

The potential and challenges of making SA a developmental state

THE HUMAN Sciences Research Council (HSRC) has come up with a useful contribution to the debate about the potential and challenges of turning South Africa into a developmental state.

The book's biggest benefit must surely be its usefulness as an anchor for a debate that has so far generated much hot air and less substance. Edited by Omano Edigheji, the research director in the Policy Analysis Unit and co-founder of the Centre for Africa's Social Policy at the HSRC, the book, *Constructing a Democratic Developmental State in South Africa: Potentials and Challenges*, provides a solid platform on which further debates about what the architecture of SA's developmental state ought to look like.

SA is one of the two countries – Ethiopia is the other – that have declared themselves to be developmental states. Countries who are today cited as successful cases of state intervention – South Korea, Japan, Malaysia – did not announce their candidature; they just did it and were only labelled as developmental states by analysts after the fact.

Edigheji correctly points out in his introduction that announcing one's candidature for a development state is one thing, constructing and acting like one is another. The challenge for SA is how to design the requisite institutions that will formulate and implement policies that will enable the country to achieve its developmental goals.

As the book's 13 chapters illustrate, the



capacity of the SA state falls far short of what is required for the country to deliver public services, let alone the creation of a developmental state, a state that is not only effective, but agile, too.

But as other students of developmental states have pointed out, the key question regarding the capacity of the state is: capacity to deliver what objective? SA has, or ought to, have three developmental goals. Each goal requires different capacity and competencies. These, according to Edigheji, are: capacity for industrial transformation and adjustment to global economic conditions; capacity for the provision of basic public services; and capacity for the redressing of historical injustices.

In this, Edigheji echoes Atul Kohli, a professor of International Affairs and Politics at Princeton University.

In a lecture at the HSRC offices two weeks ago, Kohli said that economic growth was best promoted by a political elite that prioritised, and worked closely with business to produce, economic growth. To implement its policies, the elite must rely on a capable bureaucracy.

Redistributive goals, on the other hand, are best pursued by states whose leaders' political

roots reach down into the society, "either through political parties or via well-constructed local bureaucracies that respond to central directives".

To combine the two – promote economic growth and distribution – requires political parties that simultaneously incorporate the interests of both business and the working poor. This is difficult to pull off, and is also difficult to sustain, as the ANC has learnt in recent years.

The analysis by Edigheji and the 13 contributors to the book paints a rather dismal picture. Critical to SA's success in creating a developmental state is the creation of an effective bureaucracy, one that is appointed on merit. But creating such a bureaucracy would challenge one of the key instruments of political control that the ruling party has: the deployment of members in key state positions as a reward for political loyalty.

Then there are the ANC's own weaknesses as an organisation: it has a mostly dysfunctional branch infrastructure, which limits its ability to mobilise society behind its developmental goals. Yet state capacity for development, as Kohli said, can only be enhanced if politicians are able to mobilise support for clear policy preferences as well as use an effective bureaucracy to implement these policies.

The ANC's current leadership shows no signs of being able to mobilise support for clear policy choices. Nor does it command an effective civil service.

