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Implementing the National Development Plan? Lessons from Co-ordinating Grand Economic Policies in South Africa

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ABSTRACT *The formulation of grand economic policy strategies to promote growth, job creation, and industrial development has been a regular feature in South Africa's democratic transformation. The National Development Plan (NDP) is the latest in a line of such strategies dating back to the Reconstruction and Development Programme in 1994. While the creation of these strategies at various points in the country's transition has been indicative of the state's commitment to economic progress, implementing this commitment has been severely tested by the locus of authority, cohesion among and capacity of state institutions. In this paper, we critically examine the institutional arrangements behind the implementation of grand economic policy strategies in South Africa, observe how these produced variable implementation effectiveness across these initiatives, and consider the lessons for the implementation of the NDP. We will specifically focus on how 'co-ordination' was configured through the institutional arrangements, and look at how this shaped implementation.*

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to contribute to debate on the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP), by periodizing earlier efforts to co-ordinate grand economic policy implementation in South Africa. The literature on policy implementation has, since the seminal work, *Implementation*, by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), documented the closely interwoven relationship between implementation success and the efficacy of coordinated or joined-up action between various institutional actors involved in the process (see also O'Toole and Montjoy 1984; Pollitt 2003). Our aim is to critically assess the configuration and efficacy of the institutional arrangements behind previous efforts to co-ordinate grand economic policies. We believe that this will supplement previous work that has narrated the transition between various economic policy strategies over the past 20 years, including the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (AsgiSA), and the New Growth Path (NGP) (Gelb 2007; Kraak 2011; Moyo and Mamobolo 2014; Munslow and Fitzgerald 1997). It may also generate useful lessons to enable policy-makers and observers to assess the feasibility of the NDP's institutional arrangements and the likelihood of its successful if not smooth implementation.

The NDP was tabled in 2012 after many months of drafting, and contained a broad and multi-sectoral agenda of policy measures intended to guide long-range government planning. The Plan has been endorsed by South Africa's cabinet and has achieved a remarkable degree of consensus across the country's political spectrum, and among its international partners. Despite this, we contend that the prospect of the Plan being implemented, especially its economic policy proposals, will hinge on the presence of a cohesive and sustained political coalition within the ruling African National Congress (ANC), together with institutional arrangements capable of effectively aligning the interests of various economic policy actors within and outside the state. In view of this, the notion of 'implementing' the plan should not risk narrow interpretation as a technocratic exercise capable of singular authoritative execution.

Back to the future? Policy co-ordination and the NDP

We submit that the implementation of the NDP, as with earlier grand economic plans, will be conditioned by the coordination arrangements between policy actors within and outside the state. Responses to the NDP's economic and industrial proposals have varied. This includes generally sympathetic opinion to its private-sector-led growth and job creation approach, although in some instances critiquing the feasibility of the Plan's proposals;[1] to highly critical sentiment expressed by organized labour, which has attacked the ideological thrust of the plan as simply a reprisal of GEAR.[2] This diversity signifies the crucial role that coordinating the actions of key actors within and outside government will be to the Plan's implementation, and so it is instructive to revisit the arrangements behind and effectiveness of previous efforts to coordinate grand economic plans.

We will initially review the contents of grand economic policy strategies over the past 20 years to contextualize efforts by policy actors to coordinate a response to their objectives. By grand economic policies we refer to broad, highly publicized and multi-sectoral strategies to stimulate economic growth and development. The NDP is the latest in a line of such policies which has attracted analytical enquiry. For example, Kraak's (2011) analysis of horizontal coordination and government planning traces the evolution and efficacy of multi-sectoral coordinating efforts in the South African government through the experiences of the RDP, GEAR, and AsgiSA policies. He concludes that these efforts failed to engender coordinated action within the state bureaucracy and belied the intractable challenges of breaking through institutional silos, prompting the creation of new coordinating structures which ultimately yielded the NDP. This paper will revisit this narrative by focusing more extensively on characterizing the institutional arrangements behind these initiatives up to and after the introduction of the NGP.

Periodizing grand economic policy strategies

The RDP

The RDP White Paper covered a range of transformation priorities for South Africa's first democratically elected government, from service delivery to the restructuring of the state's public service. 'Meeting basic needs' underpinned the RDP's policy approach towards social and economic issues such as access to water, housing, electricity, health care, and education. Also included was job creation, land reform, transport, nutrition, a healthy environment, social welfare, and security as basic needs. Although the RDP addressed some aspects of economic policy, it did not style itself as a macroeconomic framework, and noted instead that another White Paper addressing macroeconomic policy should follow (Republic of South Africa 1994, 6). The RDP's economic policy recommendations focused primarily on stabilizing government expenditure, promoting growth, promoting trade and industrial policy to help reduce already high employment levels, protecting workers' rights, and formalizing collective bargaining. Nattrass observed that other long-standing economic issues such as the redistribution and nationalization of mineral rights, banks and monopoly industry, feature in the Freedom Charter as well as other ANC documents produced much earlier than the political transition in the 1990s (1994, 344–345). With the unbanning of the ANC and Nelson Mandela's release from prison, it quickly became clear that these positions could be potentially damaging to investor confidence and the growth prospects under democracy. She described the conflict as follows:

> The challenge facing the ANC was to come up with a consistent set of policies which promoted economic growth and job creation, alleviated white fears and boosted business confidence—while at the same time supporting redistribution, affirmative action, small business development and trade union demands. (Nattrass 1994, 346)

The party's 1990 Discussion Document on Economic Policy (DDEP) was the first attempt to negotiate this challenge. The resultant policy adopted a state-driven and interventionist stance, with nationalization still firmly on the agenda. The interests of organized labour were also well represented, including the ambitious goal of establishing a 'high employment, high wage and high productivity economy' (Nattrass 1994, 349). In addition, the DDEP argued that redistribution could fuel growth through putting money in the hands of the poor who would spend it on labour-intensive goods, boosting output and employment in the process (Kentridge 1993, 8 quoted in Marais 2011, 100). But, business and opposition parties questioned the soundness of this strategy. There was also considerable concern over the possibility of an economic collapse if redistribution happened too rapidly (Nattrass 1994, 351).

