

OPINION: The 10-Point Plan and the Politics of Coordination

By Prof Joseph Sekhampu

When President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the 10-Point Economic Action Plan at the ANC's gathering, the nation sighed, not in defiance but in weary recognition. We have become a people fluent in reform but starved of renewal. The plan promised decisive action to reset growth, fix energy and logistics, revitalise industry, and restore confidence. Its focus on stabilising the grid, opening rail and ports to private participation, investing in infrastructure, supporting small enterprises, and professionalising the civil service speaks to real priorities. However, the scene felt familiar. Another plan, another promise, another moment of public renewal. It treated dysfunction through procedure rather than transformation, reaffirming the system's ability to reform but not to change.

This is the paradox of the political machinery. The state does not resist reform; it absorbs it. It speaks the language of renewal, adopts the posture of accountability, and performs the cleansing rituals, all while preserving the relationships that keep it intact. What appears to be a rupture is often an act of repair, not of institutions, but of legitimacy. The system reforms not to transform, but to survive.

The political economy gives language to this condition. In systems where authority depends on networks of loyalty and access, reform becomes a mechanism of self-preservation. Governments that cannot deliver performance learn to deliver theatre, perfecting the art of appearing responsive through plans, task teams, and commissions that manage outrage without changing the logic of power.

The South African experience reflects this rhythm. The Zondo and Seriti Commissions, along with countless policy frameworks from the RDP to the NDP and now the 10-point plan, have exposed a consistent pattern of procedural accountability without structural change. Each framework begins with conviction and ends in fatigue, revealing not a failure of planning but of coordination. We have mastered the art of designing strategies without learning how to sustain them. The result is a state that renews credibility through process rather than outcome, where accountability is procedural rather than moral.

There is a new twist in this cycle. The 10-Point Plan arrived within the GNU, and key partners criticised it almost immediately. A project intended to symbolise common purpose exposed how divided the governing arrangement really is. The country now has a government that is negotiating with itself. In principle, this negotiation could deepen accountability. In practice, it risks turning reform into diplomacy. When every decision is made inside the house, coherence becomes the first casualty.

If reform is to succeed, it must move beyond new frameworks and learn to build coordination in two directions: horizontally across departments and ministries and vertically between national, provincial, and municipal spheres. Horizontal coordination means aligning economic, social, and infrastructure policies so that each speaks to the same outcome, rather than competing for visibility or budgets. Vertical coordination means strengthening the connective tissue between national priorities and local

implementation. The economy lives in municipalities, not memoranda. Without competent municipalities, professional administrators, and stable local governance, national plans remain aspirations suspended in reports.

The priorities are not misplaced. Linking energy and industrial policy could revive production capacity long paralysed by fragmentation. Allowing private participation in logistics could unlock efficiency that monopolies have stifled. Directing revenue to infrastructure, if transparent, could build the foundations of inclusive growth. These are good ideas. The question is not whether the plan is wise, but whether the state can implement it with discipline and integrity. Reform will only matter when professionalisation becomes practice and competence outweighs allegiance.

The deeper danger of the current pattern is psychological. Many South Africans have grown accustomed to the performance of reform. They recognise the script: a presidential announcement, a promise of accelerated delivery, a new unit in the Presidency, and then silence. The language of hope has become predictable. Over time, this breeds not anger, but fatigue. The most corrosive consequence of adaptive reform is not outrage, but resignation. When citizens cease to believe that reform can deliver justice, they stop demanding it. A democracy that loses its moral energy slowly euthanises itself of meaning.

Every presidency, however well-intentioned, inherits the same dilemma. To govern effectively, one must rely on the very structures that reproduce dysfunction. Each attempt at reform is constrained by the fear of destabilisation. This is how South Africa has become a country of partial measures: enough reform to maintain hope, but not enough to threaten the architecture of loyalty that underpins the state.

True reform begins where comfort ends. It threatens interests, not appearances. It redistributes power away from networks of loyalty toward systems of law and competence. That is why genuine reform is so difficult. It cannot be managed from within the same logic that perfected decay. It requires courage of a different kind, moral courage, not rhetorical resolve. The real test of leadership is not whether one can announce reform, but whether one is willing to lose comrades in the process.

For all its imperfections, the 10-Point Plan offers a mirror to the nation's capacity to self-correct. Its success will depend less on the elegance of its design and more on the courage to govern differently. South Africa's challenge is no longer the absence of vision, but the absence of alignment. Reform must cease to be a ritual of renewal and become a discipline of execution. It requires capable municipalities, professional administrators, and a political culture that prioritises competence over comradeship.

If this plan is to mean anything, it must restore trust where cynicism has settled, coherence where fragmentation rules, and integrity where convenience has long prevailed. The task before government is not simply to reform, but to prove that the state can serve without self-interest. Only then will the promise of renewal move from rhetoric to reality and reform cease to be survival, becoming instead the quiet work of reconstruction.

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