



Concept
discussion document
on the **Development of a
Framework for Coalition
Governments**

*Working together to build strong and resilient
democratic institutions to serve the people*

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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A. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The year 2024 marks 30 years of Freedom and Democracy, and 28 years since the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was adopted in 1996.

Since 1994, we have as a nation, through Parliament, the Executive and the Judiciary, been working on building a stable constitutional democracy that works for the people.

We continue to evolve and are learning lessons on how best we can change legislation to be responsive to the conditions of the people.

An illustration of this is the recent passing of the 18th amendment of the Constitution to recognise South African Sign Language as one of the official languages of the Republic of South Africa.

Since the introduction of the White Paper on local government and the democratic local government in 2000, we are observing instability in this sphere of government, which is attributed to a variety of reasons. Amongst others, these include a deficit in required capacity, financial instability and recently loosely arranged coalition governments.

The current instability in municipalities has been ongoing since the 2016 and 2021 local government elections, which saw the emergence of a number of Hung Councils, with no majority political party. As of May 2023, it was noted that there are 81 Hung Council across the country and it is likely that this may ultimately affect national and provincial government.

With South Africa due to hold general elections in 2024, it is opportune to create space for a National Dialogue on developing a framework for coalition governments, while we focus on dealing with the immediate challenges in Local Government. This framework must assist in ensuring that we uphold democracy and its emphasis on the majority rule.

The issue of coalitions is part of the discussion on improving the quality of our democracy. While working towards the dialogue, Government will continue to review the negative impact of dysfunctional coalition arrangements, and its effect on service delivery.

To this end, on 25 May 2023, Deputy President Mashatile committed to the convening of the National Dialogue, working with the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and Political Parties in Parliament.

In the main, the intention of the National Dialogue is to agree on the set of principles that will make coalitions work in the interest of the greater good and in a change-oriented manner. These principles are going to be central in bringing about consensus on how coalition governments should function, to ensure that we continue to build a strong and stable democracy in our country.

B. DISCUSSION

1. Principles for the Framework for coalition governments

Based on the supreme law of the land, the framework that will emerge from the National Dialogue on Coalition Governments will be anchored on the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa that aims to:

- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights.
- Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person.
- Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people, and in which every citizen is equally protected by law.
- Build a united and democratic South Africa that is able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

Taking from the above foundational elements of the Constitution in contributing to the debate of the National Dialogue, the following six principles are deposited to guide the framework for the dialogue between and among parties:

- **Firstly**, putting the people first by making them the tenants of our value system in the formation of governments. In the spirit of Batho Pele, the

measurement of the performance of coalitions must be about what we have done to improve the lives of the people.

- **Second**, coalition governments must be committed to combating poverty and deprivation, as well as building a growing and inclusive economy and must report regularly, by providing evidence on poverty reduction, growing the economy, and including the majority in the mainstream economy.
- **Third**, coalition governments must contribute toward building a prosperous society in which people have access to land for productive purposes and are meaningfully participating in the economy.
- **Fourth**, coalition governments must be committed to building a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, united, and prosperous society.
- **Fifth**, a coalition government should be bound together by a commitment to Good Governance, with no tolerance for corruption!
- **Sixth**, the party that has won the largest votes should be allowed to lead the coalition, and the executive positions should be allocated proportionally to the votes obtained by the coalition partners.

The above principles are adding to the base of existing knowledge that has been crafted from a series of discussions amongst political parties, which is illustrated but no limited to the following:

Democratic Alliance	United Democratic Movement	Vryheidsfront Plus	Action SA
<p>The Democratic Alliance, in response to instability in coalition governments, has drafted Bills that seek to aid in creating more cohesive coalition governments.</p>	<p>The United Democratic Movement has at times led coalition discussions between opposition parties and engaged with the IEC through the Forum of Political Parties.</p>	<p>The Vryheidsfront Plus have pledged their commitment to coalitions based on nation building, accountability and workability to foster cohesive coalitions.</p>	<p>Action SA has done work internally to re-evaluate their approach to coalition governments in an effort to create more cohesive coalitions.</p>

Various academic and research institutions have also provided insights on the importance of challenges posed by the lack of a framework for coalition governments. Notable is the work produced by the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA), the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), the Dullah Omar Institute for Constitutional Law, Governance and Human Rights and IMEA to mention a few.

What is missing in the debate is a joint discussion amongst political parties, citizens based on their lived experiences in municipalities with coalition governments, as well as civil society including traditional leaders, inter-faith leaders, labour and business. The National Dialogue is an attempt to close this existing gap, and have an agreement amongst all on a framework for Coalition Governments.

2. The Rationale for a Framework for a Coalition Government

The development of a coherent framework for Coalition Governments is part of the social compacts in the nation-building project.

The instability that is experienced at the local sphere of government is affecting the nation-building project. If it is not responded to coherently, it will render the state unworkable and unable to deliver on its mandate.

Hence, it is proposed that the National Dialogue must be viewed as part of nation-building because the nation-building project is fundamentally about mainstreaming social inclusion and nation formation in development plans and initiatives nationally, regionally, and locally.

Further, there is a need for all of us to have a different type of dialogue, to move beyond rhetoric, and to focus more on tangible outcomes in the short, medium, and longer term.