Further policy drafts produced from within the ANC over the next few years showed a gradual toning down of the language of redistribution (Marais 2011, 100), leading to the RDP base document and the subsequent RDP White Paper, the latter containing no mention of the more controversial policy options (e.g. the nationalization of mineral rights). What it did, however, retain was a commitment to workers' rights and the role of organized labour in wage negotiations. Indeed, Seekings and Nattrass observed that in contrast to the narrow characterization of GEAR as pro-business or containing 'pro-market carrots', it co-existed in a broader policy context which included 'sticks' such as labour market and new Competition legislation, in 1998 (2011, 346). Nattrass (1994) explains this change by referring to a diversity of interests within the ANC itself, including pro-labour and pro-business sentiments. Others have pointed to a more aggressive strategy employed by business, especially mining companies, to lobby top ANC officials to adopt a more pro-business approach (Terreblanche 2012). Marais noted that the ANC realized its policy options were relatively limited by the need to reintegrate the country into the global economy and conform to free market principles (2011, 111–112). These observations suggest that the perceived abrupt transition from the RDP to GEAR may be described as a secondary narrative in relation to what was an already evolving economic policy within the ANC between 1990 and 1994. This resulted in a number of proposals that were considered core to the Freedom Charter, such as the nationalization of mineral rights, banks and certain monopoly industries, being shelved if not abandoned entirely even before GEAR was published.

The RDP White Paper cautioned against increased government spending, committing instead to reducing the fiscal deficit, and suggesting that the RDP be funded primarily through the restructuring of existing national, provincial, and local budgets as well as donor funding. In this regard, it aimed to strike a balance and, perhaps in an effort to achieve consensus, spoke about an 'interdependence' between growth, reconstruction, and development (Republic of South Africa 1994, 6). Marais was more critical of this trajectory, describing the RDP base document of establishing a kind of '"comfort zone"' between conflicting forces and interests, by lending itself to different interpretations', leaving the door open for relatively conservative macroeconomic policy to follow (2001, 238). Blumenfeld points out that the policy represented vastly different things to different people—some thought of it was the blueprint for socialist transformation, while others saw it as a campaign to reduce poverty (1997, 69–70). This was both a strength and weakness of the policy, writing that '... it enabled all the major interest groups to unite in support of its broad aims, but it also obscured the lack of consensus about specific—and often controversial—policy options' (1997, 69–70). While the ANC's internal policy documents in the early 1990s had argued more strongly for 'growth through redistribution' rather than the other way around, this approach had already been tempered substantially by the time the RDP base document and White Paper were produced.

The GEAR

Published just two years after the RDP, GEAR is often considered to be a turning point for economic policy planning in South Africa, when ambitious redistribution targets gave way to a so-called neoliberal economic policy approach (Marais 2001, 2011). The government, however, argued that the two policies were to work in conjunction with one another—'the success of the RDP (was) dependent on the successful implementation of the GEAR' (Manuel 1997). The official government stance presented GEAR as a more specific and enabling macroeconomic strategy that could aid in the realization of the RDP's goals for social and economic transformation. It was hoped that GEAR would encourage investment by demonstrating that a 'credible' and 'orthodox' policy framework could be put in place (Gelb 2007, 21; Seekings and Nattrass 2006, 349). As such, it was not viewed as replacing the RDP but could serve as an instrument to achieve the RDP's objectives (Department of Finance 1996a).

The main thrust of GEAR seems to be its pursuit of a higher growth rate, since the projected 3% growth trajectory of the time would fail to address unemployment or provide the necessary resources for expanded social service delivery and the level of job creation that could produce 'an equitable distribution of income and wealth' (Department of Finance 1996a, 1). In an effort to produce higher growth rates, GEAR proposed a more ambitious fiscal deficit reduction programme, 'consistent' anti-inflationary monetary policy, further relaxation of exchange controls and tariff reductions, tax incentives to stimulate investment 'in competitive and labour absorbing projects', an exchange rate policy aimed at stabilizing the real exchange rate 'at a competitive level' and the privatization or establishment of public–private partnerships in certain state-owned enterprises (1996a, 2).

The document also advocated a more flexible labour market, with 'greater sensitivity in wage determination' to factors such as 'varying capital intensity, skills, regional circumstances and firm size', while also arguing for a kind of social compact that would encourage wage and price moderation to be established (1996a, 5). In short, moderation in wage hikes and better cooperation and trust between labour and business was to be encouraged in the interest of growth. These recommendations seemed to temper the more pro-labour path set out by the RDP and subsequent Labour Relations Act of 1995. Seekings and Nattrass, however, observe that this is one section of GEAR that was never truly implemented—something that might have hampered the policy's ability to achieve its targets (2006, 349–350).

In a section on 'social and sectoral' policies, GEAR also acknowledged several of the 'basic needs' addressed by the RDP. Quality education was highlighted as key for producing growth, employment and reducing income equality in the long term. Health-care, social grants, housing, land reform and infrastructure programmes are also mentioned as priorities in addressing poverty and improving lives, while some of these could represent opportunities for job creation (Department of Finance 1996a, 15–16). Ultimately, however, the policy implies that a more dramatic increase in spending in these areas could only happen after the predicted savings, investment and growth rates were delivered.

