

Bring Aboard the Champions

Creative and innovative approaches, as well as commitment from management officials and political leadership are needed to improve coordination between the different spheres of government.

So write Department of Water Affairs & Forestry (DWAF) Director-General *Jabu Sindane* and Deputy Director: Capacity Building and Training *George Tsibani* in a discussion paper.

The paper examines government's inter-governmental relations and its implications or challenges to the department's leadership role under Project Consolidate, the State's hands-on local government support and engagement programme, launched last year.

South Africa's political landscape has changed significantly since 1994, with the introduction of the three spheres of government (national, provincial and local). The new Constitution makes provision for an integrated, inter-sectoral, and cooperative approach to governance. These provisions commit all three spheres of government to be transparent in policy making and inclusive in its approach.

Effective coordination within and between the spheres of government is clearly vital to the country's reconstruction and development efforts. Perhaps understandably, given the recent transition to democracy and the continual political transformation, inter-governmental relations in South Africa are in a state of flux. At times, it is even dysfunctional.

In that respect, write the authors, it is evident that certain aspects of Project Consolidate and the Inter-Governmental Relations institutional framework will require immediate attention to promote more effective cooperation governance between the three spheres of government. However, while the South African Constitution makes provision for national legislation to regulate inter-governmental relations, codification of inter-governmental relations in and of itself will not necessarily lead to dramatic improvements in performance, they argue. "This is because poor inter-governmental coordination and integration is frequently a problem of capacity and efficiency rather than a problem of procedure."

At the same time, this inter-relationship between different spheres of

government are always dynamic and evolve over time to accommodate changing social, economic and political relations. This means policy to support inter-governmental relations will need to be flexible for promoting greater cooperation. Mutual respect is likely to be of more significance than the legal technicalities provided for by the Constitution (Act 106 of 1996) and the Inter-governmental Relations Act of 2005.

According to Sindane and Tsibani, there is still considerable uncertainty over the precise responsibilities of the different spheres of government and the administrative echelon. In turn, this affects the capacity of government to deliver the necessary water and sanitation services.

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Creative and innovative approaches to change are required to generate effective solutions to the problems arising from inter-governmental relations and Project Consolidate. Planning efforts must move towards an approach whereby decisions taken are likely to achieve objectives, yet simultaneously leave open as many options as possible in the event of unanticipated future proceedings occurring under Project Consolidate. It is imperative for DWAF leadership to respond proactively to changes by making necessary adjustments to its internal functioning in the provinces.

Such proactive initiatives need to address four fundamental issues:

- ◆ The choice in the inter-governmental relations and Project Consolidate in which DWAF functions and the department's role in anticipating and recognising Project Consolidate and inter-governmental relation demand to new DWAF function and *modus operandi*;
- ◆ The relevance of existing DWAF work practices and procedures in terms of the position of new water and forestry business in pursuant with cooperative government principles whereby the political leadership role of MECs seems to be critical for ensuring provincial buy-in;
- ◆ The appropriateness of the existing institutional designs and structures at national and provincial levels to proactively respond to inter-governmental relations and Project Consolidate demands; and
- ◆ The capacity and capability of the leadership and administrative structures to meet the changing demands under the new service delivery paradigm in which the innovative and proactive role of MECs seems to be critical to support DWAF's water sector leadership role as a national department.

"It is assumed that this proactive approach to inter-governmental relations and Project Consolidate may transform DWAF into a legitimate agency for executing the new water sector leadership role with political buy-in from the provincial politicians," write the authors.

Thus said, it appears that the main challenges facing DWAF in achieving the required cooperative governance as set out in the Constitution and Inter-governmental Relations Act are the need to exercise imagination and ingenuity in unravelling the respective water and community forestry priorities, and designing, discovering and exercising options for accelerated services delivery as per national targets. "This needs to be done with full awareness of the



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complexity of political development under inter-governmental relations and Project Consolidate with due regard to the developmental agent role in the water and community forestry portfolios and implications hereto."

Responsible, innovative and accountable transformational leadership is therefore required to tackle the tasks ahead. People who are creative thinkers and who enjoy challenges. "Such innovative strategists must be able to reinvigorate the department so that it is fully equipped to cope with numerous challenges under inter-governmental relations and Project Consolidate," the authors maintain.

Sindane and Tsibani recommend that the MEC for Local Government and Housing (including Traditional Affairs in provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape) be a champion for water and community forestry services at provincial level. This means the MEC will be politically accountable for water and community forestry services delivery at provincial level. As such, provincial water and community forestry services structures must be coordinated and

consolidated under the leadership of the MEC for Local Government.

It is further recommended that water and community forestry services structures must submit a quarterly progress report to the MEC for Local Government. The linkages between present water and community forestry services structure and the provincial liaison committees are to be formalised by ensuring political agreements and protocols with MECs and Premiers.

Transformational leadership within DWAF and in the provinces will result in better water services and community forestry performance at provincial and local levels. DWAF as water sector leader is expected to ensure the enhancement of existing collaborative structures to ensure self-efficacy of various stakeholders towards developmental monitoring, reporting, evaluation and regulations.

This will reduce some of South Africa's developmental challenges on political leadership and DWAF senior managers to deliver sustainable basic water services, the authors conclude. 