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Understanding policy implementation:

An exploration of research areas surrounding the
Reconstruction and Development Programme

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
THE EVOLUTION OF RDP POLICY DOCUMENTS	6
Genesis of the RDP base document	6
Echoes of international development policies in the RDP	8
The RDP base document	9
The implementation strategy in the base document	11
From policy to strategy	14
<i>The green and white papers</i>	14
<i>The RDP and GEAR</i>	14
FACTORS AFFECTING RDP IMPLEMENTATION	17
Financing the RDP	17
<i>The RDP fund</i>	19
Public participation in the RDP	22
<i>Damage to NGOs and CSOs</i>	23
<i>COSATU and its membership</i>	23
Institutional design	24
<i>The power of the RDP office</i>	24
<i>Insufficient power of provincial RDP structures</i>	25
<i>Gradual dissipation of 'the RDP'</i>	25
<i>The 'pilot' function of presidential lead projects</i>	26
Staffing and capacity	26
<i>The culture of change in line ministries</i>	27
<i>Work in the RDP office</i>	27
<i>Local government</i>	28
CONCLUSIONS	28

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the results of the first phase of a study of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and its implementation. It forms part of a major research project aimed at examining the gap between policy and implementation in South Africa, and identifying ways in which this can be closed. Case studies are being performed in four selected sectors – education, justice, water, and health – and on three key policy instruments: the RDP, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, and the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS). Finally, the findings of these studies will be synthesised and some general conclusions formulated.

The case studies are proceeding in two phases. During the first, researchers have undertaken preliminary literature reviews, aimed at identifying the main issues in each sector or policy area and formulating research hypotheses. These are examined and tested during the second phase, which is marked by substantive, empirical research.

This approach seems elegantly simple in theory; however, in the case of the RDP, it is complex and problematic in practice. The main problem is that the assumed point of reference, RDP policy, does not in fact exist. There was a policy process that began with the negotiation of the various drafts of the RDP base document in 1993 and ended with the abolition of the RDP portfolio committee in 1999, all of which could be said to constitute RDP policy. There are two parallel lines, one representing RDP policy over time, and the other representing implementation. Therefore, if there is a gap between policy formulation and implementation, it is a two-dimensional plane rather than a one-dimensional line. This paper attempts to depict that plane.

Now that we no longer have RDP institutions, is the RDP dead, or is it still very much alive? And if it is dead, was its stated objectives achieved? Furthermore, if the RDP and the GEAR strategy have fundamentally different emphases, how are we to understand the relationships between the RDP process and GEAR, or get a grip on the policy directions that the current government is taking? These are among the issues this paper seeks to address.

It speaks to several key aspects of the debate on the implementation of RDP. The first is the commonly held view that the RDP has been replaced by the GEAR strategy as the government's central socio-economic policy framework. However, there are government officials and policy analysts who would assert that the RDP remains a central pillar of government policy. In order to assess whether policy outcomes differ from policy intentions, it must be clear what the policy is and whether the government maintained its policy positions over time. This paper therefore needs to take a position on the RDP—GEAR debate. It does so by using the idea of policy as a process, whereby shifts in emphasis over time are not necessarily construed as departures from policy.

Section 1 addresses policy shifts by analysing the evolution of policy documents from 1994 to the present. It examines the RDP base document, followed by the RDP green and white papers, and finally the relationship between the RDP and GEAR. In tracing this process, reference is also made to policy statements in areas closely related to the RDP, such as other documents emanating from the RDP office and the white papers of line ministries.

Secondly, it must be asked whether the RDP has been successfully implemented, and whether its demise has in fact resulted from a failure in this regard. Section 2 deals with implementation in four key areas: finance and macroeconomic policy, the participation of civil society in the RDP, institutional design, and government staffing and capacity. Where possible, comparisons are drawn with international experience.

Section 3 is devoted to conclusions: what issues, related to discrepancies between RDP policy and its implementation, has this review of literature on the RDP thrown up? Finally, the paper identifies issues to be examined during the empirical portion of this study.

THE EVOLUTION OF RDP POLICY DOCUMENTS

This section traces changes in RDP policy rather than examining factors impairing its implementation. It chronologically reviews the key documents that analysts, politicians and the media refer to when discussing the RDP: the original base document, the RDP green and white papers, and the original GEAR document. The primary aim is to convey the content of the RDP while illustrating the gradual change in this content. In doing so, 'the RDP' is treated as a process rather than an event.

Genesis of the RDP base document

The RDP was a policy framework intended to guide the new government in a broad and integrated attempt to rid the country of the legacies of apartheid. The first RDP document, known as the 'base document', was also the philosophical basis for the ANC's 1994 election campaign. It was based on a public consultation process that essentially repeated a process the ANC had initiated in 1956, resulting then in the ANC Freedom Charter. The RDP consultations were shallower and more limited than those preceding the Freedom Charter, leading an insider at the time to refer to them as 'football stadium consultations'. There was, however, sufficient basis for the document to be a legitimate representation of the wishes of a broad spectrum of people, specialists and interest groups located vaguely to the left of political centre.

The first version of the base document was drafted by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which, according to Götzt,¹ hoped to gain some tactical advantage from producing a political programme before the ANC did. Later versions of the document incorporated the views of other parties and civil society organisations. It was thus eventually co-authored by the South African Communist Party (SACP), COSATU, the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC), and the ANC before being workshopped with NGOs, think-tanks and intellectuals.² It was based, among other things, on the philosophy that negoti-

¹ Graeme Götzt, Shoot anything that falls, in G Adler and E Webster, *Trade unions and democratisation in South Africa*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999.

² Götzt, Shoot anything that falls; SA Communications Service, *South Africa Yearbook 1995*, p 54.

ated consensus creates the carrying capacity for policy implementation.³ The base document states: '... development is not about the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry. It is about active involvement and growing empowerment.'⁴ With the benefit of hindsight, the very inclusiveness of the process was one of the base document's weaknesses: it is an eclectic inventory, often described as a 'wish list'.⁵

Thus the document initially reflected the nature of the political coalition that supported the new government, but the participation of some NGOs and research organisations broadened its base.⁶ This was broadened still further when the RDP was endorsed by the other members of the government of national unity, ie the National Party and Inkatha Freedom Party. The original RDP document can therefore be seen as a very broad statement of goals in which parties advocating very different implementation paths nevertheless all saw themselves reflected. It is important to emphasise that actors from both the socialist and market camp endorsed it, in order to understand that this policy could swing in various directions depending on the choice of agents to be empowered with its implementation.

This consultation and buy-in was a demonstration of democratic prudence. Experiences in other countries show that a coalition is more likely to have firm control over the implementation of its policies than a single party. Contrary to Brazil in the period before 1985, where labour was always dependent on the state for favours and salary increases, labour in South Africa had an active voice in formulating the RDP. While in many (although not all) other countries governments initiate and then sell their economic programmes to powerful actors in the economy and civil society, the contrary happened in South Africa. The country's major trade union umbrella organisation drafted a programme, which was adopted as government policy by the ANC. The RDP thus originated with the unions, which wanted the programme to enable workers to gain control over their lives in the future dispensation. The ANC adopted the document not because it accepted its content but because of the exigency of the constitutional negotiations at Kempton Park. At a meeting of the ANC's national executive committee in February 1993, the idea of a reconstruction programme was endorsed, and Götz suggests that it was used for strategic gain at a time when the constitutional negotiations were deadlocked.⁷ ANC concerns over the idea of a government of national unity were partly allayed by the fact that it would be tied to a specific programme of delivery designed by the alliance.

