

Tough economic times require tough and sensible measures

We need to take serious action to stem the rot, writes **Motlhabane Skade**

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I THINK it is proper to declare up front that I am not an economist, related to one or a friend to one. Life in general is about economics and as such you don't really need to be an economist to realise what is happening around you.

Indeed what is happening in our country is scary and we can't downplay it anymore.

It is an open secret that as a country, South Africa is facing difficult economic times which require a need to pull resources together to get ourselves out of this sticky situation.

Our Finance Minister Malusi Gigaba was at pains last week doing an unenviable task in Parliament of delivering his maiden Medium-Term Budget speech.

The heavy burden of balancing the books of the entire country rested on him. In the meantime, all eyes and ears were on him to come up with a miracle. Critics were also salivating, ready to pounce on him by dissecting and shredding his speech into pieces before he even delivered it.

The reality is that this is our problem as a country just like any other problem facing us today.

The drought ravaging the Mother City will affect our economy badly one way or the other and that is also our problem. So why do we take out daggers and stab one person as if he is the cause of all the problems we are facing?

It is an undisputed fact that, due to globalisation, countries are not really in full control of their economic stability and that is a reality with which every country grapples. But in the case of South Africa, there are historical realities that aggravate the situation.

First world countries are still able to cushion the harsh effects of globalisation because they have been in the game for so long. They know how to navigate harsh economic times but even they are not spared. They are now feeling the heat. Who are we to escape these difficult times?

As an emerging economy with a not-so-new democracy, we have to keep on reinventing ourselves and innovating. We have to develop a new identity that is packed with patriotism.

Don't undermine patriotism. It will take you far as a nation. We have to find a formula that will overhaul government systems of accountability. The few resources at our disposal have to be used prudently to cover a bigger pool of needs.

An institution like Statistics South Africa serves as a good diagnostic tool to determine where we are from time to time, to determine our strengths, weaknesses and shortfalls. Let us use it.

Those who are entrusted with financial management of government departments and institutions have a huge task of tightening the controls and disbursing the resources where they are needed most.

We need to ask ourselves tough questions.

Does government get value for money from those who are serving the public? Do we have proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for functions and responsibilities across government institutions? Do we have consequence management for those who deviate from their responsibilities?

Are we recruiting people with the requisite skills to execute the work of government? Are we accounting for every cent from the public purse? Things cannot be left to the finance minister alone to pick up the pieces when all of us have failed.

Big chunks of taxpayers' money disappear through corruption, investigations have proven, but it also disappears through the cracks as a result of some of the questions above. Government should move

of grand-scale corruption, which has been proven over and over by the Competition Commission, and unions are there to guard against such, to protect the well-being of workers and the people of South Africa in general.

In reality, it is everyone's responsibility to lighten the work of our finance minister.

Those who are not paying back the funding for their studies from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, who are working and

beyond empty threats on those who are sinking it by not fulfilling their roles as outlined in their performance agreements.

Labour unions, which are playing a very critical role of defending and protecting the rights of workers, should not be oblivious to the problems confronting this country. They have to find ways of helping to relieve the pressure instead of making impossible demands all the time that will further sink the country into an

abyss.

Those who vandalise public institutions, those who vandalise RDP houses that are under construction, those who collude to defraud government and those who are not paying taxes are harming the fiscus badly.

The focus has been on corruption attributed to few individuals, but millions of rands are lost through taxes because people are deliberately hiding their

hiding in the private sector, are thieves.

The intentions of the unions are good but at times they are not in the best interests of the entire country and that is a problem.

They should defend workers' rights, we all agree I suppose, but they also have a responsibility of protecting the country from the rot. If they don't, the threat to few available jobs is huge.

Contrary to popular belief, the rot is not only in the public sector; the private sector is equally guilty

money.

If we don't play our roles as individuals to save this country, history will judge us harshly and the effects will be catastrophic for everyone. Pointing fingers without an action is not a solution. We may as well bury our heads in the sand and give up.

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