the Youth Commission, and the Electoral Commission. Although these are state institutions, the Constitution protects their independence by allowing them to contribute to the policy making, implementing and monitoring process 'without fear, favour or prejudice' for the sectors that these institutions represent. At presidential level, President Thabo Mbeki established several working groups (constituted by members outside government as well as selected cabinet ministers and senior advisors from the Policy Unit) for various sectors. There are a number of such presidential working groups: on youth development, women empowerment, business (big and black businesses), higher education, commercial agriculture and one with religious leaders. In the administration of President Thabo Mbeki there are scheduled meetings with these groups, which take place twice a year to exchange policy and programme perspectives around topical issues affecting them and those that they represent.

Outside the state umbrella, a number of institutions, bodies and agencies are active role-players in policy-making processes. The National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) is one body through which government comes together with organised business, labour and community groupings at national level to discuss and try to reach consensus on issues of social and economic policy. Organised business is represented by Business Unity South Africa, organised labour by the main labour federations in South Africa, and the organised community by the South African Youth Council, National Women's Coalition, South African National Civics Organisation, Disabled People South Africa, Financial Sector Coalition and the National Cooperatives Association of South Africa. Nedlac works very closely with departments of labour, trade and industry, finance (national treasury), public works and others to make socio-economic decision making more inclusive, and to promote the goals of economic growth, equity and social inclusion.

With regards to the women's sector, the South African government has opened its doors to engagement with the South African Women in Dialogue (Sawid) and the so-called National Gender Machinery (NGM) on policy issues related to poverty eradication

and development in general. Sawid is an independent and impartial women's platform for dialogue, committed to hearing the voice of every woman and to improving the status of women by engaging national government to shape community, provincial and national agendas in a manner that responds appropriately to women from all walks of life. The NGM on the other hand is a constitution of all the key roleplayers on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In the health sector, government has established the South African National Aids Council (Sanac) to provide a platform for collaboration and interaction between government and key stakeholders such as the Treatment Action Campaign and the National Association of People Living with HIV and Aids. This platform allows for discussions on policy and programme responses to the health challenges facing the country, with a specific focus on HIV and Aids.

Through these and other bodies the dynamic interaction on policy debates between government and non-state actors has ensured that South Africa continues to respond to the immense challenge of building a society that concretely advances the human development of all. Though contested, the cluster system, which is largely a South African innovation allows a rigorous process in policy making and provides some checks and balances.

3.1 SOUTH AFRICA'S PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING APPROACH: A BRIEF PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL POLICY

'Social policy as an instrument for ensuring a sense of citizenship is an important instrument for conflict management, which is in turn a prerequisite for sustained economic development' (Mkandawire 2001: 12). In effect, this is what has shaped social policy making in South Africa. Combining it with the overall human development approach, the government has probably made (public) policy in a manner that does not create negative externalities, and reduces opportunity costs to future generations. This has been done through a rigorous process that ensures the involvement of institutions at critical milestones along the policy-making chain.

The starting point, it would seem, was institutional reform, side by side with the necessary legislative foundations. This process is continuing, focusing more on building effective governance and service delivery institutions going forward. The second major step was getting the economy right. In 1994, when the first democratic government was voted into office, the economy was in an awful state in many respects. Moving from the premise that a growing economy would increase the pace of service delivery and expansion of human capabilities and cohesion of people, the government engaged on an intricate economic restructuring project. This is still under way, as the legacy of apartheid colonialism remains evident.

The third major step was a direct and explicit social policy focusing on eradicating poverty and strengthening social cohesion. Alongside further restructuring of the

economy, this will probably occupy government business and its partners for many years to come.