The AsgiSA

If GEAR presented a more specific macroeconomic framework to enable the RDP to meet its broader plans for redistribution and development, AsgiSA represented an acute revision in the ability of the South African economy to realize the RDP's ambitious developmental goals. As before, the focus continued to be on encouraging growth but this time a more detailed 'to-do' list of interventions was laid out, including infrastructure projects, a more targeted industrial policy, as well as a more realistic assessment of the constraints to growth. In his 2006 State of the Nation address, President Thabo Mbeki explicitly said that AsgiSA was not meant 'to cover all the elements of a comprehensive development plan', describing it as a 'limited set of interventions' meant as a catalyst for generating accelerated and shared growth and development (CDE 2007, 6).

Habib (2012) describes a gradual softening of the GEAR approach under President Thabo Mbeki, leading up to the formulation and adoption of the AsgiSA in 2006. He argues that Mbeki was aware of continued opposition to GEAR within the ANC's tripartite alliance with organized labour, especially after it failed to deliver the growth rates and reduction in poverty and unemployment it had promised. Gumede (2005) also noted this shift, but pointed out that Mbeki himself ascribed this change in direction to successful policies which had created a favourable climate for more expansionist policies. Whatever the motivation, some changes were clearly visible, particularly in the expansion in social grants and later in the more relaxed budget deficit target announced in 2003. Following these developments, AsgiSA placed a renewed emphasis on poverty reduction, as well as the creation of job opportunities as pathways out of poverty. The policy shifted the narrative of GEAR's drive for growth in a way that acknowledged the need for more specific types of growth—shared growth, to more effectively reduce poverty and inequality (The Presidency 2006, 3).

The positive outlook for growth probably helped bolster AsgiSA's ambitious goals, which included halving the poverty rate to below 1/6 (16.67%) of households and halving unemployment rates to about 15% by the year 2014. It also hoped to achieve economic growth of 4.5% per year over the first four years, and up to 6% between 2010 and 2014. In stating this 'shared' growth as a goal, the initiative also acknowledged some of the imbalances of past growth. Strong commodity prices, increasing consumer demand and capital inflows had boosted growth, but had also driven up the value of the Rand, which was problematic for local exporters. This made things even harder for manufacturers, who were already struggling to compete with cheap imports from nations like China and India (OECD 2008, 115). Most notably, however, the policy acknowledged that an estimated one third of households had not been able to benefit from improved economic performance, despite the positive impact that social grants had on poverty levels. Bringing this segment of the population into the mainstream economy, the policy hoped, would not only benefit them, but would also enhance the country's growth prospects (The Presidency 2006, 4).

The core of AsgiSA's diagnostic report outlined the biggest constraints to growth in the South African economy. These included currency volatility, infrastructure backlogs that increased the cost of transporting goods, a shortage of skilled labour which also drove up labour costs, limited competition and therefore limited investment opportunities, an excessive regulatory burden on small business, as well as a lack of organization, capacity and leadership in government structures (2006, 4–5). Education and skills development were also highlighted as crucial blockages to unlocking public and private sector investment through increasing the pool of trained graduates (2006, 9–10). This acknowledged that government's strategies in these areas had been lacking, and that the system was not delivering appropriate skills for the opportunities available.

An improved economic outlook with reasonably high growth rates injected AsgiSA with a sense of optimism and ambition. The initiative was presented as a kind of 'next phase' in economic policy, following on the fiscal austerity of GEAR, with the expansion of social grants, a big push in public works and infrastructure investment and a more strategic and interventionist industrial policy posture. The period between 2006 and 2010 turned out to be much more tumultuous than expected, however. AsgiSA ultimately had very little time to make its mark, as political upheaval within the ruling ANC and the global financial crisis derailed both the institutional and economic conditions in which it was to be implemented.

By Habib's assessment, President Jacob Zuma's rise to power in 2009 created some political momentum for leftist actors in the tripartite alliance whose support was crucial to his election campaign (2012, 95). His cabinet appointments following that year's national elections, however, exhibited a more inclusive approach, keeping Trevor Manuel as head of the new National Planning Commission despite his reputation as an ideological ally of Mbeki's, while also appointing candidates with ties to Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party in key positions within the government's economic cluster. Notably, this included Ebrahim Patel, who cut his political teeth in the labour movement before he was appointed to head the newly established Economic Development Department. The NGP, produced by this department in 2010, sought to create a more inclusive economy through labour-absorbing growth, reducing poverty and inequality while creating decent work opportunities for the unemployed. The 'two economies' narrative at the heart of AsgiSA no longer featured.

The NGP

The central objective of the NGP framework document was to put forward a job-intensive growth strategy for South Africa. It was not just 'new' in an attempt to distinguish it from its predecessors, but also because the global financial crisis had created new constraints to growth, necessitating a different approach. The joint goals of 'creating growth, reducing inequality and defeating poverty', the policy framework stated, can only be achieved by restructuring the economy (DED 2010, 1–2). If GEAR was intended to reduce the burden of debt and provide a stable, predictable policy environment for the new South Africa, and AsgiSA hoped to build on a good growth record following the global commodities boom, the NGP positioned itself by recognizing the difficulties of a global recession, but maintained a focus on social justice at home. It may be interesting to note that the NGP framework document references only the RDP and AsgiSA as its predecessors, with GEAR notably absent.

The language of the framework document therefore emphasized 'social equity' along with its development and growth goals, but listed job creation as the ultimate measure of success. The document acknowledged a process of consultation with cabinet ministers, provincial departments and 'other stakeholders' in its formulation, although the exact nature of these consultations and the issue of continuing consultation, as outlined under AsgiSA, were not addressed. It did, however, mention that its proposals were not set in stone and should be adaptable to changing economic circumstances, implying that there would be some room to manoeuvre in the future.

The NGP also considered the broader economic context in which it was drawn up, especially labour market conditions. It not only noted a lack of employment opportunities, especially for young people, but also identified a need for 'better' jobs. Quoting Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Survey for the third quarter of 2008, the framework pointed out that '... many workers had poorly paid, insecure and dead-end jobs ... half of all employed people earned less than R2500 a month and over a third earned under R1000 a month'. The framework categorized its priorities according to a short-, medium- and long-term vision—state employment schemes and targeted subsidies in the short term, developing labour-absorbing activities in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors in the medium term, while still encouraging knowledge- and capital-intensive development so that the economy remained competitive in the long term.