Götz⁸ further argues that the adoption by the ANC of a policy document which was not its own resulted in it holding the RDP at arm's length, despite having formally endorsed it. Thus the RDP's genesis weakened the political will to implement it, and its sub-

³ See, for instance, B Schreiner, *A popular guide to environment reconstruction & development in the new SA*, Johannesburg/Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1995.

⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁵ Interview with Tanya Abrahamse, DEAT, 8.9.99.

⁵ Ibid.

⁷ Götz, *Shoot anything that falls*, p 169.

⁸ Götz, *Shoot anything that falls*, pp 159-90.

sequent dilution weakened relations between the trade union movement that had drafted it and the ANC which adopted and adapted it.

On the other hand, it must also be argued that the dilution process was essential to the creation of sufficient carrying capacity to push the programme through; COSATU could not have expected the wholesale adoption of the programme in its original form. While the ANC might have grudgingly endorsed it, the inclusiveness of its evolution ensured its broad acceptance in civil society and by parties other than the ANC. The negotiation of its contents within the alliance smoothed over its sharper edges, and undoubtedly made it more palatable to the IFP and NP as a programme for delivery under the government of national unity. The RDP must also be seen as a symbolic document, a statement of confidence in a peaceful resolution of South Africa's ills by means of a jointly endorsed programme. This programme, although it was rather eclectic and did not commit itself to difficult policy choices within the wish list of development priorities, included much of the nation-building and unifying rhetoric that was part of the vocabulary of the first post-apartheid cabinet.

Echoes of international development policies in the RDP

The document enjoyed the benefit of hindsight in the sense that South Africa could look back at the entire African experience of post-independence development planning. The RDP could bypass the debates on modernisation, dependency and neo-liberalism that characterised the cold war era and build on a more nuanced picture of the roles of state, NGOs, civil society, and the market in rebuilding South Africa. For instance, it emphasised encouraging small and medium-sized enterprises (in line with market-oriented development policies) on the one hand, while enshrining labour rights (in line with social-democratic thinking) on the other. Stable, consistent, and predictable state policies were seen to be a factor in encouraging foreign investment (market orientation), while strong state intervention was supported to encourage black empowerment in the business sector (social democratic orientation, in the sense of state intervention in the economy to achieve social gains). A strong emphasis on meeting basic needs echoed the international development era of the 1980s, but coupled to economic growth as a means of creating jobs and developing infrastructure in the context of ecologically sustainable development.

While the goal of putting people and their needs at the centre of development is laudable, its practical implementation has been poor around the world, mostly in countries with serious macroeconomic difficulties. From the outset, the RDP was beset with serious practical questions which showed that its implementation was not going to be smooth. Firstly, the basic mistake was made of not prioritising the RDP 'wish list' of basic needs. As a result, there was no systematic way of matching these needs to the limited administrative and financial capacity of the state. Indeed, the most difficult part of a reform pro-

gramme is not introducing the reforms but sustaining them until they have a chance to bear fruit and thus secure political support from the potential beneficiaries.⁹

The development period of the 1990s is also well represented in the document, reflected in a strong emphasis on good governance, democratising society, and human rights, particularly those of women. While analysts agree that democratic systems create the best conditions for implementation, a government that operates without strong opposition can also implement the necessary economic policies to achieve rapid economic growth. Korea and Taiwan are examples. However, most of the five-year plans adopted by African states failed to resolve their problems. Some were abandoned during implementation (Kaunda abandoned Zambia's stabilisation-cum-reform programme in 1987), others (such as '*le Plan Mobutu*' in Zaire) were never implemented, and others still created more problems than they solved. This is not only an African problem: in Latin America, too, numerous centrally driven economic reform programmes have been abandoned or have collapsed.¹⁰

Therefore, although the RDP strongly echoed thinking in the 1990s, it was also, given its complexity and linkage of 'everything with everything', reminiscent of the 'heavy' integrated rural development programmes of the 1970s. Rapoo¹¹ believes that this emphasis on integration masks a reluctance to prioritise interventions, and commit scarce resources to those targets.

The RDP base document

The base document spells out a set of six basic principles (chapter 1), which are then operationalised in five programmes. The six principles are:

- RDP programmes should be integrated and sustainable;
- they should be people-driven, ie participatory;
- they should restore peace and security;
- they should build the nation, and repair apartheid divisions;
- they should link reconstruction to development through basic needs provision; and
- they should democratise society.

The five programmes are:

- meeting basic needs;
- developing human resources (via education and training);
- building the economy;
- democratising state and society; and
- implementing the RDP.

⁹ Centre for Development and Enterprise, *Policy-making in a new democracy: SA's challenges for the 21st century*, Johannesburg, 1999, p 80.

¹⁰ Economic crisis and choices, in *ibid*.

¹¹ Thabo Rapoo, *Making the means justify the ends?: the theory and practice of the RDP*, Research report no 45, Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 1996, pp 10, 17.

Each of these programmes are dealt with in a further chapter in the base document, which sets out the nature of the problems in that sector and the list of needs to be addressed in order to solve it. The basic needs programme with which the RDP has come to be associated is only a small portion of the RDP as set out in this document.

- The *basic needs programme* (chapter 2) deals with the prerequisites for the self-actualisation of all South Africans. It is aimed at creating jobs and improving working conditions; improving access to services such as water, health, education and transport; and creating a social security system for the poor, aged, and infirm.
- The *education and training programme* (chapter 3) emphasises that overcoming the legacy of apartheid will require integrated planning that will lift the level of education of the whole nation, and particularly restore access to education to those whom apartheid cast out of the system: women, alienated youths, and uneducated adults. It deals with issues of access in arts and culture, sport and recreation, and youth development, and looks at regaining a balanced representation of South Africa's diverse cultures in these areas.
- The *macroeconomic programme* (chapter 4) describes South Africa's economic needs in detail. It emphasises economic stagnation, inequalities among people and regions, the lack of productive efficiency related to human resource capacities, and re-entry into the world economy. Growth is to be thoroughly linked to development. Trade and industry needs to attract more local investment, the expansion of infrastructure should be linked to growth, and the economy should gear up for international competition. Jobs are to be created by stimulating the small, medium and micro enterprise sector. Mining is to be reformed to serve the nation as a whole rather than a minority (again, a question of increasing access). The fact that mining earns the bulk of South Africa's foreign exchange is recognised. As regards agriculture, more emphasis must be placed on extension support and inputs to small farmers while recognising the contribution of the existing farm sector to employment. In fishing, deconcentration and de-monopolisation is intended to enable *access* of previously disadvantaged fishers to the industry, while guarding sustainable harvesting. In tourism, the emphasis was on opening up to the local mass market as well as tapping into the potential for increasing international visits. In infrastructure, reconstruction and development were reconciled as investments would boost the economy while enhancing access to services. In the financial sector, opening *access* and increasing accountability were emphasised. On workers' rights, the need was recognised to overcome a history of repressive legislation and re-establish proper working conditions. In regional policy, a turnaround was envisaged from destructive and destabilising relations with neighbours to reinforcing mutually regional Cupertino in economic matters.
- The *democratisation programme* (chapter 5) attempts to redefine the balance of political power, providing all citizens with access to a democratic state. It advocates empowering civil society to determine the shape and direction of government via measures focusing on improved access, accountability and responsiveness. Re-

establishing the rule of law and reclaiming its legitimacy are key elements, as is the restructuring of the public and parastatal sector.

- Finally, the *implementation programme* (chapter 6) merits special attention in the context of this study, and will therefore be dealt with separately below.