South Africa made a commitment in 1994, through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP),[11] to meeting basic needs, building the economy, democratising the state and society, developing human resources, and promoting nation building. Since then, the country has experienced a stable democracy, entrenchment of freedom, a growing economy and steady progress in bringing a better life to all. Over and above material conditions, there are improvements in areas such as national identity and relatively higher levels of social cohesion, in terms of unity, coherence, functionality and pride. The country has, to some extent, been exemplary in mitigating racial, ethnic and cultural tensions, in redressing decades of discrimination and underdevelopment, and in redefining and pursuing a collective national vision. South Africa is a nation that has harnessed meagre resources towards improved human development, at little disruption to the economy and the lowest costs to future generations, in a collective effort that addresses the ugly political history and its legacy.

In essence, as recent targets and objectives imply, (social) policy making in South Africa has been about addressing the challenge of poverty and underdevelopment as well as building national unity. The Policy Unit oversees and partakes in meta-policy development and management through the cluster system in ensuring that the goal of mitigating poverty and building a cohesive society, and other complementary objectives are achieved. The unit does this largely through ensuring that all policies are aligned to the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) of government as a whole. The MTSF has been influenced by the paradigm that prioritises economic growth for addressing social ills. Needless to say, public policy making has been affected by the commitments of the 'national democratic revolution' to which the ruling political party and its alliance subscribe. These commitments are elaborated in policy documents of the African National Congress (ANC) government which, through structures and instruments with the Policy Unit's leadership, translates those ideals into a formidable programme of action within the obtaining policy (and political) platform. Always at the core of that programme of action is an explicit sense of trade-offs being made, almost always reprioritising human development within an economic growth 'construct'.

Many recent studies suggest that there are improvements in the 'quality of life' of most South Africans (Gumede 2008). For instance, Bhorat et al (2008), in the absence of an official poverty line, chose to use two lines, the lower poverty line of R174 per person per month and the upper line of R322 per person per month, in 2000 prices.[12] They found that over the period 1995–2005, the first decade of democracy in South Africa, absolute and relative poverty (on the upper- and lower-bound poverty lines) have both declined. The two poverty lines and the poverty gap index have declined. Household poverty, as measured by the headcount index at a poverty line of R322 a month declined by five percentage points, from 53 per cent in 1995 to 48 per cent in 2005. At the lower poverty line of R174, a similar decline in poverty is evident because the incidence of poverty declined by eight percentage points from about 31 to 23 per cent.

The measure of relative poverty – the poverty gap – indicates a similar national trend Linked to this are improvements in job creation and social transfers to the most vulnerable. For instance, Van der Berg et al (2007), using the Labour Force Survey, show that approximately 1.7 million jobs were created between 1995 and 2002, and 1.2 million between 2002 and 2006. In relation to social transfers, government records suggest that more than 12 million South Africans receive cash transfers. This excludes the social wage in terms of free basic water and electricity, subsidised housing and so on.

As an example, data from the South African Research Foundation (SAARF) demonstrates relatively good progress regarding living standards. The Living Standards Measure (LSM) divides the population into 10 LSM groups: 10 (highest) – 1 (lowest). LSMs are calculated using 29 variables taken directly from the SAARF All Media and Products Survey – calculating imputed average monthly incomes as a measure of household assets and consumption. For instance, as development indicators (2008: 24) reveal (see figures 1 and 2 below), 'between 2000/01 and 2006/07 there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of people in lower LSMs (1 to 3) and an increase in the size of the middle bands (LSM 4 to 6)'. Among the factors that could account for this trend are increasing economic growth and employment, 'as well as government's poverty alleviation initiatives, amongst others, provision of basic services to indigent households, social assistance support and better housing' (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services 2008: 24).
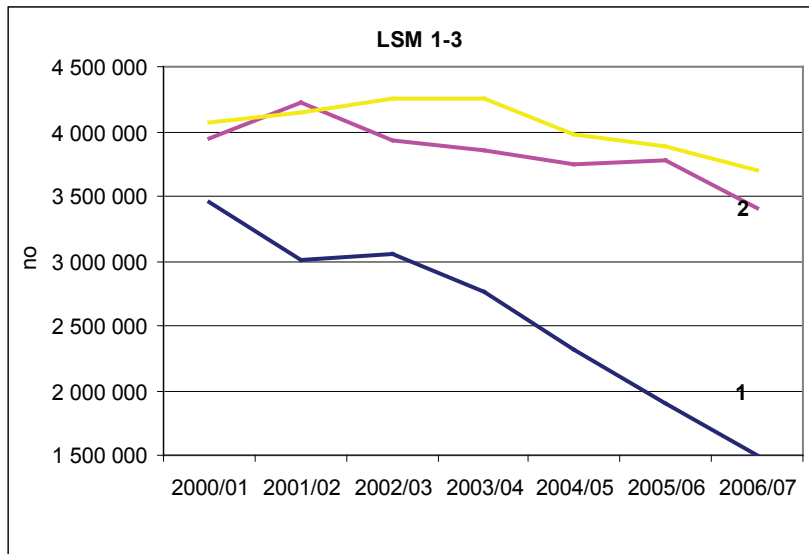