The NGP stated that it does not expect any 'single policy instrument' to deliver its vision of employment intensive growth and development. The complete package of policy interventions, then, covered a wide range of instruments. The macroeconomic package included inflation targeting (for low, stable inflation), managing exchange rate competitiveness by purchasing foreign currency flowing into the country, restrained but more focused fiscal policy that also eliminated wastage and corruption (DED 2010, 16). The proposed microeconomic interventions were also extensive, and included industrial policy action plans, the need for quality education and skills development, effective competition policy, small enterprise development, black economic empowerment and technology (research and development infrastructure and extending access to communication technology, for instance)—all of which were strategies referenced in or instituted under AsgiSA.

Along with the macro- and microeconomic elements, the social compacts mentioned earlier form a third pillar to the NGP, while 'progressive taxation and support for the social wage' and a focus on service delivery for poor households (arguably also a continuation of past policies) also aim to address ‘excessive’ inequality between top and bottom wage earners. In a sense, the NGP is every bit as wide-ranging as AsgiSA in terms of the ground that it covered, but with a more singular focus on job creation and social equity. It is less specific on the mechanisms required to achieve these goals, however, with the exception of some very ambitious plans for reaching a compromise between the interests of business and labour. The NGP framework document therefore not only emphasized social equity, of the need to reduce poverty and inequality, or of job creation as a means to address these issues, but added the need for decent work opportunities to this agenda as well—hoping to protect workers and ensure they were truly better off after gaining employment.

The NGP anticipated a roughly 5 million jobs created by 2020, and a reduction in unemployment by 10 percentage points from 25% to 15%. It acknowledged the need for growth between 4% and 7% per annum, but specifically linked this target to growth with an employment intensity between 0.5% and 0.8%. The main ‘jobs drivers’ identified to achieve these goals included investing in public infrastructure, also a key element of AsgiSA, targeting labour-absorbing activities such as agriculture, manufacturing and mining-related value chains, as well as exploiting opportunities in the knowledge and green economies. Rural development initiatives and the so-called social economy, including non-governmental organizations, are also mentioned as presenting employment growth potential. The NGP combined the interventionist industrial policy that took off under AsgiSA, in the form of Industrial Policy Action Plans, with its own ambitions for a social accord between labour and business.

Grand economic policy co-ordination and institutional politics

If it can be argued that the shift from the RDP to GEAR, based on an analysis of their comparable policy contents and intent, represented an exaggerated disjuncture, then what might explain the emergence of the disjuncture narrative? The institutional conditions under which the RDP and GEAR emerged, which was characterized by an urgency to demonstrate policy action and substantial transformation within the state itself, provides a useful explanation. The state’s response to the RDP was meant to be steered by a specific coordinating Ministry responsible for championing the initiative under the direction of a ‘Minister without Portfolio’, Jay Naidoo. The White Paper described the Minister without Portfolio as assuming a lead role in the implementation of the RDP, as well as having the power to allocate monies appropriated to an RDP fund to finance specific projects and initiatives in line with the policy; although the administration of the fund itself fell under the ambit of the National Treasury (Republic of South Africa 1994, 12–13). The Minister also enjoyed the authority to convene task teams to enable coordination of RDP-related activities between national departments, provincial departments, and municipalities.

Since the RDP’s goals stretched over the portfolios of several national departments, including housing, water, agriculture, education, health, and welfare, questions were raised about the precise role that the RDP ministry was meant to play. Was it a 'super-ministry', corralling various line departments under its mandate? (Blumenfeld 1997, 74) This impression was clearly problematic for Minister Naidoo himself, and rendered his role potentially untenable, as he recounts in his memoir: some ministers saw the RDP Fund as an 'unnecessary step where they had to submit proposals and business plans and justify to a colleague why their programmes met the criteria of the RDP' (Naidoo 2010, 241). He added that the level of authority that he held in relation to his ministerial colleagues also raised the ire of some who would remark: 'well, why should I come to the RDP Committee and have to negotiate this with you' (Naidoo 2010, 237). Furthermore, the idea that line departments would contribute to and receive funding back from the RDP Fund, administrated through the National Treasury, to carry out RDP-approved projects—was also characterized as a counterproductive 'game of musical chairs' (Nattrass 1995 in Blumenfeld 1997, 75).

There were clear institutional limits to the role and influence of the RDP Ministry, which was meant to perform a specific 'coordinating' function, to vet, persuade, and influence larger, more focused, better resourced and more permanent line departments, or as Naidoo put it, the 'extent to which the RDP Ministry would be allowed to assert its role . . . ' over other ministries (2010, 239); something which Kraak notes it was unable to do: 'the RDP Ministry . . . failed to assert a level of collective authority higher than that exercised by individual line-function Ministries' (2011, 351). Moreover, the boundaries between the functional jurisdiction of line departments and the coordinating role of the RDP Ministry in vetting and approving departmental initiatives and business plans intended to give effect to the RDP's goals were clearly blurred. This effectively meant that ministers and their departments had to surrender some of, or at the very least subject to external scrutiny, their control over human resource and financial planning to the RDP Ministry; or as Munslow and Fitzgerald (1997, 48) observe, the RDP Ministry had to carry out its activities 'on the turf of other forces and players . . . '. What made this even more problematic was the fact that this was taking place in the very early stages of post-apartheid public sector restructuring:

> The rapid delivery of the RDP vision was extremely difficult to achieve as it . . . required a policy and institutional commitment to a more co-ordinated, integrated, and co-operative governance approach at the same time that new political incumbents were wrestling of governmental machineries and mastering sectoral briefs. (1997, 43)

With a relatively small staff contingent, no clear status as a 'super-ministry' authorized to give orders and monitor delivery, and little executive power of its own, support for the RDP Ministry quickly waned. The closure of the RDP office in 1996 was presented not so much as the end of its mandate, but rather as a relocation of its responsibilities and budgetary allocations to line departments (Department of Finance 1996b). Although the institutional framework for the RDP was largely dissolved, the RDP White Paper itself still features in policy discussions and assessments of government's transformation and service delivery records, particularly around basic needs such as access to water and housing (DPME 2013).