The differences between ‘principles’ and ‘programmes’ are not entirely clear; in fact, most of the ‘principles’ could also be interpreted as programmes. It seems logical to categorise the principles as categories that define the means by which the five programmes are to be achieved – ie, they are goals relating to *process* rather than *content*. But democratising state and society is both a pillar and a goal. This presumably means that achieving democracy is an overall goal and a programme of the RDP, while the means to achieve them are also democratic processes. Implementing the RDP is also identified as a programme. This is rather strange: a political programme naming its implementation as one of its key objectives is tautological. Therefore, chapter 6 should perhaps have been labelled ‘institution-building’, as it constitutes an (initial) attempt to identify the institutions and processes required to implement the programme. If the base document of a political programme is itself not clear about directions to be taken, its implementation is already threatened. These issues will be briefly examined below.

What is the RDP, and what is it not? There is a discrepancy between the policy as spelled out in the base document, and its implementation during the past six years. Analysts and commentators have primarily associated the RDP with a developmental basic needs programme: its programmes of ‘building the economy’ and ‘democratising state and society’ are not readily associated with it, although they might be associated with government policy in general. The very emergence of the GEAR document was associated with the lack of an effective strategy for *economic* development in the RDP. Thus strategies for growth are more often than not associated with GEAR rather than the RDP (which focused on broad objectives and processes rather than strategies). And ‘democratising state and society’ is more often associated with the joint efforts at democratic governance of the parties in the NGU, or former president Mandela’s nation-building efforts, than with the RDP. Thus although the base document may have dealt with economic and political issues, it largely came to be associated with developmental policies.

The implementation strategy in the base document

For the purposes of this study, a key element of the RDP is its implementation. What did the base document have to say about how it would be implemented?

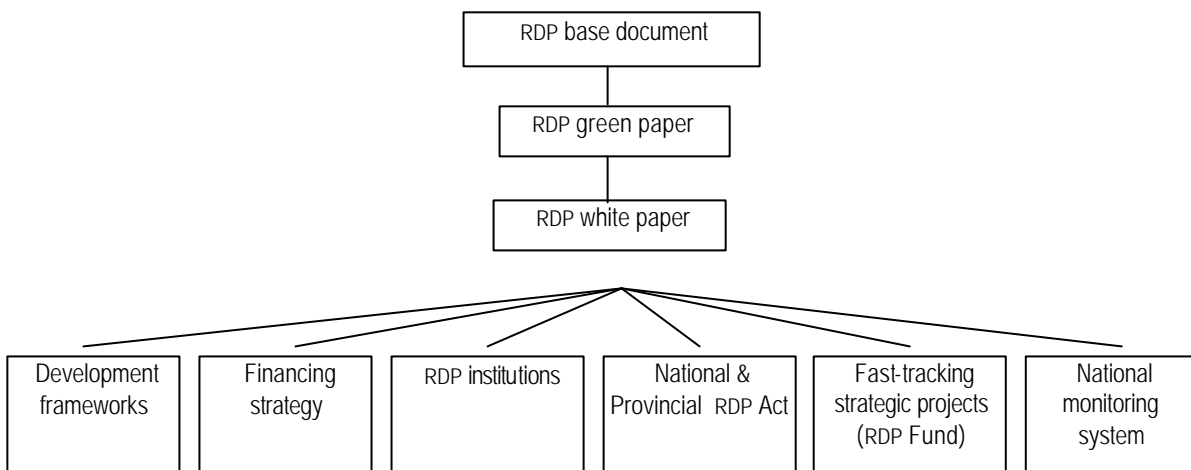
The base document was a policy framework informing the activities of the new government, and it was intended that all government spending should be *transformed* and *aligned* with it. It was believed that public spending under apartheid had been very inefficient, and that an effective developmental programme could easily be financed by the existing budget without having to increase overall expenditure. Therefore, contrary to popular belief, the RDP was to be implemented through all 28 ministries, and not merely by one minister without portfolio. Some confusion has been created by the existence of a separate budget for RDP spending over and above the allocations for line ministries,

which created the incorrect conclusion that expenditure by Jay Naidoo, then minister without portfolio, were a sort of developmental ‘add-on’ to regular government spending.

The intention was that, after government had been thoroughly transformed, the RDP would become the entire budget,¹² and in the interim the budget of the RDP office would finance key projects so as to ensure that delivery got under way while the other departments were transforming themselves. The idea was that transformation of apartheid-era government institutions would ensure service delivery through the line departments in the long term. The RDP office would merely encourage co-ordination among ministries in the course of implementing the RDP, while ‘kick-starting’ delivery in the interim.

Chapter 6 of the base document is a meagre attempt to translate policy into concrete institutions and processes, but it does mention six key elements of the RDP’s implementation. Figure 1 shows the relationship between these early ideas on the implementation process. It is worth unpacking them, as many were instituted, and they have a bearing on the way in which the RDP evolved.

Figure 1: RDP implementation strategy as spelled out in the base document



The final chapter of the RDP document proposed the following implementation strategies:

First, the RDP was to be based on a ‘co-ordinated and coherent’ *development strategy*, operating at the national, provincial and local level. The white paper proposed a development planning branch in the RDP office that would draft urban and rural development policy. Examples that emerged later are the municipal infrastructure framework and the much delayed rural infrastructure framework.

Secondly, a *financing strategy* was to be formulated, detailing how reconstruction was to be funded. Initial statements in the base document on financing the RDP were op-

¹² P Fitzgerald, A McLennan and B Munslow, *Managing sustainable development in SA*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1995, p 55.

timistic about the ability to realign what were considered to be wasteful expenditures incurred under apartheid to RDP priorities without increasing state spending. As will be seen below, this was difficult to achieve.

Thirdly, separate *implementing institutions* were to be created at the national, provincial and local levels charged with monitoring implementation, overcoming fragmentation within and between departments, and reviewing all public institutions in terms of their abilities to help implement the RDP. It was not stated what these institutions would be. These only emerged in the white paper: at the national level, responsibility for the RDP would be assumed by a minister without portfolio, who would be charged with co-ordinating and integrating the activities of the line ministries and implementing a series of lead delivery projects while the line ministries transformed themselves towards a new set of delivery goals. At the provincial level, responsibility would be located in the office of the premier, or the MEC for economic affairs.

Fourthly, a *legislative and regulatory system* aimed at giving the RDP legal backing was to be created.¹³ In the base document, national and provincial RDP acts were envisaged which would regulate development planning and the fast-tracking of key reconstruction projects. The vision in this document was enabling in character, emphasising for instance that:

The regulatory system must [...] provide for rapid granting of legal status to widely supported, interim metropolitan/district and provincial development frameworks.¹⁴

However, the white paper adopted a significantly different approach to the role of the RDP Act, emphasising instead the power of the RDP office over line ministries. Rather than formally endorsing popular development plans at the local and provincial levels, the RDP Act was to lay down performance indicators and reporting procedures to which line ministries had to adhere in order to gain access to the discretionary portion of their budgets.

Fifthly, the base document mentioned a regulatory system for ‘defining and fast-tracking strategic reconstruction projects’. In the white paper this was to become the RDP Fund; again, top-down control was emphasised. The white paper presented the fund less as a developmental tool than as an instrument of power, to be used to ‘leverage’ government spending,¹⁵ ‘remove’ departmental allocations, and ‘reassign’ them ‘subject to compliance with the new priorities’.¹⁶

Lastly, the base document envisaged a six-monthly system of *performance auditing*. Strangely, this was omitted from the white paper. Individual presidential lead projects were to be evaluated in terms of a list of performance indicators – but this is not the same as evaluating the RDP as a whole on a six-monthly basis.