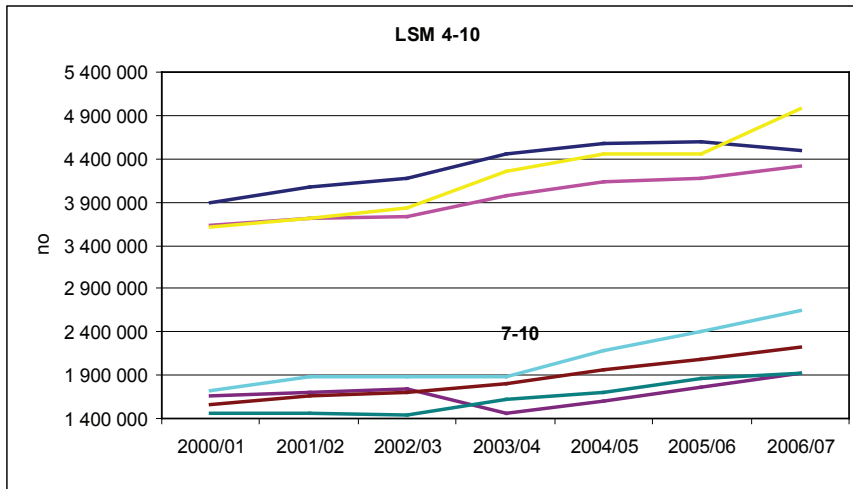**Figure 1 :** Living Standards Measure 1 – 3

Figure 2 : Living Standards Measure 4 – 10

Sources: South African Advertising Research Foundation and Policy Coordination and Advisory Services' Development Indicators 2008

3.2 THE CASE OF NATION BUILDING IN SOUTH AFRICA

To give a picture of the state of cohesiveness in South Africa, the HSRC social attitudes survey shows that more than 60 per cent of South Africans reported that they do not at all feel discriminated against, as opposed to 27 per cent that said they had sometimes been discriminated against. Moreover, the survey shows that across races, pride in being a South African remains high: 94% for Africans, 84% for Indians, 87% for coloureds and 75% for whites. In the aggregate, 93% are proud to be South African, and 83% would rather be citizens of South Africa than any other country. The authors of the report state that 58% of South Africans believe that the world would be better if all countries were similar to South Africa, compared with 26% in the US, 35% in Ireland and 45% in Canada, countries that have been reported to have higher national pride than South Africa.

