

Panel discussion on NDP highlights need for leadership in implementation

R500 billion will be invested in the National Development Plan (NDP) by the formal business community, so long as the plan has "no U-turns, no shocks and no unpleasant surprises," said Business Unity South Africa Special Policy advisor, Prof Raymond Parsons.



He was speaking at a thought leaders panel discussion he participated in together with planning minister Trevor Manuel and Cosatu president Sdumo Dlamini. The UNISA Graduate School of Business Leadership (SBL), together with broadcaster CNBC Africa, hosted the panel discussion on the NDP to highlight the need for leadership in its implementation. The discussion will be broadcast on CNBC Africa on Thursday, 27 June 2013 at 2pm.

Implementation as key

"The private sector will invest if there is a climate of certainty. We need a commitment as to how the plan will unfold, one into which business can safely invest knowing their investment aligns with the national vision and will not subsequently be undermined."

Manuel said that 'implementation' was the key word for the NDP: "Whether in education or any other structural economic weakness, policy and legislation is not the problem - we have good plans that never get adequately implemented." He recommended that all parties put the past behind them and push as one for implementation of the NDP.

Dlamini pointed out that the NDP did not align with earlier plans, and particularly did not align with the Freedom Charter, which was the initial mandate of the tripartite alliance. "We're not opposed to beginning to implement, but at present believe we will be starting in opposite directions. If the NDP is not based upon the principles of the Freedom Charter how then can we achieve those principles?"

Manuel pointed out that many of the outcomes that the business community was looking for were already being implemented. "Some government ministers have been extremely cooperative in retaining and implementing accountability in their departments. It's already happening in pockets and now needs to be done across the public sector. We recognise it is a prerequisite to delivering quality public services that public sector employees demonstrate accountability."

Bridging structural weaknesses

In turn, business had not kept to its agreements to create jobs under previous accords, and Prof Parsons suggested that this would not be the case this time: "Previous accords were implemented top-down, but the NDP is different in that it is a bottom-up policy which already has achieved a considerable amount of consensus."

The panel discussion was attended by a number of academics and alumni of SBL. Professor Jan Kruger of the UNISA SBL pointed out that a major defect of any plan was the dysfunctional education system which produced university graduates that were functionally illiterate, and school graduates that were unemployable: a generation was being produced without credible leadership capacity.

Manuel responded that the plan was meant to address precisely such structural weaknesses in the economy, and must be part of the solution rather than a reason to delay. "The solution to South Africa's problems will not be found in wealthy private schools but rather in township schools - we want to focus on the cleavage between kids of the rich and those of the poor."

Transformation through future leaders

In response to a question by Doctor Allan Feldman, senior lecturer in Leadership at the SBL, on low levels of trust in South Africa hampering agreement on the NDP, Prof Parsons likened low trust to "a tax on everything we try to do". "However, the process of implementation of the NDP is precisely what will itself bridge the lack of trust in this country," he said.

According to the deputy-director: Communication and Marketing of UNISA SBL, Cristal Peterson, the panel discussion was hosted in order to create a platform for debate among South Africa's leadership and to bring closer together government, the private sector and labour.

"Business schools such as SBL have a great deal of brainpower among their academics, alumni and students. This is a resource that should not be omitted when it comes to upskilling public sector employees and introducing governance and accountability. We want to be part of the process of transforming our economy, as we already do to an extent by creating future generations of leaders," said Peterson following the discussion.

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