Education, training and innovation in the National Development Plan 2030

At the end of each year, many of us make resolutions for the year ahead. We will eat more healthily, join a gym (or attend more frequently), contribute more to our pension fund, be more diligent at work. As the new year rolls in, the challenges we face are those of turning the resolutions into practices and, once that has been accomplished, sustaining the good intentions throughout the year – and the years ahead.

In his New Year’s message to South Africa, President Jacob Zuma had this to say about the National Development Plan:

“We have a long road to travel to prosperity. And we have a plan to get us to that destination – the comprehensive National Development Plan. The plan outlines the type of society we should be in 2030, where all will have water, electricity, good health, libraries, good schools, roads, good hospitals and clinics, safety and security, recreational facilities, a growing economy and jobs. Government alone cannot build that type of society, but will need to work with people from all walks of life to find solutions.

A careful analysis of what the Plan requires reveals that those who work in the ‘walks of life’ that include education, training and innovation will play essential roles in the achievement of almost all the goals set out in the Plan. And the challenges in relation to the President’s resolutions regarding the National Plan are the same as our own: how will we make this happen? And how will we keep the good intentions and far-reaching Plan come alive in deeds more than just in words?

The importance of the Plan, as the only major document referred to in the President’s speech (apart from the 2011 Census), is underscored by two other considerations: Planning Commission Chair Trevor Manuel’s resignation from active politics in order to drive and support the Plan’s implementation, and the emergence of the National Planning Commission’s Deputy Chair, Cyril Ramaphosa, as the Deputy President of the ANC and most likely the country’s Deputy President after the elections in 2014.

Although education, training and innovation occupy less than 8% of the document, this proportion may not reflect the depth and consistency of the discussions on these issues. It was widely agreed by the members of the Commission that the aims of the Plan to achieve overall growth, development and freedom, will depend to a very large degree on what these three areas are able to offer. Sadly, these discussions do not emerge in the Plan itself. Yet these sectors are the initiators of implementation and the engines for sustaining the development process.

The Plan includes 14 objectives and 16 actions relating to education, training and innovation. In the case of education, these objectives start with strong and efficient spatial planning systems and the publication of annual reports on identified resources to inform policy formulation. In the Plan’s section that deals with environmental sustainability and resilience, the starting objectives are indicators for natural resources, and the publication of annual reports on identified resources to inform policy formulation. In the Plan’s section that deals with transforming human settlements the changes needed will almost certainly not happen. Similarly, in the case of the section of the Plan that deals with health-care specialists, engineers, agriculturalists and social workers, to name just a few. Without people to provide these services (educated and trained in universities and colleges), and without serious, intensive research and appropriate innovation, the changes needed will almost certainly not happen. Similarly, in the case of the section of the Plan that deals with environmental sustainability and resilience, the starting objectives are indicators for natural resources, and the publication of annual reports on identified resources to inform policy formulation. In the Plan’s section that deals with transforming human settlements the objectives start with strong and efficient spatial planning systems and the upgrading of all informal settlements; while in the area of social protection, addressing the skills deficits in the social-work sector is a key objective. Once again, education, skills, research and innovation must be the platform for the realisation of each of these objectives.

The National Development Plan’s slogan is “Our Future – Make it work”.

Perhaps a prior slogan should be “Our Education – Make it work”.