¹³ ANC, *The Reconstruction and Development Programme*, Johannesburg: Umanyano, 1994, s6.4.7.

¹⁴ Ministry in the office of the president, *RDP white paper*, 1994, p 141.

¹⁵ ANC, *The RDP*, s2.3.1.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, s2.3.1 and s 2.3.2.

These were the key elements of the implementation strategy envisaged in the base document. As is apparent, it provided little to identify the institutions, processes and financial means by which the programme was to be implemented. The white paper was intended to fill this hiatus. The next section focuses on the process of decision-making that translated the base document into concrete policy interventions.

From policy to strategy

The green and white papers

The base document was followed by green and white papers on the RDP, which made the crucial jump from a 'wish list' to concrete policies.

Perhaps inevitably, how these wishes were to be achieved was debated far more intensively than the wish list itself. Various operational definitions of the RDP can be conceived, ranging from market-driven delivery to strong state intervention. The base document never made clear choices in this regard, but the green paper, for instance, emphasised fiscal discipline as a cornerstone of RDP policy. It was released on 14 August 1994 and was produced by a technical team in the RDP office before being published for comment. Inter alia, it set targets for reducing state spending as well as indicating that, rather than the government assuming the lead role in development, it should rather facilitate private investment.¹⁷ The green paper was therefore a more market-oriented document than the base document, and this evoked criticism from the SACP and COSATU about a perceived swing towards conservative economics.¹⁸

Similarly, the white paper announced a commitment to trade liberalisation in line with GATT agreements and cutbacks in state debt, but retained much of the eclectic, something-for-all, character of the base document. Thus it avoided difficult political choices for some kinds of development at the cost of others, and emphasised overall financial stringency instead. This is probably what has led Hein Marais to comment that 'the broad parameters and some of the specific assumptions about GEAR strategy were already evident in the white paper'.¹⁹ Institutionally, key choices were made that favoured the authority of the RDP office over line ministries. This aspect will be dealt with in greater detail below. However, it should be noted here that, in doing so, the white paper introduced possibilities for conflict that were absent in the base document.

The RDP and GEAR

The relationship between the RDP and GEAR has been intensively debated. Some analysts regard GEAR as a radical departure from the RDP; a move towards neo-liberalism away from the state interventionism found in the latter. Ziko Thamela of the South African Trade and Allied Workers' Union (SATAWU) reflected this analysis when he stated that

¹⁷ *RDP Monitor*, 1(2), 1994; Tough bargaining ahead on draft RDP green paper, *Business Day*, 26.8.94.

¹⁸ *RDP Monitor*, 1(2), 1994; The fight against a watered-down RDP, *New Nation*, 19.8.94.

¹⁹ Hein Marais, *South Africa: limits to change – the political economy of transition*, London: Zed Press, 1998, p 181.

‘there is a particular class that is dominant [in government], that cannot implement a programme that comes from another class [ie the RDP]’.²⁰ In this view, GEAR cannot be linked conceptually to the RDP because they are fundamentally different.

Other analysts believe policy-making is a process demarcated by discrete documents; their production and subsequent status reflect the balance of power among political groupings and policy-making bodies. In this view GEAR can be said to emanate from the RDP, representing the ascendancy of a particular faction of policy-makers within the RDP process. It is a new strategic discourse on the RDP, one which alienates members of the alliance such as COSATU and the SACP while moving closer to white business interests. The RDP ‘broad church’ encompassed various political positions, including that reflected by GEAR, and the latter perspective simply gained prominence after April 1996. In fact, as Gavin Lewis has pointed out, two key officials in the RDP office, Bernie Fanaroff and Chippie Olver, helped to draft GEAR.²¹

As time went on, the new government began to formulate detailed policy, submit draft legislation, and implement the first RDP-oriented programmes and projects. Pragmatism began to replace idealism, and in the wake of this process the base document, the cornerstone of policy from 1994 to 1996, received a ‘handmaiden’ to lead South Africa out of the ‘economic desert’ – ie, the GEAR document.²² GEAR is often presented as a response to the disappointing economic growth rates since 1993 of about 3 per cent a year; inter alia, it announced a commitment to raise this to 6 per cent. According to many analysts, the publication of GEAR in June 1996 after the closure of the RDP office in April signalled a decline of the role of the RDP and of the emergence of a new economic realism in policy formulation. Certainly, when the RDP office was closed, the RDP lost the institution that was most proactive in promoting adherence to its principles. It is also true that GEAR strongly advocated fairly neo-liberal interventions such as a move towards a competitive, outward-oriented economy and cutbacks in state consumptive spending, whereas the RDP had been more interventionist. However, the minister of finance, Trevor Manuel, among others, have emphasised that the RDP and GEAR are strongly related, and that the GEAR document is a necessary addition to the RDP, even if they differ in contents and emphasis.²³

Thus there are some elements of continuity, and some of change: GEAR is not a total departure from RDP, nor are they very similar. There was a synchronicity between the April 1996 cabinet reshuffle and the emergence of GEAR which could be seen as a shift in the balance of power within the alliance in favour of pro-market, slim-state, approaches to the country’s problems.²⁴ Key to this reshuffle was the replacement of the then minis-

²⁰ CPS, Proceedings of workshop on the EU project, February 2000.

²¹ Ibid.

²² See The RDP is handmaiden to the Moses who would lead us out of the economic desert, *Sunday Independent*, 3.9.95.

²³ RDP, macroeconomic goals complement one other, *Business Day*, 28.10.96; The RDP is handmaiden ..., *Sunday Independent*.

²⁴ See *Business Day*, 29.3.1996.

ter of finance, Chris Liebenberg, by Manuel, a free-market thinker within the alliance. Secondly, Alec Erwin was moved from finance to trade and industry, signifying the removal of a socialist from state spending and placing him in charge of key free-market operations.

If policy is seen as a process that occasionally results in specific outputs, the RDP base document, the green paper, the white paper, and GEAR are all significant outputs of a policy *process* quite rightly referred to as the RDP. GEAR, in this view, is not a departure from the RDP process but an event in it. If the labels must be changed, one could refer to the process as 'the post-apartheid policy process' and assert that this policy changed its emphasis over time and that the change was ushered in on 1 April 1996 with a cabinet reshuffle. 'The' implementation of 'the' RDP that this paper seeks to examine must therefore be seen as a gradual shift in the implementation of a gradually shifting policy. The RDP continued to inform policies: the emphasis on employment generation and redistribution in GEAR, for instance, are both strong 'social' aspects of policy that hark back to the RDP. And line ministry white papers continued to reflect RDP thinking even after the closure of the RDP office.

GEAR, therefore, is the macroeconomic framework that emerged as a result of implementation of the RDP, remoulded and recast by the practical exigencies of the first years of government. Time, contingencies, and a revisiting of policy are part and parcel of a policy process. As Rapoo states, the RDP is many things, and its content has been appropriated by many interest groups: there is no single RDP but rather many interpretations of it.²⁵

Therefore, rather than harping on the shift in policy from the base document to GEAR, it is more interesting to ask what caused this shift and why particular interpretations achieved hegemonic status at particular times. For instance, the low economic growth rate coupled with slow RDP delivery were quoted by an insider as the reasons for the establishment in 1995 of a top-level cabinet committee which was to make recommendations for macroeconomic growth that ultimately led to GEAR via the Growth and Development Strategy (GDS).²⁶ The GDS represented a shift in cabinet thinking from service delivery to economic growth. It contained some key ideas that were later further developed in the GEAR policy document, such as a target growth rate of 6 per cent and the creation of between 300 000 and 500 000 new jobs every year.²⁷ Interestingly, the RDP office helped to draft the GDS; ie, one of the last documents in which the office was involved came very close to GEAR in its content. It moved away from the central economic idea of the RDP that infrastructure development could generate economic growth and suggested, for instance, the restructuring of the industry and services sectors to enhance global competitiveness.

