

Civil society must anchor a developmental state

TURNING SA into a developmental state would require much more political mobilisation than the African National Congress (ANC) has been able to muster so far. This is because the success of a developmental state in the 21st century requires stronger and more effective linkages between the state and civil society, linkages that are at best weak — and at worst nonexistent — in SA.

Peter Evans, a professor of sociology and international studies at the University of California (Berkeley), writes in a new book that the 20th century developmental states of east Asia were founded on state-business linkages, which are a challenge to manage today because of capital's global integration.

A developmental state today needs linkages that involve civil society institutions, which are a crucial force in driving the improvement of a nation's capabilities (through education, for example). Improving a nation's capabilities is crucial to long-term economic growth, but it is a project that capitalists do not rally behind easily, just as it is hard to get them to buy into policies that increase the country's economic output.

Evans is one of the contributors to Constructing a Democratic Developmental State in SA: Potentials and Challenges, published by the Human Sciences Research Council.

Evans adds that it is the role of the state to make state-civil society linkages possible by



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helping civil society institutions on to their feet. Creating such linkages will not be easy, partly because crafting a shared agenda is easier said than done, but also because of the complication of dealing with civil society, with individuals and organisations claiming to represent general interests.

The biggest challenge in building linkages between the state and civil society "is enabling communities to construct shared coherent goals, whose concrete implementation can then be co-produced by public agencies and the communities themselves".

Though Evans does not offer an opinion on the ANC's ability or willingness to build strong and effective linkages with civil society, a quick glance at the ruling party's weaknesses, as well as its track record, suggests it will be a tall order. This is because the

ANC lacks an organisational infrastructure as well as political maturity at branch level to engage with its counterparts in civil society, and has tended to see civil society organisations as potential political rivals.

Yet the successful creation of a developmental state in SA will depend on how successful the ANC is in building linkages more encompassing than the state-business linkages that were the pillar of the east Asian developmental states 40 years ago.

"The growing power of capital and the growing integration of local capital into transnational networks has made close ties with capital riskier and more difficult for a developmental state. Capture is more likely and maintaining the essential balance between autonomy and embeddedness is harder to sustain. At the same time, there is less overlap between the agenda of the 21st century developmental state and the profit-maximising projects of capital. In the 20th century, manufacturing-focused development project, the symbiosis between private profitability and a shared national project, was easier to execute," writes Evans.

Contrasting the 20th and 21st century development models, he finds that 40 years ago it was possible to imagine that policies for economic growth could be separated from social policies as growth policies could be built around state-business partnerships that did not have to concern themselves with so-

cietal well-being. "The 21st century developmental state cannot afford such myopia. Policies that expand capabilities may look like 'social policy' or 'welfare policy' but they are essential to growth policy. This recognition requires reshaping ties to capital.

"Pretending that nothing has changed is an invitation to local capital and its transnational allies to construct their own agenda, deflecting state policy in directions that will allow them to capture resources and subsidise profits without contributing to capability expansion," Evans warns.

The risk of the state's agenda being captured by special interests is a theme that runs through the literature on the role of the state in driving socioeconomic development.

If under former presidents Thabo Mbeki and Nelson Mandela capital gained more influence on the country's economic policy agenda, the Congress of South African Trade Unions has since Polokwane made a concerted effort to steer economic policy in favour of the unions. But as Evans and others have cautioned, capture of the developmental agenda by either labour or capital threatens the nation's long-term prosperity. SA needs a strong centre that is built on civil society. Without it, the rest of society will have to make do with the crumbs left after labour and capital have had their feast.

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