There is apparently a sense of a 'South African identity' that reflects a shift away from a largely racial identity. The surveys of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDISA) in 1994, 1995 and 1997 showed that between 50% and 70% of South Africans regarded racial or nationality/language categories as their primary form of social identification. However, there has been a significant shift – as the recent FutureFact Mindset Survey of South Africans 16 years and older shows – in that 53% of the respondents defined themselves as South Africans and 17% defined themselves as African. In terms of race, 80% of whites, 79% of Indians and 73% of coloureds and 45% of blacks defined themselves as South Africans. In the aggregate, about 70% of South Africans define themselves as African or South African, and this is strongest among whites, followed (in

this order) by Indians, coloureds and Africans. Perhaps more importantly, the HSRC's latest social attitudes survey found that 92% of respondents felt that it is important to be 'truly South African' and that 89% 'feel South African'. Also, 55% of respondents in the recent survey trusted public institutions, compared with 50% of respondents in the 1999 survey (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services 2006).

Regular public opinion surveys, though debated, have been instrumental in informing government of public perceptions of the progress South Africa is making in building a cohesive and united nation, and of public opinion on service delivery. Tables from Markinor's[13] regular surveys show the public opinion trends.

Table 1 : Race relations are improving

2003/04	2003/11	2004/04	2004/11	2005/04	2005/11	2006/04	2006/11	2007/04
47.9	50.8	60.4	59.4	59.7	58.6	60.3	58.1	57.0

Table 2 : Confident of a happy future of all races

2003/04	2003/11	2004/04	2004/11	2005/04	2005/11	2006/04	2006/11	2007/04
75.1	77.5	85.6	85.0	85.7	84.2	83.8	79.8	77.8

Sources: Markinor and Policy Coordination and Advisory Services' Development Indicators 2008

Tables 1 and 2 depict a general positive trend in South African views on race relations and in the public's outlook for the future of the country. Government progress in breaking down the barriers that hamper participation in the economy and in reducing poverty has been reported, within the context of a growing economy, to be the main contributory factor to these increasing levels of social cohesion. (A detailed analysis of other discriminatory variables, such as level of education, geographical location and race, has not yet been done.)

This picture implies that there is progress in strengthening social cohesion in South Africa, which is encouraging for a young democracy . However, Chipkin and Ngqulunga (2008) argue (correctly so) that more analysis, particularly examining the functioning of state institutions, is critical in concluding whether social cohesion is improving. Indeed, many empirical questions remain that require a focused study on social dynamics and their implications for nation building in South Africa. This article is on public policy making rather than a sharper focus on social cohesion, though nation building is used as a case study of South African social policy-making outcomes.

Much of the reported progress (as evidenced in tables 1 and 2) is attributable to partnerships between government and the people through quangos and other non-state actors. To put it aptly, the social policy-making process in South Africa is anchored on the ideal of 'a better life for all', materially and spiritually. The initiatives for improving unity are therefore approached through dealing with human development and nation building, within the framework of partnerships or public participation. South

Africa has a relatively strong civil society sector. As a result, public policies are often highly contested and significantly influenced by diverse opinions and expertise. The ability of the government to remain unshaken in its quest to respond to development challenges in a manner that emphasises and values public participation is one of the strongest elements of South African democracy. This contributes largely to the progress made in strengthening cohesion. Moreover, because of this environment of a fair and participatory public policy-making process, the government has made sound gains in developing social policies that respond appropriately to the needs of those that they are intended to serve. This, in a nutshell, is the hallmark of the administration that this article focuses on.

4   CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has attempted to present a preliminary perspective on public policy making in South Africa. It undertook descriptions of various institutions, including non-state actors, and points of interface in the policy-making chain; highlighted possible political and paradigmatic forces and factors shaping policy making; depicted some high-level outcomes of that policy-making approach, and presented some broad views on developments taking place in nation building.

In conclusion, probably the optimal policy-making approach is one that takes various challenges into account, and tries to strike a balance between economic and social issues within the context of sustainable human development. South Africa's approach to tackling development appears to be driven largely by the quest to strike this balance. This has been demonstrated through concurrent efforts towards accelerating economic growth, eradicating poverty, and fostering nation building. Although many challenges remain, it would seem that the nation-building agenda being pursued is giving some encouraging results.