The institutional arrangements behind GEAR differed markedly from the experience of the RDP Ministry, although it produced its own institutional politics and co-ordination tensions that would echo in succeeding years and plans. GEAR dispensed with the creation of auxiliary coordinating structures within the state by being spearheaded by key ministerial actors in Cabinet and the bureaucracy, led by the Ministry of Finance and the National Treasury. Although GEAR spoke of the need for 'effective coordination of economic policy at Cabinet level' (Department of Finance 1996a, 22), the pre-eminence of the Treasury in this process was clear. What GEAR seemed to do more successfully, compared to the RDP, was to identify implementing agencies with clear and authoritative mandates in the National Treasury and Reserve Bank. For instance, Gelb (2007, 21–22) highlights the successful reduction of the budget deficit as 'the ... policy success story' coming out of GEAR, and cites the leadership of the 'powerful' National Treasury with this accomplishment. Kraak (2011, 352) also associates GEAR with the 'dominance of the Treasury'. This strategy, along with an improvement in tax collection, eventually allowed for a gradual expansion of social spending, both on services such as health and education, and by directly supplementing incomes through social grants.

The formulation of GEAR was highly restricted and appeared to catch key stakeholders in the ANC's alliance on the back foot (Marais 2011, 112). Representatives from the departments of finance, labour, and trade and industry were part of the process, coordinated by Iraj Abedien and André Roux (Masiza and Ngqungwana 2001, 7). Joel Netshitenze of the ANC would later describe it as a kind of 'self-imposed' structural adjustment policy (2004 in Gumede 2005, 88). Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and Finance Minister Trevor Manuel also played key roles in the development and implementation of GEAR, with Manuel even branding the framework as 'non-negotiable' after it had been drawn up (Marais 2011, 112). It is also worth noting that the RDP office had already commissioned its own economic policy process at the time, dubbed the national growth and development strategy, but was excluded from the formulation of GEAR and ultimately sidelined in favour of the latter (Masiza and Ngqungwana 2001, 7) Marais (2011, 404) suggests that this significantly changed the function of the RDP, making it more of a political symbol, albeit a powerful one, than preferred government policy. In this sense, it embodied the contradictions of the post-apartheid state; of 'concessions', 'trade-offs' to ensure stability which primarily favoured capital; and the challenge of reconciling the past (e.g. Freedom Charter) with the post-apartheid realities of the present.

The institutional authority and exclusive formulation behind GEAR, which in one sense facilitated co-ordination in contrast to the RDP, in another sense produced tensions and damaged co-ordination with other economic policy stakeholders. An example of this is the muted input of the National Economic, Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), a creature of the RDP White Paper, whose composition was to include representatives from organized labour, business, and the state, along with other stakeholders to consult, 'co-ordinate' and negotiate on issues relating to economic, labour, and development issues pertaining to the RDP (Republic of South Africa 1994, 27, 39). In view of the crucial role envisioned for NEDLAC, it is remarkable that GEAR was never put before this body, possibly because of the anticipated opposition from organized labour. Instead, trade unions chose to contest GEAR's proposals within the structures of the ANC's tripartite alliance (Seekings and Nattrass 2011, 347). Moreover, it is noteworthy that both labour and business are associated with encouraging investment and managing or tempering wage determination processes. Indeed, they are counted among 'key constituencies' in forging a macroeconomic regime (Department of Finance 1996a, 22). Curiously, the role of NEDLAC in bringing these groupings together is acknowledged through references to some matters under negotiation in the forum, despite GEAR never having been submitted to the forum for consideration.

GEAR succeeded in alienating and damaging coordinating relationships with key economic policy stakeholders, if not within, but outside the boundaries of NEDLAC. COSATU described GEAR as 'unworkable and unwinnable' (Marais 2011, 112). This has had ripple effects to this day, with the National Union of Metalworkers criticizing the NDP on the basis that it is unlikely 'to deal effectively with the often mentioned challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality' and that it lacks 'critical evaluation of policies pursued since 1994'—a veiled reference to the disappointment that GEAR engendered (Gina 2013). Some have argued that GEAR's performance did not solely depend on the government's capacity to implement the policy, but on its ability to secure buy-in from its alliance partners and the business community (Masiza and Ngqungwana 2001, 15). GEAR achieved little in coordinating the interests of business and labour, in comparison to its successful reduction of the budget deficit; but perhaps because it was rather improbably attempting to secure buy-in from organized labour while declaring the policy to be 'non-negotiable' (2001, 15). Moreover, while the RDP was constructed after lengthy consultation and debate and sought to entrench community participation and widespread consultation in service delivery and policy-making, GEAR was a clear example of top-down policy-making (Gelb 1999, 16–17 in Marais 2011, 112)

In what might be described as a shifting and easing of the top-down approach to coordinating economic and industrial policy under GEAR, AsgiSA emerged in an environment in which authoritative policy co-ordination had drifted to the centre, in the office of the Presidency; and had also become consolidated and formalized in the intervening years through the creation of specialized coordinating mechanisms ('clusters') in the state (Kraak 2011, 353). In this context, AsgiSA may be described as a centrally orchestrated but more diffuse approach to coordinating economic and industrial initiatives across various government departments, in which the policy resembled more of a clearinghouse which sought to foster cross-sectoral synergy across existing government initiatives.

