

# Wanted: an efficient civil service that isn't built on patronage

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 little 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 to further debate what the architecture of South Africa's developmental state ought to look like.

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 that announcing one's candidature for a developmental state is one thing, constructing and acting like one is another. The challenge for South Africa is how to design the institutions that will formulate and implement policies to enable the country to achieve its developmental goals.

"By a democratic developmental state we mean a state that could act authoritatively, credibly, legitimately and in a binding manner to formulate and implement its policies and programmes."

As the book's 13 chapters illustrate, the capacity of the South African state falls far short of what is required for the country to deliver public services, let alone the creation of a developmental state – one that is 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?

States – South Africa is no exception – need different capacity for different objectives. South Africa 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 eco-

nomic 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 economic growth was best promoted by a political elite that prioritised economic growth and worked closely with business to produce that growth.

To implement its policies, the elite relies on a capable bureaucracy.

Redistributive goals, on the other hand, are best pursued by states in which leaders whose 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 South Africa's success in creating a developmental state is the creation of an effective bureaucracy, one that is appointed on merit.

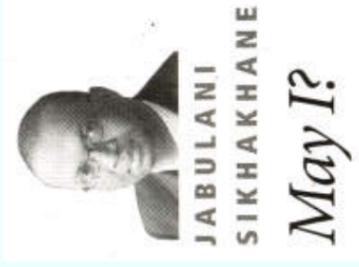
But creating such a bureaucracy would challenge one of the key instruments of political control that

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.



South Africa is one of the two countries – Ethiopia is the other – that have declared themselves to be developmental states. Countries which are today cited as successful