At theoretical level, the obvious next stage in public sector reforms worldwide, after the new public management reforms, is the integrated governance approach (as described by Halligan 2007). Integrated governance involves ways of ensuring that government functions as one, that there is sufficient capacity in government (especially in the 'centre'), that there are proper performance management systems, and that the function of service delivery is properly defined and distinguished from policy making and policy advice function, and so on. Given how public sector reforms have evolved, it would seem that South Africa has earnestly entered a phase of integrated governance approach. There are still many challenges, particularly those that relate to capacity in the public bureaucracy and the functioning of state institutions.

The public policies that are being pursued and the manner in which this is being done (in an integrated governance fashion and partnerships with rest the of society) is an attempt to mediate the neo-classical economic (or neo-liberal) thinking, including constraints on development imposed by theories such as public choice theory. This is

contrary to the characterisation by Luiz (2002) and Wenzel (2007), among others, of the South African public service and public policy making and associated outcomes.

Lastly, although the integrated governance system requires further interrogation, it could tentatively be concluded that South Africa has established ideal institutions for the policy-making process. Overall, South Africa encapsulates most of the salient features of a democratic developmental state which is seen as a state that is active in pursuing its developmental agenda, working with social partners, and has the capacity and is appropriately organised for its predetermined objectives.

NOTES

1. Dr Vusi Gumede, chief policy analyst in the President's Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, email gumede.vusi@gmail.com.
2. I would like to thank Policy Unit colleagues who contributed to the contents of this article. The first version was given as a public lecture at Cornell University. For that, thanks go to Professors Ravi Kanbur, Muna Ndulo and David Sahn for co-hosting me as a Distinguished African Scholar in the first half of 2008. I would also like to acknowledge that this article takes forward a 'think peace' prepared as a background paper for the forthcoming African Human Development Report.
3. Ravi Kanbur highlighted some of the issues around social policy definition and analysis during his speech at the World Bank conference in Arusha, Tanzania, 12–15 December 2005. Lack of consensus in the definition of policy is not restricted to social policy per se. Birkland (2001) alludes to the same problem with regard to the definition of public policy in general.
4. Refer, for instance, to the collection of papers in S. Mehrotra and J. Richard 1997, especially a case study on the Republic of Korea by Mehrotra et al. Scholars such as Chalmers Johnson (1982;1999) and Peter Evans (1995) have emphasised the important role of the state in development. Amsden (1989).
5. See for instance the recent *Oxford handbook of public policy*.
6. See for instance Lasswell 1951, 'Policy orientation', in D. Lerner and H. Lasswell 1951, *The policy sciences*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
7. For example, Dror 1968, *Public Policy Reexamined*, Pennsylvania: Chandler
8. Cabinet comprises the president, deputy president and ministers. Its main role is to give strategic direction to government, ensure effective decision making, ensure the coordination, implementation and monitoring of the implementation of public policies, and maintain the effectiveness and integrity of governance systems.
9. Extracted from the Presidency website: *www.the presidency.gov.za*
10. The categories of municipality are   Category A: a municipality that has exclusive municipal executive and legislative authority in its area; Category B: a municipality that shares municipal executive and legislative authority in its area with a Category C municipality within whose area it falls; and Category C: a municipality that has municipal executive and legislative authority in an area that includes more than one municipality. It should be noted that at the finalisation of this article a review of the provincial and local governance system was underway for the purpose of scaling up coordination, intergration and, most importantly, long-term planning.
11. The ANC White Paper on Reconstruction and Development 1994 spelled out the overarching agenda of a democratic South Africa, including an explicit objective of nation building, predicated on the desire for national unity and national identity.
12. The 2000 poverty lines were adjusted for the impact of inflation in 1995 and 2005 and these adjusted poverty lines were used to calculate the poverty measures in the two years.

13. Markinor surveys, that is, the Government Performance Barometer GPB and the Socio-Political Trends SPT, are based on a national sample of 3 300 people.

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