AsgiSA placed a renewed emphasis on the reduction of poverty, as well as the creation of job opportunities as pathways out of poverty. However, the policy shifted the narrative of GEAR's drive for growth in a way that acknowledged the need for more specific types of growth—shared growth, to enable a more robust attack on poverty and inequality (The Presidency 2006, 3). This approach to growth was adopted in an atmosphere marked by a more inclusive style of policy dialogue. Gumede (2005) cites the Growth and Jobs Summit in 2003 as a sign of this. Not only did this contribute to a less rigid application of GEAR targets and principles, he argues, but it could be seen as a step towards widening government consultation on economic policy, given its co-ordination by NEDLAC.

A more inclusive approach to economic policy co-ordination was not, however, the only factor contributing to the rise of AsgiSA, which given the large passage of time between this initiative and GEAR, had enabled the state to consolidate and review the effectiveness of its own institutional capacity to drive and achieve coordinated policy outcomes. Alan Hirsch, chief director in the Presidency's Policy Coordination and Advisory Services at the time, revealingly described AsgiSA as 'a process of communicating, monitoring, evaluating, reporting and intervening where necessary to clear the blockages in the system' (CDE 2007, 3). He elsewhere described the initiative as aiming to 'foster coordination and implementation of prioritized programmes', and as a 'modality for prioritizing and pursuing implementation' (Hirsch 2006). Evidently the state's coordinating capacity left a lot to be desired, with AsgiSA being viewed as a catalyst to redouble efforts at rolling out state-led investments across a variety of key areas such as physical infrastructure, enterprise and skills development, and employment creation. Plans for expanding infrastructure investment, for instance, required budget allocations from the National Treasury, as well as effective coordination between the national, provincial, and local spheres of government. The many infrastructure projects listed under AsgiSA included every province, from the Square Kilometer Array in the Northern Cape to the Johannesburg International Airport Logistics Hub. These were referred to as 'infrastructure projects with major AsgiSA impact' (The Presidency 2006, 6–8).

AsgiSA also seemed to spark renewed interest in existing sector-specific policies such as the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI's) National Industrial Policy Framework (NIPF). The NIPF itself stated that it 'adopts and extends the same methodology as AsgiSA' and that it 'has a fundamental role to play' in realizing the latter's goals (DTI 2007, 3, 9). Moreover, it was observed that AsgiSA may have been instrumental in 'focus(ing) the energy of government and its partners' through strategies such as the NIPF (The Presidency 2006, 8). AsgiSA also emphasized existing activities being carried out by the DTI, including developing procedures for government and state-owned enterprises to procure goods and services from small-scale, black-owned business. Furthermore, it also aimed to facilitate access to funding by small businesses through bodies such as the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and the National Empowerment Fund's venture fund.

In the education sector, AsgiSA highlighted a number of existing programmes, such as the Dinaledi programme (established in 2005) which aimed to increase the number of science and maths graduates, and the Quality Improvement, Development Support and Upliftment Programme programme, which sought to improve literacy and numeracy levels in primary education. Existing skills-focused initiatives of the Development Bank of South Africa and the Umsobomvu Youth Trust were also listed, along with the second phase of the National Skills Development Strategy, launched in 2001 (The Presidency 2006, 9–10).

A new coordinating structure convened by AsgiSA focused on skills and capacity development, which crosscut and underpinned the initiative's sector-specific prioritization. The Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) was created in the form of a committee led by the Deputy President and consisting of national ministers, business, labour, education, and training providers. The programme aimed to address skills shortages through bolstering training institutions, adjusting immigration requirements to attract skilled foreign nationals or encouraging retired professionals to re-enter the labour market. JIPSA functioned as a task team from 2006 to 2010, after which the Presidency issued a final report on its progress and possibilities for addressing skills shortages in the future. The report pointed to the need for continued leadership and coordination from the central government in addressing these issues. In some cases, initiatives already existed, but communication between government departments needed to improve (The Presidency 2010, 17). Clearly, there had been difficulties bringing different parties from business, labour, government, and educational institutions together, with leadership from the centre and from within the various spheres involved in the process proving critical for overcoming 'initial mistrust' and establishing 'commitment to serious collaborative action ... ' (2010, 48).

The fortunes of AsgiSA could be said to have been acutely affected by co-ordination politics compared to differences in policy substance, given the aftermath of the ANC's 2007 Polokwane National Elective Conference. This conference represented a platform for leadership battles within the ruling party and its alliance partners to play out. Habib suggests that disagreement over the impact of GEAR, along with President Mbeki's leadership style, laid the groundwork for his eventual ousting as head of the ANC at the conference (2012, 93). Moreover, it is also worth noting that Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, whose office was tasked with driving the implementation of AsgiSA, resigned along with a number of cabinet members when President Thabo Mbeki was eventually recalled by the ANC in 2008. She was replaced by ANC National Chairperson Baleka Mbete, who produced the final AsgiSA progress report in April 2009, which reported on the progress made in 2008. Despite the effect of these seismic shifts in the ruling ANC, the resolutions adopted at the ANC's Polokwane Conference showed little evidence of drastic policy change. The economic policy recommendations continued to reflect AsgiSA's terminology and orientation. Removing obstacles in the way of 'accelerating shared economic growth', for instance, as well as state-led infrastructure investment, are mentioned as priorities (ANC 2007).

The NGP was a product of a re-alignment in economic policy co-ordination. In his speech announcing the new cabinet, President Zuma (2009) stated that a new Department of Economic Development (DED) would be focused on economic policy-making, while certain 'implementation functions will remain with the Department of Trade and Industry'. The DED, which produced the NGP, had several government agencies transferred to it from the existing DTI—the Competition Commission, the Competition Tribunal and the International Trade Administration Commission, the IDC, and the Small Enterprise Finance Agency.

