

From the Freedom Charter to the National Development Plan

 By [Chichi Maponya](#)

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South Africa last week commemorated the 60th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, which is widely regarded as a seminal document in South Africa's quest to transform our society into a model of equality - equal opportunity, equal access, equal development. Our country's highest law - the South African Constitution - is based on this progressive document.

I was recently reminded of the words of Joseph Stiglitz - Noble Prize Winner and an economist of great authority, - who said: "It's not only inequality in income and wealth that is making us frail, but inequality of opportunity." In reflecting on the Freedom Charter I realised that while the vision encapsulated within its pages is still to be achieved, its vision for equality and equity remains as relevant as ever and the need to turn this vision into reality is more urgent than ever.

The Freedom Charter represents a coalition of people, or what is now referred to as the Congress of the People, who transcended race, religion and political ideology to come together to define a vision of a South Africa which would belong to all who live in it.

The Freedom Charter outlined the vision of a South Africa where:

- A spirit of freedom, equality and democracy would characterise our country and would be embodied by our people.
- All citizens would have equal rights and equal access to opportunities, including amongst others, education, housing and employment opportunities.
- South Africa would take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the global community of nations and would make a meaningful contribution to sustainable international peace, security and development.

While stakeholders in our country continue to strive to turn these visions into reality, we have made some significant strides. Most notable has been the development of the National Development Plan which contains, as its foundation, the pillars of the Freedom Charter.

The National Development Plan which was adopted in 2012, and around which social partners are coalescing as the country's blueprint for social and economic development - more easily referred to as Vision 2030 - should guide our conversations and action for a common future of prosperity and development for all the peoples of this country.

There is a cliché that there is nothing as powerful as an idea whose time has come. I believe the powerful idea is that South Africa is one country, we are one people and our vision for a prosperous future should be a common one. The National

Development Plan should guide our endeavours as we build this common future.

The National Development Plan is already being implemented with a view to addressing systemic challenges which would impede South Africa's long term growth and development. These include infrastructure development, energy security, as well as people centred development.

In as far as infrastructure development is concerned, it is important to understand that while a country's investment in infrastructure is an enabler for international investment and economic growth, the primary beneficiaries of infrastructure development are the citizens of the country. It means that, amongst others, people can access services far more quickly and get to work more easily.

Since 2009, government has allocated more than R800bn toward infrastructure development and had spent R1tn towards this in areas such as energy, water infrastructure, sanitation, rail, road-based public transport, and hospital revitalisation among others.

All sectors of South African society are simultaneously working towards people centred developmental programmes.

In this regard, some of the significant achievements have been:

- The Employment Tax Incentive scheme through which, by the end of 2014 a total of 270,000 young people had benefited.
- Developments towards a knowledge based economy through skills building. Government will, through the Department of Science and Technology, spend R13bn on the Research, Development and Support Programme. The Department will also make transfers to the National Research Foundation of R2.7bn to support 4,539 researchers, 15,918 masters students; and 9,615 doctoral students.
- The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), a joint initiative between government, business and civil society to improve education outcomes is being implemented in eight districts in Limpopo, Eastern Cape, North West and Mpumalanga and is reaching a total of 4,262 schools.

While many of these initiatives are funded by the public purse, due to their strategic importance for the country's growth and development, government cannot implement these programmes on their own. A partnership that involves business, labour and ordinary citizens is essential to ensuring the National Development Plan becomes a reality that lives beyond the pages on which it is written.

This is the spirit that will drive the growth and development of our country and it is this same spirit that is embodied in the Freedom Charter. This spirit of coming together for a common cause - the growth and development of our country and our people - is a core character of the South African brand and our national identity.

We have since 1994 been referred to as a rainbow nation. We have also been known for the slogan - unity in diversity. We need to draw on, and harness, all our collective energy, spirit and strength to rewrite our narrative and forge a development-centred, inspired and secured future for all our people.

Our late founding President Nelson Mandela, reaffirmed in July 1991 on a visit to Cuba that, "Our goals remain achievement of the demands of the Freedom Charter, and we will settle for nothing less than that."

I am convinced that if we put our minds to it, our 60th commemoration of the Freedom Charter, can become a landmark day in our country not dissimilar to Kliptown, 26 June 1955 where a group of like-mind, progressive and inspired individuals came together to draft the Freedom Charter which today forms the basis of our social contract with citizens. We must come together to deliver Vision 2030. We must not be found wanting by the generations of the future.

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