

Perspectives on KwaZulu-Natal

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Transport budget covers rural road development, job creation, empowerment

Giving his budget speech in the KwaZulu-Natal legislature this month, provincial transport minister and KwaZulu-Natal's leader of the African National Congress S'bu Ndebele spoke about economic development, the development of rural roads, empowerment and job creation and sustainable development.

A budget is a most crucial instrument of policy. Speeches and pronouncements only acquire the status of a realisable programme once they are backed by a budget.

Of the total budget of South Africa 40% remains at the national level while 56% goes to the provincial sphere of government and 4% to local government. The highest provincial allocation goes to KwaZulu-Natal, namely more than R27 billion. Of this budget, 85% is allocated to education, health and social welfare. The remaining 15% is shared between the rest of our KwaZulu-Natal portfolios. The department of transport receives R1.19 billion.

As we review our provincial budget the compulsory litmus test is to gauge how far it has been targeted at reversing the stark reality of the legacy of apartheid inequality.

We have now acquired a national and political identity that commands international respect. But black people, in particular, still do not have an economic identity.

For democratic government in South Africa the transformation from a racial economy to a representative economy is non-negotiable. Political liberation and economic liberation must go hand in hand. As government we must go beyond the responsibility of acting as a regulatory body to one that intervenes to reverse our historical legacy so as to create an economic identity for previously disenfranchised population groups, especially the black majority.

Poverty and job creation

It is precisely because the majority of citizens in South Africa are poor that our government has targeted the eradication of poverty as its number one priority. And it is this priority that must necessarily inform the way we allocate and spend public monies.

Central to the lasting eradication of poverty is the creation of a growing business sector that creates sustainable jobs that increase the productivity of our country. This small business sector must reflect the economic empowerment of ordinary citizens and not just the upper echelons of

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society.

Here it is important to appreciate that despite the fact that our economy is growing and that South Africa has a favourable trade balance our business sector is not creating sufficient new job opportunities to absorb new market entrants. Indeed it is alarming that a recent report by Statistics South Africa calculated that one million jobs were lost between February 2001 and September 2001. That is one million jobs lost in less than one year. A high proportion of these jobs were lost in KwaZulu-Natal. It is now calculated that only 5% to 7% of matriculants who pass matric will be absorbed by our formal economy. Clearly political liberation and economic liberation are out of sync. In KwaZulu-Natal nowhere is this more severely experienced than in rural communities.

Rural communities

Our rural communities, in particular, are in crisis. They have reached the stage where the physical reproduction of society is, by and large, now the responsibility of adults who do not have direct access to the social reproduction of society. Our dependency ratios, particularly in rural communities, have reached dangerous proportions. The Human Sciences Research Council reports that in Msinga 37 people are dependent on one income earner. In Nkandla 27 people and in Nongoma 24 people are dependent on one income. While these districts might represent our worst case scenario, the truth is that the vast majority of young adults in KwaZulu-Natal cannot feed, clothe, shelter, educate and care for their children without the assistance of a working mother, father, brother, sister, pensioner or friend.

All the evidence points to the fact that we have a stagnant rural economy that, despite improved service delivery since 1994, has not been able to diversify its productive base for several decades. Deep rooted poverty and the lack of sustainable development is a function of our political history rather than natural factors. Many of our rural districts have massive agricultural and tourist potential. They are stagnant because they have not been assisted to diversify and grow to their true potentials.

We need, as government, to face this truth.

The preconditions for any sustainable economic recovery are peace, democracy and development. In a similar way the preconditions for development are access, energy and water.

To meet this challenge it is imperative that we budget accordingly. Road access, energy and water are all considered necessary conditions for successful integrated rural development and economic growth.

The need for a good road network

It has become an international truism that a well-maintained balanced road network is critical to the creation of a nation's wealth. A well-maintained KwaZulu-Natal road network is more consequential for our nation's performance in international markets precisely because we act as a 'gateway' province to the rest of South Africa.

It is common cause that South Africa's transport infrastructure has been hopelessly and progressively under funded ever since the previous government discontinued the allocation of funds collected through a dedicated fuel levy as a method to finance roads programmes.

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We must, as the provincial legislature, take responsibility for financing the provincial roads programme if we are to retain and enhance our role as a 'gateway' province and liberate our rural economy from the shackles of physical, social and structural isolation.

The department's budget

The growth in our department of transport budget can be attributed more to an increase in conditional grants to provinces than to an increase in allocation from our own fiscus. We calculate that we are under funded by 46% if we are to finance a 10-year programme to upgrade and maintain our provincial road network to an appropriate standard.

Since 1994 the KwaZulu-Natal department of transport has systematically reduced its number of establishment posts to ensure that a higher proportion of our budget is spent on actual services to the public. The proportion of the budget spent on personnel in the 2001/2002 financial year was 27.8%. This is set to drop to 27.1% this financial year and to drop even further to 24.3% by 2004/2005.

Job creation initiatives

When the department tabled the Road to Wealth and Job Creation Initiative at the job summit in October 1998, we tabled a plan of action to develop the provincial road network and at the same time to put our provincial economy, particularly our rural economy, on a labour absorptive growth path. The Road to Wealth and Job Creation Initiative is a strategy to create sustainable employment and business opportunities at all levels of society, from the most destitute and least skilled to highly qualified professionals and construction companies. The conceptual underpinnings of this initiative have become a reality in the daily lives of tens of thousands of KwaZulu-Natal citizens. Nowhere is this more evident than in our African Renaissance Road Upgrading Programme (Arrup).

