

# NDP at risk of becoming factional alliance football

**T**HE National Development Plan (NDP) is in danger of becoming a political football as the discussion around it are increasingly linked to the internal battles of tripartite alliance partners, in particular the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).

The proponents and detractors are staid in their acceptance or rejection of the plan — the National Union of Metalworkers of SA (Numsa) has likened it to Democratic Alliance (DA) policies and the ANC Youth League has chastised party leaders who remained silent in the face of the criticism of the plan, calling on them to defend it.

The blanket rejection or acceptance of the NDP is not healthy, given the debate's significance in moving the country forward, South African Communist Party (SACP) deputy general secretary Jeremy Cronin says.

Numsa's outright blasting of the NDP has resulted in other Cosatu affiliates treading carefully with their own critique with many agreeing with the content of the argument but not with the tactics, which one insider has described as "populist point-scoring".

"People feel they have to defend the NDP because of Numsa's position," says an affiliate leader, who wishes to remain anonymous.

Numsa says it is merely articulating the views of its members.

In the SACP's recent online newsletter, Numsa president Cedric Gina challenged those tackling Numsa over its critique.

He claims the reaction has been personalised and has vilified the union's leaders — playing the man and not the ball.

While many affiliates agree Numsa has gone about its critique in the wrong way, they have been examining the NDP for a

## Insight

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crucial meeting of Cosatu's top brass at the end of the month, and are expected to voice their own concerns.

National Union of Mineworkers general secretary Frans Baleni says the leadership of Cosatu's largest affiliate have welcomed the existence of a "long-term plan" for the country.

He says it helps to give successive ANC governments some consistency in unshackling the country from the lingering effects of apartheid.

But the union's national executive committee disagrees with some of the solutions provided by the NDP. Some, Baleni says, do not take into account the very challenges the NDP itself describes.

"So those are some of the points where we disagree and our attitude is: let's engage at the level of the tripartite alliance strategically," he says.

SA Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) general secretary Walter Theledi expresses a similar view. The union's structures have flagged many areas of the NDP where it "failed to take forward the national democratic revolution".

He has declined to elaborate. Samwu would hold a two-day workshop where it would take its time to formulate a position.

"We want to make it very clear that the position we take is a union position, not an individual position. We don't want to jump onto the bandwagon with other people."

Police union Poperu is also set to hold a workshop on the NDP, as will the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu).

Nehawu says it will discuss the plan's shortcomings within Cosatu and it looks forward to an alliance summit with the ANC and the SACP to "iron out any differences and confusion".

The response to the NDP from unions such as Nehawu and Poperu on the one hand and Numsa and the Food and Allied Workers Union — who also oppose the plan — on the other, appears to be linked to the broader battle raging in the federation, over its posture towards its allies and the ANC-led government.

The SACP is set to release a discussion document of its own on the NDP.

The party, which has demonstrated its clout in policy-making in the past, has adopted a middle-of-the-road view, neither rejecting it in its entirety, nor unquestioningly accepting it.

"There are good things in it and there are very problematic things.

"It is best to think of it as a broad vision, not as a plan, ready for implementation," says Cronin.

The National Planning Commission itself, a part-time, 26-member body of professionals and academics, is not ideal for South Africa's long-term planning needs, he says.

While there is clearly agreement between allies that the plan is far from perfect, the outright opposition or absolute acceptance of it would create a "stupid debate", Cronin says.

*Natasha Marrian writes for Business Day*