



HOW DOES ONE BENCHMARK THE TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA?

1. BENCHMARKING

- 1.1. One of the most common implicit, if not explicit, practices in socio-political analysis.
- 1.2. Not the same as comparing the present with the past of the same country. Although this is a very important form of analysis. Usually a standard set of criteria are set up and regularly checked to see whether progress or decline has occurred.
- 1.3. Benchmarking presupposes a common point of reference in terms of which different countries can be compared to each other, to see if they are "shaping, making it, failing or succeeding."
- 1.4. More often than not the point of reference is seldom clearly defined or made explicit and is assumed to have an unambiguous meaning in common discourse. Think how often you have heard the following: "South Africa is going exactly the same way as Zimbabwe"; "After all we are a third-world country"; "What do you expect of a black majority government"; "Of course there is no such thing as "Black minority government", etc.
- 1.5. Slopping benchmarking is the greatest source of negative perception on South Africa's present and future prospects.

2. WATCH OUT FOR THESE CONCEPTS

- 2.1 Africa, as in African Union, NEPAD, etc.
- 2.2 Post-colonial
- 2.3 Emerging Markets
- 2.4 Democratic
- 2.5 The State

FACTORS WHICH COMPLICATE BENCHMARKING SOUTH AFRICA'S TRANSITION

1. South Africa is the only country in Africa that experienced a transition to democracy after the fall of the Berlin Wall.
2. South Africa is the only country on the African continent that negotiated a democratic outcome from a stalemated situation without any external assistance.
3. South Africa had the highest level of financial, commercial and socio-economic infrastructure development in Africa when it went through its transition. It also was one of the most urbanized countries on the continent.



- 4. South Africa had, and still has, one of the smallest ratios between white and black, and the largest settled white population on the African continent.
- 5. South Africa is the only country in Africa that, from the start of its transition, constitutionally and through explicit policies, concurrently pursued the ideal of a liberal democratic state and market led economic growth.
- 6. Benchmarking has become much more complex and complicated post Berlin and post 9-11.

3. SO? HOW DOES ONE BENCHMARK SOUTH AFRICA?

- 3.1 No physical country, African or otherwise can serve as a benchmark.
- 3.2 The only benchmarks are the goals that the South African state has set itself and to compare South Africa with countries who more or less successfully pursue the same goals.
- 3.3 Through its Constitution South Africa has declared that it wishes to be a successful Liberal Democratic State.

THINGS TO WATCH FOR WOULD BE:

- The separation of powers
- The independence of the Judiciary
- The independence of media and freedom of speech
- An electoral change of Government
- The shift from one-party democracy to a multi-party democracy

So far South Africa enjoys a high degree of democratic stability as opposed to repressive or authoritarian stability.

- 3.4 South Africa has declared that socially, it wishes to be an open society. Things to watch for would be :

- The scope and vibrancy of civil society
- The management of rapid urbanization
- Broadening of the skills base
- Accommodating traditionalism
- Health and HIV/Aids
- Policing, crime and corruption

So far, in the social sphere, South Africa has set the right targets to be an open society, but suffers from severe problems of capacity and delivery. In the medium to long term, this could pose the biggest threat to democracy and the economy.

3.5 As far as the economy is concerned, South Africa has declared its intention to being a strong growth oriented market economy. Things to watch for would be :

- Economic policy on exchange control, deficit management, labour (also immigrant labour) and privatization
- Coping with Globalization.

Economist tells us that economically speaking South Africa is in pretty good shape, although the benefits of this do not seem to permeate to the social sphere.

4. IN CONCLUSION

It is not difficult to bad mouth South Africa if one is that way inclined (e.g. rape statistics). I prefer to benchmark South Africa against the goals we have set ourselves. Given the context of our transition and the difficulties we have to cope with in pursuing our goals, we could have been much, much worse off than we are now.