

INSIDE STATISTICS



DR PALI LEHOHLA

An Everest looms for President's priorities

THE NATIONAL Development Plan (NDP) adopted universally in 2012 identified unemployment, poverty and inequality as priority evils that should be tackled.

The sixth administration, whose Cabinet President Cyril Ramaphosa appointed last week, is the Titanic that is stuck in the iceberg.

With mounting evidence that economic growth is heading south, the frosty season is going to be long.

Our current state, despite the brilliant articulation of the challenges by the NDP, confirms the state of toxicity in our national edifice.

We have a snow-packed Everest to climb. In relation to tackling the key priority evils, there are interesting outlier appointments in Ramaphosa's Cabinet.

They bring hope of raising delivery credentials. Regarding the NDP priorities, Patricia De Lille and David Mabuza share evidence of best performance in the areas that they were assigned.

In August 2017, Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) launched the Living Conditions Survey (LCS) 2014/15. The statistician-general reported that poverty in 2015 increased, with 55 percent of the population having fallen into poverty, corroding the gains made between 2001 and 2011.

What was the record in Mpumalanga under Mabuza's watch as premier? According to the statistician-general, Mpumalanga was the only province that showed a reduction in poverty. Would this not qualify Mabuza to practice at the national level what he successfully did in Mpumalanga?

Turning to the Minister of Public Works, Patricia De Lille, when she presided over the Cape metro, it outperformed every other metro and municipality in the country, not only insofar as reducing multidimensional headcount poverty, but also successfully reducing poverty and stemming the tide of unemployment.

Others face monumental challenges, such as the minister of education. Long before the children are aged six and enter basic education, the challenges they have and bring into the classroom are insurmountable.

These appointments are key. However, the new Cabinet will be trying to plot a new route to growth blindfolded.

The dilemma South Africa and the Cabinet faces is poverty.

Fact finder of the nation StatsSA doesn't seem to be able to tell us, as they did not measure it per schedule last year, thus breaking the time series.

The politicians did not allocate the funds. The consequences of this decision are going to be dire.

I speak from experience of the 2003 Consumer Price Index debacle.

This was my professional mistake. However, the politicians failed to allocate R6 million for a household survey through which we measured housing inflation. This left very adverse financial and economic consequences for the country.

Estimates have put it at R20 billion. It is irresponsible of politicians to cause the statistician-general to break a time series.

This self-made crisis is to revisit the nation as it attempts to lift itself out of a crisis of a self-promoted state capture.

Without a science-based theatre of intervention, the vexing limitations of the mechanical politician, the anonymous statistician, the participative scientist and the blind voter will continue to dog South Africa as we fail to focus on the key challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

De Lille and Mabuza provide some important lessons and hope. However, measurement is central to their evidence of performance.