Despite the difficulties we face, as a mature, sound, and stable democracy, we will always fight to protect our democracy and ensure a sustainable economy for all.

3. Comparative analysis on Coalition Governments globally

There are mixed records of accomplishments on Coalition Governments. The following are countries where coalitions have worked:

- Kenya,
- Germany,
- Belgium,
- Austria,
- Malaysia,
- Japan,
- The Netherlands, and
- Denmark.

The specific socio-political culture and institutional conditions in these countries make it possible for coalitions to guarantee continuity of socio-economic development and service delivery, regardless of the dynamics in politics.

Further, the professionalisation of public administration and the insulation of civil servants or public servants from political upheavals prevents these governments from being dysfunctional.

Other factors include the level of economic development, the strength of democratic institutions and the degree of national consensus on how the country moves forward (e.g. post-war German consensus and social democracy in the Scandinavians countries).

There is another set of countries where coalitions have been disastrous for national development. This is prevalent in countries undergoing democratic transitions and structural transformation in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In these countries Coalition Governments have been synonymous with instability and fragmentation that has not been good for national reconstruction, socio-economic development and structural transformation.

However, a developmental and transformative agenda requires stable and cohesive governments that have great synergy with civil society and other social partners. For instance, most Asian economies would not be where they are if they had highly fragmented and unstable coalition governments.

The African experience on coalitions demonstrates that states grappling with the triple burden of colonial underdevelopment, authoritarianism and protracted conflict require an approach to conflict resolution and peace-building that has some kind of national unity of governments that are not

in accordance with atypical Western model of coalitions, which tend to exacerbate political instability and compromise nation-building, peace-building and reconstruction and development. Only few coalitions have worked in these countries.

From the overview of international experience, we conclude that coalitions are neither inherently good nor intrinsically bad. They cannot be romanticised as the answer to the problems facing many democracies.

Some have worked, while others have failed phenomenally. It really depends on the conditions and challenges each country faces, -the socio-political culture, strength of democratic institutions, level of socio-economic development and the degree of national consensus on what each country wants to become.

4. Development of a Discussion Document

In preparing for the National Dialogue, academic experts working with the established technical task team, will provide an independent discussion document that will among others be based on the following:

- Synthesis of the existing research, international experiences and recommendations made;
- Identification of root causes for instability in municipalities;
- Dysfunctional municipalities in general and transformation of Local Government;
- Voters confidence;
- Regulatory reforms looking into the current electoral system, regulation of coalitions, thresholds for entering Councils and other legislation;

- Culture necessary for coalitions, role of electorates, possibility of limiting votes of no confidence, secret voting by office bearers, etc.;
- Political and Administrative interface, professionalisation of the public service and political social compact for improved service delivery; and
- Dealing with stability in the upcoming elections and explore policy interventions.

Further, in light of the Amended Electoral Act that now provides for the inclusion and nomination of independent candidates as contesters to elections in the National Assembly and provincial legislatures, subsequent phases following the finalisation of the framework that will arise out of the National Dialogue should also consider the possibility of independent candidates forming a coalition and registering as a party prior to elections.

Moreover, the discussion document will consider two paths of frameworks:

1. To urgently deal with coalitions in the national and local sphere of government and,
2. Establishment of a Panel of Experts to conduct an extensive research, and engaging the society with regard to the country's electoral system

C. CONCLUSION

On the overall, Coalition Governments have functioned better where “like-minded parties” work together to achieve national goals or where

ideologically divergent parties decide to set aside their differences and work together to tackle a national crisis in the national interest.

This requires extra-ordinary leadership from all contending parties and forces, with a sense that the nation's success is far greater than the narrow interests of parties.

In line with South Africa's identity of using its people's collective wisdom for reaching consensus difficult matters, the National Dialogue is a call for all social partners and citizens of South Africa to deposit ideas on the broader principles that should constitute the Framework for a Coalition and identifying points that should form part of legislation for a coalition government.

All this is built on the principle of working together and preserving the future of the country for future generations.

ANNEXURE 1: OUTLINE OF THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON COALITION GOVERNMENTS

HOSTING OF THE DIALOGUE:

Date: Friday, 04 August and Saturday, 05 August 2023

Venue: University of Western Cape, Cape Town

OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON COALITION GOVERNMENTS:

1. Emerge with a consensus on a framework that governs coalitions in the Republic of South Africa, at national and local government level.
2. Appreciate existing domestic and global experiences on Coalition Governments.
3. Develop a process towards the coalition framework and legislation.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Government, Chapters 9, 10 and 11 Institutions, Community, Labour, Business, Academia, Political Parties, Inter-Faith Leaders, Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders, Continental and International country representatives

FACILITATORS: Eminent Persons

- Opening of the Dialogue
- Purpose of the Dialogue
- Inputs to the dialogue by community representatives on their lived experiences from Coalition Governments

- Comparative experience on Coalition Governments – Domestic, Continent, Global, South Africa Local Government Association
- Presentations by Leaders of Political Parties
- Inputs by Government, Business, Labour, Civil Society Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders, Inter-Faith Leaders
- Roadmap for the Framework on Coalition Governments
- Declaration
- Closing Plenary Session

ANNEXURE 2: ROADMAP TOWARDS A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK ON COALITION GOVERNMENTS