²⁵ Rapoo, *Making the means justify the ends*.

²⁶ The RDP is handmaiden ... , *Sunday Independent*.

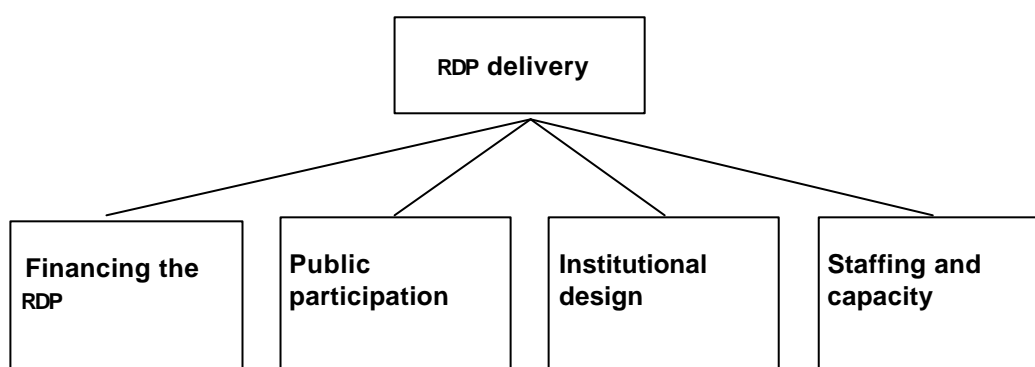
²⁷ *RDP Monitor*, 2(6), 1995.

FACTORS AFFECTING RDP IMPLEMENTATION

Having followed the evolution of government policy from 1994 onwards, this section will examine the actual implementation of the RDP. This is unpacked into four clusters of explanatory factors identified in the early stages of the research, namely:

- mobilising the required finances to initiate development;
- achieving a people-driven process whereby government acts as an enabling institution responsive to the needs of the people;
- achieving an appropriate design of institutions and institutional relations to effect a developmental strategy; and finally
- creating and mobilising the human resources that such a programme requires.

Figure 2: Four important factors affecting RDP delivery



Financing the RDP

The white paper on the RDP was published in the *Government Gazette* on 23 November 1994. It set out the principal mechanisms for implementing the RDP. In essence, the intention was to maintain fiscal discipline and redirect rather than increase government spending. This was first mentioned in the base document,²⁸ and reiterated in the white paper.²⁹ It was to be achieved by progressively reducing the budgets of line ministries and reallocating these funds to key ministries seen to be essential to the RDP delivery process, such as education, welfare, health, land affairs, and water affairs and forestry. This reprioritisation and redirection was in the first instance to be effected through the leverage created by the RDP Fund. The white paper stated:

In effect therefore the RDP Fund consists of funds which have been removed from departmental allocations and can be reassigned to them subject to compliance with the new priorities.³⁰

²⁸ ANC, *The RDP*, s6.5.3.

²⁹ Ministry in the office of the president, *RDP white paper*, s4.1.1, s4.1.2.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 2.3.2.

Thus R2,5 billion was taken out of the 1994/5 budget of R148 billion to create the RDP fund; this was to increase to R5 billion in 1995/6, and R10 billion in 1996/7.³¹ Line ministries were to negotiate with the RDP office over funding for projects and programmes, tied to assessments of the capacity of staff to run them. As the funds available from the budget for the RDP office increased, so did its power over line ministries, which could receive the portions of their budgets they had lost by submitting project proposals to the RDP office that complied with RDP principles. In the meantime, the line ministries were to be transformed, and it was envisaged – or hoped – that within five years of the elections the whole budget would be based on RDP principles.³² The RDP office thus had formal financial power over line ministries, but this did not necessarily result in transformation as it also created animosity from the latter towards the former. The RDP office did not manage to ‘lever’ the activities of line ministries as intended. For one thing, the latter tended to go about their activities in much the same way as they had done in the past, using the RDP fund as an additional source of revenue. Similarly, at the level of personnel, transformation met with considerable obstacles along the way, among other reasons because the path of least resistance was often to utilise existing capacity and create new structures besides the existing ones rather than replace existing apartheid-era structures.

Again, this shows that ‘the RDP’ was originally the RDP fund, but it was envisaged that after the public service had been transformed, the entire budget would express RDP principles. Thus the RDP fund was seen as a temporary instrument.

Having separated the RDP as state budget from the RDP fund, we can now proceed to the issue at hand, namely: how did the RDP fare in terms of the stated intention to redirect expenditure rather than merely increase departmental budgets still styled along apartheid lines? This breaks down into two questions: one, what happened in respect of expenditure from the RDP fund? And two, what happened to the state budget, and was it spent on RDP delivery?

Beginning with the latter question, table 1 shows the general squeeze on development spending from 1994 onwards. This rather broad category is created simply by subtracting what Landman³³ has referred to as the ‘terrible twins’ – expenditure on personnel, and interest on debt – from the national budget. In theory, the remaining figure can be taken as being available for development purposes.

³¹ Ibid; Ministry in the office of the president, *RDP annual report*, 1994–5.

³² Ibid, p 2.

³³ J P Landman, *How big and how costly is the civil service?*, Policy brief no 4, Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 1998.

Table 1:³⁴ State expenditure on development, personnel, and debt (Rm; categories as percentages of total)

	1994/5	1995/6	1996/7	1997/8	1998/9
Total	148 000	158 068	177 555	190 222	204 300
Personnel	(47,2%) est	46,6%	47,3%	49,4%	51,1%
Interest on debt	(17%)	18,8%	19,6%	20,4%	21,4%
'Development'	(35,8%)	34,6%	33,1%	30,2%	27,5%

Sources: SA Yearbook, 1997, 1998; CPS Policy Review #4/1998; IDASA Budget Info Service; RDP annual report, 1995. The figures for 1994/5 are estimates.

As the table shows, development spending was squeezed out by expenditure on personnel as well as debt repayments. This may seem to indicate that the RDP's capacity to deliver declined significantly over time. However, personnel expenditure on education, for instance, also contributes to development. Manuel has emphasised this point:

Education expenditure of about R35 billion annually represents investment in people of nearly three times public sector spending on physical capital formation.³⁵

The RDP fund

The next question is what happened to the RDP fund. In 1994/5, R2,5 billion was allocated to it, and by the end of that year 22 lead programmes had been identified, cutting across a broad range of departmental responsibilities.

Table 2: Allocation to and rollover from the RDP fund (Rbn)

Budget	1994/5	1995/6	1996/7
Total allocation	2,5	5,0	7,5
Rollover to next year	0,437	2,0	(closure)

As table 2 shows, the RDP fund developed substantial rollovers from the start. In the media this was commonly attributed to a lack of staff in the RDP office, the RDP business contracts and tender procedures, and a lack of capacity at the local government level.³⁶

During the RDP period, the national budget had a dual character. It consisted of 'model' developmental spending by the RDP office on the one hand, and transformed al-

³⁴ Figures from IDASA's budget information service differ substantially from these, but confirm the same trend: they report a rise in personnel costs from 35,9 per cent of the budget in 1995-6 to 40,65 per cent in 1998-9 and a decline in non-interest, non-personnel, funds from 42,5 per cent to 38,5 per cent in the same period.