According to a Parliamentary Committee report, the DED had originally intended to introduce three Bills before Parliament—the Competition Amendment Bill, International Trade and Administration Amendment Bill and the Infrastructure Development Bill. However, only the Infrastructure Development Bill was eventually introduced and passed by the National Assembly on 25 February 2014 (PMG 2014). The Bill is aimed at fast-tracking priority infrastructure projects, giving the Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission the legal standing to designate strategic projects and appoint steering committees to drive them ('Department of Economic Development Defends Its Relevance', 2014). The department also managed to conclude five cross-cutting social accords, namely the Skills Development, Basic Education, Local Procurement, Green Economy and Youth Employment Accords, although the proposed accord on wage moderation is conspicuously absent from this list (PMG 2014). These accords attempt to bring together various role players to ensure their commitment to common objectives.

The experience of the RDP Ministry revealed the perils of introducing a new ministry to implement specific policy initiatives. The introduction of the DED seems to have caused ructions and confusion among the economic policy cluster of ministries. For example, Mandy Rossouw opined in early 2010 that a failure to clarify the respective roles of the Finance Minister and Minister of Economic Development had adversely effected the government's budget preparation and sown confusion about which Ministry was to assume leadership over macroeconomic policy (*Mail and Guardian*). A year later, Mzukisi Qobo (2011) opined that the DED should not have been created in the first place, and that its existence stemmed from 'political jostling' at the ANC's Polokwane Conference which saw ANC-allied unions assert themselves more aggressively. The consequences of the DED's creation, Qobo writes, has created duplication between it and the DTI. He also supports the argument that the government's economic cluster of ministries lacks authoritative steering by a lead Ministry, which he believes should reside with the Treasury. Leading up to the 2014 General Elections, some reports even suggested that the DED may be eliminated from the new cabinet after having to 'fight for space alongside bigger and more influential departments, the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry' (Magubane, 2014). Both the department and Minister ultimately survived the 2014 General Elections.

The consequence of this institutional politics among the economic ministries appears to have been detrimental to the NGP's fortunes. For instance, the annual budget speeches delivered by the former Minister of Finance, Pravin Gordhan, appears to show a gradual shift in emphasis from the NGP to the NDP between 2010 and 2014. After the draft NDP was produced in 2011, the two plans are mentioned in conjunction with one another in the 2012 budget speech, alluding to the need for both short- and long-term strategies (Gordhan 2012, 7). A year later, the NGP is characterized as 'supporting' the NDP

(Gordhan 2013, 6). By 2014 there is no direct mention of the NGP, while the NDP is referenced repeatedly (Gordhan 2014). The budget speech may not be a catchall indicator of the plan's political profile, but it at least gives an indication of the emphasis (or lack thereof) that the National Treasury wants to place, publicly, on a particular strategy. In this sense, the NGP seems to have lost its initially high political profile after the production of the NDP.

Grand economic policy co-ordination and implications for the NDP

In this section, we will attempt to define and categorize the motive behind and character of coordination in the RDP, GEAR, AsgiSA, and the NGP, in an effort to draw out some implications for the NDP's implementation. The intention of our definitional scheme, outlined in Table 1, is to describe the impetus behind and practical conditions under which these grand economic policies were coordinated, and how this affected their implementation. Our characterization also draws on observations from the policy implementation literature, which generally describe institutional arrangements to co-ordinate policy as spanning a continuum from more hierarchical and rule-ordered to more decentralized and voluntary collaborations. For example, Pollitt (2003, 37, 40, 42) distinguishes between 'looser' forms of co-ordination in which designated coordinating institutions monitor the alignment of discretionary activities carried out by their peers, which can retain an ethos of mutual trust and partnership, to increasingly 'tighter' arrangements which hierarchically bind together institutions through common operational protocols. The benefits of looser forms of co-ordination for facilitating the commitment of individual institutions might, however, come at a cost of clear lines of accountability. In an effort to re-assert control over the implementation process, which, in the wake of the early implementation literature saw a degeneration of co-ordination by institutional vested interests (see Pressman and Wildavsky 1973). Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983, 27) advocated for a 'hierarchical integration' within and among implementing institutions working in joined-up policy areas. Peters (1998, 296–299) also recognizes a hierarchical versus more decentralized, negotiated/bargained approaches to co-ordination, but notes that the conditions under which these approaches are employed will determine their efficacy. These include the complexity of a policy issue or area; mutually clear policy mandates

Table 1. Characterizing Policy Co-ordination in Grand Economic Policy Strategies

Grand economic policy strategies	Approach to policy co-ordination	
RDP	Symbolic	Experimental
GEAR	Pragmatic	Authoritative
AsgiSA	Catalytic	Diffuse
NGP	Opportunistic	Redundant

Source: authors' interpretation of co-ordination motive and character (i.e. what to do); and common or compatible policy values and operational logics between institutions (i.e. we would describe this as how to approach what to do, and how to do it).

In the case of the RDP, the approach to co-ordination might be described as symbolic and experimental; this given the unchartered policy territory embarked upon by a nascent government trying to assert control over an estranged and entrenched bureaucracy, coupled with the visionary appeal of the RDP to confront enormous challenges of societal transformation. The formal designation of a coordinating ministry in the RDP office was symbolic in its physical representation of the commitment and compliance required of every government ministry towards the aims of the programme, though it ultimately proved experimental in being overwhelmed and effectively sidelined by the efforts of individual ministries to renew and re-assert themselves by transforming their core business and modus operandi in a post-apartheid environment. The experiment of an RDP ministry to vet and co-ordinate the activities of state institutions proved unworkable and, according to some, was rendered redundant.