In last year's budget I reported the intention to upgrade major transport corridors from gravel to blacktop so as to unlock the apartheid legacy of uneven spatial development. At the same time Arrup would be used to normalise the road construction industry in KwaZulu-Natal by creating opportunities for emerging and well established contractors as well as newly established and well established consultants. It was also envisaged that Arrup would contribute towards nation building in that several of the road projects will provide all weather access to locations that are of significant relevance to the history of the Zulu kingdom.

All Arrup projects are now well advanced in the design phase and some are already under construction. Joint ventures between well-established and newly established technical consulting firms have been contracted to oversee the design and supervision phases of the projects. The bottom line of each joint venture is to build on the capacity of newly established firms. The net result of bringing together old and new consultancies has been the creation of a remarkably innovative think tank.

In all instances the designs produced by the consultants have gone way beyond the normal parameters of road design to include the creation of community assets that could be used after construction. Here are a few examples:

- Identify abandoned buildings, for example, shops, clinics and missions, which could be renovated as site offices and later used as public facilities.

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- Identify derelict buildings that have been destroyed by political violence and renovate these to act as site offices and symbols of the future as well as of the past.
- Identify the building needs of other government authorities to erect site offices in accordance with their design requirements and negotiate with them to take over the site offices for their own use.
- Establish attractive and appropriate accommodation facilities that can be transferred to local communities to promote eco-tourism, community centres, housing for the aged and HIV/Aids orphans.
- Use spoil materials to construct school and other playing fields.
- Remove alien plants within road reserves and replant with indigenous trees and shrubs as part of a road beautification programme.
- Establish locally owned and managed indigenous plant nurseries.
- Establish earth dams and boreholes to provide water during construction that can also be used by communities for both human and animal consumption.
- Establish local quarries that can be used to promote small industries locally such as block making, paving, tombstones and the supply of crushed stone.
- Construct bus and tax shelters using local materials.

It is important to emphasise that neither departmental personnel nor consultants work in isolation of community stakeholders. Project liaison committees, which are representative of all major stakeholders, including amakhosi and local government, are formed to oversee and contribute their knowledge towards the successful implementation of Arrup. The Arrup projects have rapidly become an important vehicle to realise co-operative governance and integrated rural development.

Our Arrup programme will also be used to intern technician students who require two periods of six months practical training. Since 1999 some 60 students have been assisted in obtaining their practical training with the department and of these 16 have been offered permanent employment in the department.

The minibus taxi industry

The vast majority of KwaZulu-Natal's citizens are dependent on public transport to meet their daily mobility needs. The minibus taxi industry is undoubtedly the most critical pillar of our public transport sector in that it accounts for some 65% of the daily transport needs of the KwaZulu-Natal public. Not only is it the most accessible form of public transport, it is also the most affordable.

No one will argue against the fact that the taxi industry has had a turbulent history. Equally no one should argue against the fact that the taxi industry must have a bright future. Our role, as the transport authority, has been to regulate the taxi industry and, at the same time, to facilitate a dialogue with taxi leaders to identify and build towards that bright future. Together we have had

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many ups and downs, but I am pleased to say more ups than downs. This is readily evident by the fact that of the 252 taxi associations in KwaZulu-Natal, 247 have been referred to the Local Road Transportation Board and new route based licences have been processed.

On April 24 last year a fully representative provincial taxi council was elected. This completed the democratisation process of the taxi industry in KwaZulu-Natal.

Rural bike initiative

In last year's budget speech I announced the intention to introduce a range of cargo tricycles to promote rural mobility and to lessen the burden on rural women who are required to carry heavy loads. The cargo tricycles would range from pedal power to petrol power. In the initial stages of the programme they were to be imported from China.

Further investigations into the licensing of the petrol powered cargo tricycle indicated that the legal requirements would involve a more complicated and prolonged process than originally envisaged. Further the customs duty on the motorised version is high and this introduced the alternative possibility of competitively manufacturing or assembling cargo tricycles locally. We have explored a wide range of options and concluded that the public would be best served were we to capitalise on synergies with the national department of transport's scholar bicycle programme.

This financial year rural mobility needs will receive a much-needed boost through the launch of four pilot studies to introduce cargo tricycles. The pilot centres will be Newcastle, Vulindlela, Nkandla and Port Shepstone. The department will roll out these pilot projects in partnership with Afribike, a company that is developing prototypes of a cargo trike, velo taxi and vendor bike. All are pedal powered and will be field-tested and then re-engineered to meet the climatic and topographic conditions of KwaZulu-Natal.

Traffic courts

Officials from the department and a number of other representatives, including the director of public prosecutions met earlier this year to discuss violence on our roads and security on provincial and national routes. The establishment of dedicated traffic courts was also discussed and the department has undertaken to consider funding these in co-operation with the public prosecutor's office. This, we believe, will streamline the adjudication of traffic offences and give teeth to the zero tolerance traffic campaign.

In conclusion

The majority of our citizens (69%) in KwaZulu-Natal are considered poor. Without their vote our coalition government would cease to exist. The majority of our citizens want the jobs and opportunities that will free them from the grinding poverty that has become their living nightmare. We, as provincial government, must answer to this will of the people. We must be prepared to put aside those differences that prevent us working together in the interests of the public to ensure the maximum social and economic impact of all our budgets. We must collectively declare an all-out war on poverty.

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