³⁵ Trevor Manuel, minister of finance, quoted in *Business Day*, 5.4.1996.

³⁶ See, for example, *Sowetan*, 9.1.95; The complexity of rebuilding SA – Jay needs help, says RDP team, *The Star*, 13.1.96.

locations to the various line ministries from the ministry of finance on the other. These two budgets differed, partly because the RDP office had considerably more discretion over spending than the ministry of finance in that the latter was locked into regular expenditure on personnel and continuing programmes and projects, whereas the former was not. However, to an extent the different budgets also reflected approaches to development spending.

Table 3 shows the order of priorities followed by the RDP office. Top of the list was housing, followed by health, constitutional development (this is almost completely accounted for by the Municipal Infrastructure Programme), water affairs and forestry, and education. Expenditure in all these sectors are in line with the RDP principles of satisfying basic human needs as well as developing human resources.

By contrast, if the 1994/5 and 1995/6 national budgets are examined, education has top priority at 21,2 per cent, followed by health at 11 per cent, and social security and welfare at 10,8 per cent, with water affairs and housing claiming minute portions of 0,8 per cent and 2,7 per cent respectively.

Table 3: RDP allocations to projects and programmes, 1994–1997

Sector	Capital allocation	Percentage of total
Agriculture	7 384 000	0,07
Arts, culture, science, technology	20 000 000	0,17
Constitutional development	2 040 832 000	18,30
Correctional services	21 905 000	0,20
Education	925 699 000	8,30
Health	2 050 800 000	18,43
Housing	2 897 000 000	26,04
Justice	65 752 000	0,59
Land affairs	703 628 000	6,30
Minerals and energy	101 599 000	0,91
Public Works	350 000 000	3,15
SA Police Service	195 000 000	1,75
State Expenditure	1 068 000	0,01
Transport	365 100 000	3,28
Water Affairs and Forestry	1 334 037 000	11,99
Trade and Industry	2 020 000	0,018
Welfare	25 484 000	0,23
Sport and Recreation	20 000 000	0,18
TOTAL	11 127 308 000	100%

Source: Calculated from P Bond and M Khosa (eds), *An RDP policy audit*, Pretoria: HSRC Publishers, 1999.

Given the growing rollovers of allocations to the RDP fund, spending pressure was building up within the office, and although the RDP business contracts enhanced the sustainability of projects they also slowed allocation. On this score, Lewis points out that on any big project it takes from 18 months to two years before the first bricks are laid – and the RDP office was closed in a shorter period, before it could be judged on its merits or demerits.

In late 1995 allocation and spending picked up considerably; it is worth asking what enabled this. In an article written in January 1996 Naidoo listed several major programmes that had helped to accelerate spending. They seemed to have one thing in common: concentration, or capital intensity. They included development corridors, which focus resources in ‘sustainable areas’; community centres, which house a variety of services; and the integrated municipal infrastructure programme (MIP). All of these are located in areas that are already relatively well-resourced in relation to severely underprivileged areas, and also involve a large amount of funding in one administrative transaction. The municipal infrastructure programme (MIP) is a case in point; it managed to absorb more than 18 per cent of total RDP allocations. It is argued here that research into the fate of both the MIP and the rural infrastructure programme will yield interesting results. This

is because the two programmes met very different fates, and it was only in president Thabo Mbeki's address at the opening of parliament in early 2000 that salvaging rural development was mentioned once again.

In the empirical phase of the research, spending on RDP programmes and projects will be tracked from the state level down to the project level, and possible bottlenecks, spending pressure and differences between intentions and outcomes will be traced.

Public participation in the RDP

Throughout the history of the RDP, there has been a tension between pressure for rapid delivery on the one hand and the need to develop participatory methods of project and programme formulation and implementation on the other. The dire need of people on the ground for jobs, services and infrastructure and the mandate given to the liberation movement to deliver on these needs put considerable pressure on the new government to deliver as quickly as possible. However, speedy delivery tends to work to the detriment of public consultation, while consultation and participation can ensure project sustainability if certain conditions are met. Taken instrumentally, the participation by potential beneficiaries in formulating and implementing a project can have at least three advantages.

Firstly, it can ensure the absorption into management plans of knowledge of the local environment which outsiders may not have. Secondly, participation can embed projects in local power systems in such a way as to avoid the infiltration of adverse incentives into project dynamics. At the minimum, the endorsement of projects by local elites can ensure that those who control local resources do not deploy them against the workings of the scheme. Thirdly, and perhaps somewhat cynically, participation utilises people's willingness to invest resources (eg labour or capital) into a scheme as long as they expect to see their investments rewarded. These three aspects point to the utilitarian advantages of enhancing participation in delivery.³⁷

Beyond instrumental factors, however, the active participation of citizens in developmental programmes can deepen democracy, a goal central to the RDP. Participation assists the 'democratisation of state and society' in at least three ways. Firstly, it can augment periodic accountability via elections with ongoing accountability via continuous interchanges between the state and civil society. Secondly, it expands the standard policy packages of political parties into proactive, issue-based debates and engagement. Thirdly, it provides a bulwark against the hollowing out of participatory mechanisms in situations where knowledge and expertise are used as ways to exclude the public from certain arenas of decision-making.

What do instances of participation or non-participation tell us about the implementation of the RDP? An entire chapter of the RDP base document was devoted to the democratisation of state and society, while the commitment to a 'people-driven process' was de-

³⁷ See W Sachs, *The development dictionary*, London: Zed Books, 1993, pp 116-31; E Ostrom, L Schroeder and L Wynne, *Institutional incentives and sustainable development*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, pp 213-33.

clared to be one of the six pillars of the programme. Therefore, the relations between the state and civil society, specifically as regards popular participation in the RDP, are a key indicator of emerging gaps between RDP policy and its implementation. Some key examples of state–civil society relationships during the RDP period are discussed below.

Damage to NGOs and CSOs

NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) were central to advocacy and service delivery during the last years of the apartheid era, and many had forged substantial links with people at the grass roots. On the one hand, in their capacity as professional organisations devoted to the production and/or defence of public goods, they represented a diversity of civil society interests and opinions that engaged with government policy and its implementation, thus deepening democracy and ensuring the ‘people-driven delivery’ underpinning the RDP.

On the other, many NGOs and CSOs had strong institutional links with communities at the grass roots, while others were membership-based. They thus provided a conduit for the transmission of political ideas from civil society to decision-making arenas.

However, following the transition to democracy, many donors rerouted their funds to government, plunging the entire NGO sector in crisis; following the 1994 election many NGOs were forced to close down, and, according to a recent survey, 60 per cent of surviving NGOs are experiencing serious or very serious financial problems.³⁸ Thus financial pressure on NGOs since 1994 has helped to erode existing participatory structures in society. This was exacerbated by delays within the RDP office in developing donor co-ordination policy.³⁹ The relationship between the government and NGOs needs to be examined further during the empirical phase of the research, as some important information on people-driven development is likely to emerge.

