

# ANC proposals on local government

In the run-up to the ANC Policy Conference in Mangaung, the party's Legislature and Governance Working Group has produced a policy discussion document that pays considerable attention to provincial and local government.

The discussion document acknowledges that, although a wide range of measures are in place to build a developmental state, these measures thus far have not been effective. It proposes reforming the mandates and operations of state agencies, strengthening government-wide planning, building the human resources capacity of the state and enhancing the role of legislatures in defining the national transformation agenda and the development of service delivery geared towards service delivery. This article summarises the proposals that are most relevant to local government.

## On the organisation of the state

The ANC maintains that its policy is a unitary model of government, and the discussion document identifies problems that bedevil the current system of cooperative governance. It proposes reviewing that system so as to address the current challenges, adjust to the ever-evolving environment and support the building of a developmental state. In particular, the ANC calls for a far more integrated cooperative governance system, in which the three spheres of government work much more effectively together.

## On the future of provinces

The discussion document reiterates that the ANC wants government to retain provinces as part of the system of government. However, it proposes rationalising and

strengthening provinces by reducing their numbers, revisiting their powers and making them more sustainable. It also proposes strengthening provincial legislatures, considering municipal representation on provincial legislatures and doing away with 'ethnic' provincial boundaries.

## On local government

The policy discussion document states that local government is the 'most challenged' sphere of government and bemoans the fact that service delivery does not match expectations, the integrated development planning framework has not lived up to its promise and trust in local government is waning. It sees a strong link between high poverty, poor services and institutional weakness in municipalities. The problems are attributed to the familiar themes of critical skills gaps, poor internal controls, high staff turnover, a weak financial position, poor communication and ineffective public participation.

To address the challenges confronting the local government system and service delivery, the document proposes

- a more differentiated approach to municipal planning, financing and support;
- increasing local government's share of nationally raised government revenue;
- reviewing the manner in which the equitable share, municipal infrastructure grants and conditional grants are calculated;
- strengthening the spending capacity of municipalities;
- putting in place measures to deepen democracy;
- enhancing the administrative and financial capabilities of municipalities;
- vigorously implementing municipal credit policies;
- improving the coordination of cross-departmental interventions impacting on local government; and
- reviewing the role of district municipalities.

## On district municipalities

The discussion document recounts the tale of confusion surrounding the role of district municipalities and the incoherent policy and legislative initiatives that have further compounded the problem. It takes a firm position that 'something must be done' – that is, retaining the current system is not considered a viable option.

What then? The creation of more 'stand-alone' municipalities is offered as a serious option. This would entail amending the criteria for Category A status so that it is not limited to metropolitan areas. The document suggests that making district municipalities responsible for 'planning, coordination and support' (as opposed to direct service delivery) is also an option, but hastens to add that this is already part of their role, although they do not necessarily perform it effectively. Retaining districts only in certain areas is also mooted (which probably amounts to the same thing as creating more 'stand-alone' municipalities).

Finally, absorbing them entirely into national or provincial administrations is put on the table as an option by the discussion document. This would require significant changes to the law, as it would reduce districts to administrative arms of other governments.

## On differentiation

The word 'differentiation' appears seven times in the document, indicating a commitment to breaking with the one-size-fits-all paradigm. The document proposes

- further devolution to, and specific infrastructure funding for, cities;
- differentiated capacity-building initiatives;
- differentiated regulation (eg simplified IDP formats for some municipalities); and
- more revenue-raising powers for specific municipalities.

## On governance

The document proposes strengthening the oversight role of municipal councils and wants the ANC to urgently develop political guidelines on the implementation of the Municipal Systems Amendment Act. This presumably refers to, among other things, the prohibition on party officials taking up senior management positions in municipalities.

## On community participation

The familiar problems surrounding public participation are recorded in the document, which sets much store on emphasising and reforming the ward committee model. The document calls for greater representation on ward committees. It emphasises that these committees are not just for political activists, but also for business, the youth, ratepayers and so on. It calls for more powers, more members and more funds for ward committees, as well as more money for ward committee members and more structures (school governing bodies, community policing forums etc.) to be included in or linked to ward committees. It concludes with the proposal that ward committees should be compulsory for all municipalities.

## On single elections

The document suggests that electoral cycles not be merged but that the status quo be maintained. In other words, it proposes that current councillors serve a full, five-year term and that municipal election dates remain distinct from national and provincial election dates.

## On demarcation

The discussion document takes a swipe at the municipal demarcation process and bemoans the fact that the governing party's views are 'relegated to complaints'. It calls on the ANC to strengthen its ability to interact with the Municipal Demarcation Board and proposes a review of the criteria for demarcating ward and municipal boundaries. It furthermore

suggests a review of the demarcation process and of the role, functions, scope and composition of the board.

## Conclusion

Many of the ideas expressed in the discussion document have surfaced in earlier ANC policies, government policies and government reports. There is perhaps one area where the document appears to push a little harder than before, though, and that is the role of district municipalities, where policy shifts may indeed be on the cards. Inevitably, much will depend on how the debate unfolds over the next few months, and what detail is added to the broad suggestions discussed above.



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