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MOVING FROM WELFARE TO "WORKFARE"



A Sensible Approach towards a Developmental State

There is a story about a drunken Scotsman who unknowingly said to Lady Diana: "Hey you're gorgeous." People who were in his company thought that he would be consumed with personal shame and discomfort after he was told the identity of the Princess. He, however, was unconcerned and said: "I don't care who she is, she's gorgeous." In order to tackle the thorny problem of welfare, we have to be as frank as the drunken Scotsman.

By Mabila Mathebula

When it comes to being frank, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe had a tongue like a cat-o-nine tails when he recently decried the culture of dependency on the government: "People want houses, they want this and they want that. For free, for free! Where have you ever heard of such a thing?" (*Sunday Times*, 9 January 2011).

A Dependency Syndrome

There is a misperception amongst our people that the government can solve all our problems. Motlanthe is exercising his right as a leader to destroy that mentality and build an alternative. According to Dr John Demartini's philosophy, a leader should be able to build and to destroy. Briefly put, Demartini claims that leaders should "build new ideas and have the courage to destroy that which is no longer relevant or adding value" (*The Star*, January 2011). As such, Motlanthe is encouraging people to think about what they can do for their country and not waiting for the government to do everything for them. On the other side of the coin, he is destroying people's poisonous mentality of saying, "If government can solve all problems, why should I bother about them." He wants everybody to play his or her role and the government to reciprocate accordingly. One surmises that he is putting the ruling party's philosophy – "By working together we can do more" – into practice.

Mondli Makhanya observes that "there is nothing wrong with doses of welfarism in a state. Contrary to free-market fundamentalists, there are successful welfare states on the planet. The difference is that the people do their bit and the state reciprocates by making their lives easier to live..." (*Sunday Times*, 16 January 2011).

Teenage Pregnancy and Welfare

One case in point is the situation at Mavalani School in Limpopo, which is disconcerting to say the least and it warrants our full attention as a nation. Since the start of the new school year, 27 girls have been reported as being pregnant. There is a group of 15 women who sit at the gate of the school daily waiting to assist these future

mothers in delivering their babies. Last year 50 girls fell pregnant at the same school (*The Star*, January 2011). Ironically enough, the role of the midwives and the teachers are clearly defined: teachers enact their teaching role whilst the midwives deliver babies. Where have you ever heard of such a thing?

Once the babies are born, government will be inundated with requests for child support grants. The pregnant girls, and the boys who rendered them pregnant, feel no sting of opprobrium. In South Africa there is prevalence of certain attitudes and customs, notably the recognised status of beggary and the absence of social stigma in the acceptance of indiscriminate charity. A child support grant in the Mavalani case is a pervasive incentive for gross irresponsibility.

Not all the people abuse the welfare system, as Zihle Z Mtshali observed; in fact, many use it quite effectively. However, welfare may subject people into a state of perpetual dependency for generations (*Sunday Times*, 21 November 2010). In a nutshell, welfare may become a generational curse or, in Kwame Nkrumah's language, welfare may become a type of servitude in tranquillity.

The flow of sustained, indefinite aid implies an obvious and yet widely ignored danger: the pauperisation of the recipients. A pauper is one who relies on unearned public assistance and "pauperisation" accordingly denotes the promotion and acceptance of the idea that unearned doles are a main ingredient in the livelihood of the nation. Pauperisation undermines the value of self-reliance, which is required for a country that is geared to become a developmental state. The flow of unearned grants obstructs the development of the qualities, attitudes and efforts which make for advancement and diverts attention from these prime determinants of development. In addition, recipients of aid often tend to place little value on what they get for nothing. As the late TW Kambule once put it: "People do not appreciate unearned public goods or money."

We are living with a volcano that could be dormant for months; even

years and then suddenly erupt for no reason except that it couldn't contain itself. Moeletse Mbeki's warning of another Tunisia should be heeded. Tunisia's problems did not start with the death of a hawker; the time bomb has been ticking away for many years and it had no other option but to explode because it could not contain itself. Abraham Maslow warned that he who is good at using a hammer starts to think that everything is nail. But we should not assume that all our problems are nails; some are screws as Professor of Politics and African American Studies, Melissa Harris-Lacewell suggests. If you bang away on a screw you get a big mess. South Africa should put down the hammer and try a screwdriver.

Developmental State v Welfare and Corruption

If not contained, the current welfare system could damage the objective of creating a developmental state. Alec Erwin, the former Public Enterprises Minister, sounded the following warning in good faith: "It's a dangerous mistake for government to say it's a developmental state. It requires social cohesion and technical competence. This requires profound changes" (*City Press*, 13 February 2011). Where will you have technical competence if the majority of the population do not pull up their boot straps and stop depending on the government to give them hand outs? On the other side of the coin, there is rampant corruption and political favouritism in the civil service. Excessive welfare and corruption are the enemies of a developmental state.

A number of political analysts have argued that to make the developmental, or rather, entrepreneurial state successful, it would need people who did not only adapt to the environment, but people who would challenge the environment to adapt to their needs. They also observe that in South Korea and other developmental states, the emphasis was on building human capital through technical and vocational training, and integrating educational institutions with industry networks as well as relevant development agencies.

Recommendations

It is said that the road to success is always under construction – one never arrives. On the flip side of the coin, the road from welfare to "workfare" is riddled with boulders, devastating floods and potholes – it is a pathless path indeed! The real problem is coming up with the right questions or direction.

Firstly, there should be a major shift from people as clients to people as citizens. Kapeng Makoko and Zolilie Feketha quoted Tom Dewar of the University of Minnesota who drew a perfect line of separation between clienthood and citizenship: "Clients are people who are dependent upon and controlled by their leaders and helpers. Citizens, on the other hand, are people who understand their own problems in their own terms. Good clients make good citizens. Good citizens make good communities" (*City Press*, 13 February 2011). To do so, there are a number of possible avenues:

- Establish a department of workfare or incorporate it with an existing department, to become something like a Department of Public Works and Workfare. Make recipients work for their welfare through training.
- Cut off payments to people who will not work. The New Growth Path should encourage people to move from welfare to workfare.
- Avoid the vicious circle. For example, cut off assistance if the children of recipients do not go to school, like what the state of Wisconsin in the US did.
- In a case like Mavalani, to minimise the damage, the boys who fathered the babies should also go on maternity leave when a girl goes to give birth.

Conclusion

Our country is at a crossroads. We need a strong and able crew to effect a safe journey towards achieving the goals of a developmental state and each and every person should be part of the crew. Communities should work together with the State. By working together we can create jobs, reduce the number of welfare beneficiaries and lay the basis for a developmental state. ■