COSATU and its membership

It was mentioned in section 1 that COSATU drafted the first version of the RDP base document. It is also a strategic member of the ANC’s alliance with political parties and civil society organisations. A large proportion of the ANC’s votes emanate from COSATU. Therefore, COSATU’s relations with its members forms an important part of the connections the ANC has with its voters. As mentioned in section 1, the evolution of policy documents has been a source of continuing tension between the union co-ordinating body and the government. Although the union movement is strongly committed to the alliance, the government has at times undoubtedly created some distance between it and members of COSATU unions. Occasionally – such as at the time of the release of the GEAR document in 1996, or more recently at COSATU’s seventh general congress – tensions between the ANC on the one hand and the trade union movement and SACP on the other are very

³⁸ Caroline Kihato and Rapoo Thabo, *An independent voice?: a survey of civil society organisations in South Africa, their funding, and their influence over the policy process*, research report no 67, Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 1999.

³⁹ The complexity of rebuilding SA, *The Star*.

clearly expressed. Manuel's insistence on maintaining fiscal discipline, reducing the budget deficit, and keeping inflation down has also undoubtedly endeared the ANC to liberal thinkers in the business community. Thus, support the ANC may have lost to the left (which is not borne out by election results) has been partially made up on the right. The question of public influence on policy via organised labour needs to be taken up further in the empirical phase of the project. For example, to what extent did RDP programmes and projects succeed in creating jobs? To what extent did they succeed in training/reskilling the labour force? Also, to what extent were the views of workers involved in RDP programmes taken into account in their implementation? These questions ask whether people-driven development was ever realised in practice, and, if not, what departures there have been from this model.

Institutional design

Processes of institutional design also strongly affected implementation of the RDP. Problems created by institutional design included the power of the RDP office over other ministries, the dissipation of the RDP across line ministries, and the key role assigned to the presidential lead projects.

The power of the RDP office

While the RDP fund was meant to gear up development spending in terms of RDP priorities, it also created tensions between the RDP office and the line ministries. As noted earlier, RDP funds were taken from departmental allocations and the RDP office was given a mandate to use these funds to gear up spending on RDP priorities.⁴⁰ The effect of these institutional arrangements was to pit the RDP office against the line ministries in terms of both budget allocations and ministerial independence. Indeed, the line ministries commonly regarded the RDP office as excessively centralist as well as an unnecessary hurdle in discharging their responsibilities.⁴¹ A source in the president's office also noted that, because of its influence over line ministry spending patterns, the RDP office was encroaching on the planning and budgeting functions of the ministry of finance.⁴²

The RDP office, on the other hand, regarded cuts in line ministry budgets as non-negotiable; as a result, conflict arose when line ministries tried to reclaim the lost portions of their budgets. In this perspective, success in reclaiming these funds was a function of a number of things. These were the degree to which the activities of the ministry fitted into overall RDP objectives; the ability of staff in that ministry to draft RDP project proposals (usually stunted by lack of 'developmental' capacity); and the energy, charisma, and personal influence of key individuals in the ministry, such as the directors-general.

⁴⁰ Ministry in the office of the president, *RDP white paper*, p 14.

⁴¹ Centre for Policy Studies, *NBI monitor*, May 1996, p 6.

⁴² See also *RDP Monitor* 1(2), 1994.

Thus the RDP implementation framework created tensions between the RDP office and the ministry of finance, as well as between the former and line ministries. Further research needs to track institutional arrangements at subnational levels, and examine how these arrangements affected the implementation of RDP programmes at the programme and project level.

Insufficient power of provincial RDP structures

In 1996 the *Sunday Independent*⁴³ reported a lack of contact between Naidoo and the regional RDP heads, with the result that the latter were struggling to assert authority in their provinces. Rapoo⁴⁴ confirms the difficulties that the Gauteng and Mpumalanga RDP structures had in asserting their authority. He relates this to the fact that the position of RDP commissioner was technically unconstitutional (there is no provision for this post or for support staff in the constitution or the Public Service Act). Gauteng and Mpumalanga emulated national RDP structures by locating their provincial RDP commissions the premier's office; these played a co-ordinating rather than implementing role. In North West, an RDP commission was formed that was neither housed in the office of the premier nor that of an MEC; it reportedly had a great deal of influence over line departments, partly because of its control over the disbursement of RDP funds.

Given an alleged lack of contact with the national RDP office as well as the lack of a legal basis for RDP institutions having MEC status at provincial level, it appears as if provincial RDP structures indeed lacked the power to persuade provincial departments to effectively implement the RDP. This left the onus on central government to oversee the implementation of the RDP at the provincial level. Lewis mentions the additional problem of wage settlements at the national level, leaving the provinces to pick up the increased bill from existing budgets, thus squeezing out capital expenditure.⁴⁵

Given the importance of local and provincial governments in implementing that RDP, this aspect needs to be closely examined in the second phase of this study.

Gradual dissipation of 'the RDP'

Democracy cannot coexist with strong ideological control, as diversity is the basis for democratic debate. Relatively undemocratic, top-down decisions can be taken relatively quickly, while the democratic process retards decision-making as sufficient consensus on a particular issue is generated. How did the RDP influence the contents of second-generation policy documents, such as the white papers of line ministries?

In the new South Africa the line ministries have considerable freedom to formulate their own policies; however, the ministers and directors-general responsible for policy development are hand-picked by the president. This ensures some policy coherence. On the other hand, all white papers are subject to review by parliamentary portfolio commit-

⁴³ It may be altruism, *Sunday Independent*.

⁴⁴ Rapoo, *Making the means justify the ends*.

⁴⁵ CPS, Proceedings of a workshop on the EU project.

tees and, to a lesser extent, by the cabinet. There are therefore three centralising forces in respect of sectoral policies. Moreover, from 1994 to 1996, the power of the RDP office over line ministry policy and transformation was superimposed on these.

From the white paper onwards, the RDP gradually dissipated as its influence as a policy document was weakened by multiple interpretations, the disappearance of guardian institutions such as the RDP office, and the emergence of budgetary and economic contingencies that necessitated pragmatic interpretations of the base document.

Firstly, each line ministry interpreted the RDP differently, and used it as but one input into policy formulation. In general, line ministry white papers went through processes of specialist design and public review during which developments in each sector were analysed on their own merits and policy responses designed, while attempting to retain key aspects of the RDP.⁴⁶ In some cases, such as the water white papers, the authors made a major effort to build the RDP into sectoral policy. In others, such as the local government white paper, the relationship is extremely tenuous. However, each white paper quotes the RDP at least a few times, linking the document to broader government strategy. Overall, the relationship is fairly loose; no ministry was obliged to adhere strictly to RDP dogma. Thus the white papers are dilutions of the RDP, compounded by differences in interpretation, leading the original RDP being dissipated over time.

During the second phase of this study, these conclusions need to be illustrated with examples of correspondences as well as departures from the RDP.

The 'pilot' function of presidential lead projects

RDP lead projects were intended to serve as examples to line ministries of how the RDP should function in practice. However, some of them ran into difficulties, often due to a lack of capacity at the local level.⁴⁷ This undermined their status as model projects. The numerous factors slowing down RDP projects occurred in the lead time between ideas and their implementation – for instance, line ministries were reportedly slow in submitting project proposals, and the process of putting projects up for tender and then selecting consultants could take up to three months.

Staffing and capacity

The RDP was implemented by real people in concrete work-settings, making day-to-day decisions. Therefore, if the RDP's implementation is to be adequately described, something should be said about the workings of the various spheres of government, and the way in which internal institutional cultures affected output.

⁴⁶ See, for example, the white papers on water supply and sanitation, environmental management policy, local government, and health.

⁴⁷ RDP annual review, 1995, p 3.