GEAR's approach to policy co-ordination, in contrast to the RDP, may be described as pragmatic and authoritative. In the midst of the RDP's visionary blueprint, GEAR adopted a more restricted policy focus on creating the economic conditions to enable reconstruction and development. Moreover, the harder edged fiscal prudence that its advocates hoped to achieve was more successfully pursued by locating coordinating responsibility within an existing ministry which enjoyed authoritative standing in Cabinet, and whose core business corresponded with the aims of GEAR. This approach did, however, incur a trade-off by alienating key policy stakeholders in organized labour which produced tensions within the ANC alliance that reverberate to this day.

The approach to co-ordination adopted by AsgiSA may be described as catalytic yet diffuse, which ultimately fell prey to leadership and associated institutional changes in the ANC and government. The lengthy period between GEAR and AsgiSA had witnessed the consolidation of state institutional structures and a greater emphasis on facilitating the collective efforts of individual departments towards enhancing the impact of government policies (e.g. clusters). Ultimately, although the objective of AsgiSA was to reenergize the government's collective policy commitment to economic growth, its committee-like coordinating structure not only resulted in individual departments being left to their own devices, but also lacked resilience when confronted with political ructions in the ANC in the aftermath of its 2007 Elective Conference.

The creation of the NGP benefited from the leadership changes resulting from a new ANC administration elected in 2009, and its approach to coordination can therefore be described as opportunistic. The creation of a new Department of Economic Development presented an opportunity for the ANC's labour constituency to pursue a growth and development strategy underpinned by social equity and decent work. Despite its continued existence, the DED's creation has been an uneasy fit among the pre-existing economics line ministries resulting in claims that it has created confusion and redundancy in macroeconomic and industrial policy setting. The DED can in some part be likened to the RDP Ministry, although the latter was not a line ministry. Despite the inherent difficulties experienced by coordinating ministries in trying to enforce their will and compliance on their bigger and more powerful line ministry counterparts, it could be said that the RDP Ministry was at least equipped with a weak set of teeth, whereas the DED appears to have had no teeth at all in driving economic and industrial policy in the face of more powerful and entrenched ministerial counterparts. This has been detrimental to the fortunes of the NGP which some argue has been eclipsed by the NDP's proposals on economic and industrial policy, which differ from the NGP on matters such as labour market reform and growing employment (Kaplan 2013).

Conclusion

We argued in the introduction that the prospects for the implementation of the NDP, especially its economic policy proposals, will hinge on the presence of a cohesive and sustained political coalition within the ANC, together with institutional arrangements capable of reconciling divergent interests among economic policy actors within and outside the state. What can we learn from previous efforts to co-ordinate the implementation of grand economic policy strategies, and are these conditions evident? Firstly, the NDP appears similar to the RDP in its scope and symbolic value, and has attracted widespread societal support from opposition political parties, business and non-governmental sectors. However, unlike the RDP, the NDP has sparked divisions within the ANC alliance exposing old wounds from the experience of GEAR, with COSATU criticizing the Plan's economic policy proposals (Mabona 2013). The enabling but ultimately fleeting political coalition that paved the way for AsgiSA and the NGP will need to be not only more enduring but also replicate the cohesion that built and sustained support for the RDP, before this was damaged by the introduction of GEAR.

Secondly, the approach to coordinating the implementation of the NDP will necessitate institutional arrangements that avoid the pitfalls of previous plans by striking a balance between authoritative steering and line ministry ownership. Similar to the RDP, the drafting of the NDP was overseen by a new executive structure based in the Presidency, overseen by a Cabinet minister, and charged with a specific coordinating role: the National Planning Commission. According to the Green Paper on National Strategic Planning, the Commission appears to shoulder some of the same expectations as the RDP Ministry, which, as with the latter, will likely expose it to claims of intrusiveness by line ministries. This might be especially problematic in the Commission's case given that it sees itself as an institution both within and apart from government in offering an independent perspective 'unencumbered by the structures and systems of government and bureaucracy' (Government Gazette 2010, 12) The Commission, however, also styles itself as an insider, 'focusing government towards the achievement of clear goals and ensuring synergy across sectors and spheres'; and more revealingly, it is expected to be backed by a 'well organized and technically capable institutional machinery infused with a high degree of authority and leverage' (The Presidency 2009, 25). Moreover, apart from conducting research, the Commission is also expected to 'align planning capacities across government—including by ensuring common methodologies, integrity of data systems and complementarities of planning activities and projects' (2009, 26).

Perhaps sensitive to the viability of this role, the Revised Green Paper adopts a less interventionist stance around the Commission's coordinating role, namely line ministries, including 'interact[ing] with government to understand the capabilities, resource constraints, potential and limitations of what is possible and achievable in a specific timeframe' (Government Gazette 2010, 12). It may also be telling that the Revised Green Paper does not see the need to formalize its existence and role in a government white paper, 'given that there will be a degree of "learning by doing" in the establishment of the Commission and in the development of a vision and long term strategic plan … ' (2010, 14). The role of the NPC as a grand economic planning institutional coordinator ultimately appears more precarious than the RDP Ministry, although the Commission itself seems to acknowledge this, perhaps with the benefit of hindsight. It does not possess the short-term reactive ministerial authority of the Treasury, namely GEAR, but its acknowledgement of this may prove to be a virtue. Moreover, the long-term implementation window outlined in the NDP along with the permanent status granted to the Commission as a special purpose institutional vehicle, might enable it to avoid the diffuse and opportunistic weaknesses of AsgiSA and the NGP.

Notes

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1. Concerns were expressed about South Africa's underlying business competitiveness environment to achieve jobs growth (see KPMG 2012); and economist Phillipe Burger (2012) has questioned the feasibility of the NDP's projected export-led growth given South Africa's international wage competitiveness and productivity.
2. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has expressed concern about the Plan's prospects for job creation through dampening wage growth; ignoring previous government plans such as the NGP and the Industrial Policy Action Plan; and renewing GEAR's fiscal conservatism (see COSATU 2013; Taylor 2013).

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