The culture of change in line ministries

The praxis of transition was difficult and confusing. Old institutions were remodelled and new ones created; thus government institutions found themselves in a state of flux. Given the expectations expressed by the electorate via their vote in the 1994 elections, as well as the commitment of the liberation movement to reshape society, service delivery to the previously disadvantaged had to be improved as quickly as possible while detailed policy was still being developed.

At the same time, the institutional framework for implementing new policies, as well as the division of responsibilities between institutions and within them, were not yet clear. Therefore, any policy documents emerging from the line ministries must be seen against this background, which created a culture of excitement (or anxiety) and expectancy which, at the same time, lacked direction. For instance, members of the 'old guard' in many ministries, who had valuable experience and technical knowledge, had reservations about the rapid advancement of new staff, while the 'new guard' was often hoping to push change forward at a faster pace.⁴⁸ And, for all their idealism, many new staff members of ministries were trained in the resistance movement and usually had little experience of working in government structures. The tension between an old guard, with a lot of experience but an old mind-set, and the new staff, with little experience but a firm dedication to new ideals, is also often cited as a factor impairing the rate of delivery under the RDP.⁴⁹ These claims need to be substantiated during the empirical phase of the research: one could also argue that, given good leadership, a positive synergy could have emerged between the ideals and drive of the new order and the experience of the old.

This confirms an earlier statement that research should examine the relations between the old guard and the newcomers in each department, and the outcomes in terms of implementation of the RDP policy intentions.

Work in the RDP office

Compared to the line ministries which have thousands of employees, the RDP office consisted of nine key officials assisted by consultants brought in from the private sector and other centres of expertise, and charged with managing a fund that grew by R2,5 billion a year for the first three years.⁵⁰ This led to considerable pressure on staff in the RDP office.⁵¹ A complaint from one disaffected consultant who worked in the office related to the lack of relevant capacity among senior staff: the RDP was being led by a trade union leader, a nuclear physicist, a medical doctor and an entomologist, and they had little ex-

⁴⁸ See, for example, Mcebisi Ndletyana, *Route map to change: lessons from the DoT's approach to transformation*, Policy brief no 13, Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 1999.

⁴⁹ See, for example, It may be altruism or opportunism, but business is making a go of the RDP, *Sunday Independent*, 11.2.96.

⁵⁰ See Pulling out all the stops, *Sunday Independent*.

⁵¹ See *Finance Week*, 1-6.2.96: Jay needs help.

perience of working in government or managing projects.⁵² People working in the RDP office complained that the line ministries were focused on amalgamating the various apartheid bureaucracies and were unable to absorb the funds on offer from the office, let alone spend it at the local level in areas they had not dealt with previously.⁵³

Local government

As the RDP evolved, it was increasingly characterised as a programme that delivered infrastructure at the local level. And indeed, much of the focus of the original RDP document was on satisfying basic human needs. In an arena in which there are multiple claims by civil society organisations, traditional authorities, individual leaders and political parties to represent the local populace, elected local governments can oversee the delivery of public goods and services while all other actors act as advisers and lobbyists. In this sense, local government was the cornerstone of delivery during the RDP era, but faced a triple crisis of a lack of legitimacy, a lack of resources, and a lack of administrative capacity.⁵⁴

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has attempted an initial analysis of the formulation and implementation of the RDP. It has done so by examining, in section 1, its formulation and evolution and its mutation into GEAR. It followed this by looking at four aspects of implementation: the mobilisation and spending of financial resources for the RDP, public participation in the RDP, institutional design of the programme, and issues relating to staffing and the capacity of those charged with its implementation.

In section 1 it was argued that the content of RDP policy and discourse changed over time, a slide which began with a state interventionist and developmental position authored by the trade union movement, and evolved towards a more market-oriented/liberal stance that put growth before redistribution. This was marked by discrete jumps in policy as key policy documents were published that redirected the debate into new channels. The slide was set in motion by the need to move from a 'wish list' that assisted nation-building and the restoration of peace towards a set of concrete choices that could be implemented with a finite set of government resources. It was further helped along by the pragmatism that came with practical experience in government and the sluggish and disappointing growth of the economy in the first years after the elections.

GEAR is interpreted as a specific discourse on the RDP that achieved ascendancy by virtue of a shift in the constellation of office-bearers who held those views on reconstruction and development. RDP policy is still alive in the minds of many government officials,

⁵² Pulling out all the stops, *Sunday Independent*.

⁵³ Conversation with Julia de Bruijn, president's office, 3.11.99.

⁵⁴ See, for example, RDP's focus shifts to local government, *Business Day*, 15.1.96; It may be altruism or opportunism ... , *Sunday Independent*.

and its use as a mantra and reference point for policy in the years immediately after the first elections has affected government policy in all sectors. However, given the absence of institutions charged with its implementation, the RDP is gradually being dissipated. The only continuing strand is GEAR which is defended and implemented via a wide range of public institutions and is therefore more likely to have a lasting impact on society.

In section 2, the actual implementation of the RDP was briefly examined. In the financial section, it was argued that the RDP lead projects enabled delivery to get under way while the line ministries were engaged in transformation, spurred on by the need to reclaim portions of their budgets lost to the RDP office. Under this formula, delivery could indeed get under way immediately, and there were tangible results from the outset. However, on other fronts this financial design failed. Firstly, the leverage that the office had over the line ministries had the unintended effect of alienating the ministries from it rather than encouraging effective transformation. Secondly, the 'sunset' clause and the spending on apartheid debt squeezed out an increasing amount of money from the government budget that could otherwise have been spent on development and delivery. Thirdly, the RDP office itself built up substantial budget rollovers and was eventually forced on a capital-intensive path of delivery through the municipal infrastructure programme before it was closed down. How funding flows affected RDP programmes and projects remains a question to be evaluated during the next research phase.

In the section on participation, it was argued that speedy delivery of services was detrimental to participatory and sustainable development. In the realm of public input into the reconstruction and development debate, the government's relationship with NGOs, CSOs and trade unions has deteriorated over time, resulting in a growing distance between it and organisations that have links with the grass roots or that hold independent positions in the various policy and implementation debates. This has been at odds with the RDP's intention to introduce people-driven development.

In the section on institutions, it was argued that the power of the RDP office over the line ministries created tensions that were detrimental to the implementation of the RDP, and eventually led to the closure of the RDP office. Furthermore, it was argued that the RDP was not properly decentralised, nor were local government authorities empowered enough to enable them to carry the RDP forward. As the institutions defending the RDP were closed, so the programme began to dissipate, with its relationship with the white papers of the line ministries becoming less and less clear.

In the section on staffing and capacity, it was argued that various line departments did not inherit much capacity in the area of developmental programmes. Such staff as there was, was therefore overburdened and limited by budget constraints on the creation of extra capacity. Work in the ministries was confused by transformation, the search for new policy directions, uncertainty about staff redeployments, and contractual dependability. These factors slowed implementation in both the RDP office and the line ministries, and detracted from original intentions.

All of this points to substantial divergences between policy and its implementation on all four fronts covered, and thus the evidence suggests that these fields will provide fruit-

ful avenues of enquiry during the next, empirical, phase of this study. The central issues and questions to be followed up have been listed at the end of each subsection.

Having noted the failures of the RDP, however, one should also highlight its successes. The peaceful transition to democracy can be attributed at least in part to the inclusive character of the RDP base document, which promised something for all and allowed all parties to buy into the transitional programme. This achievement has perhaps been the RDP's greatest achievement. The threat of civil war has abated, and while the RDP has dissipated it has certainly helped to place South Africa on a new and less conflictual course.