Is SA on the path to progress?

Transforming the townships and informal settlements into places with a local business culture of small companies of electricians, building maintenance teams, specialised security service providers, information technology service providers, software consultants, caterers and so on, as opposed to an army of roadside hawkers, is a key economic and urban priority. There is a growing feeling that entrepreneurial activity in many townships is on the wane. If this is the case, what is causing it?

How are we going to improve the quality of education for black South Africans? Although SA has succeeded in expanding access to schooling for black children; our ability to provide sound education in those schools has not improved, and might even have declined. Most South African schools are falling. According to official statistics, the average reading and writing scores in grade 3 is 39%, average maths score 30% and close to 60% of pupils are reported to drop out before matric. Yet SA spends a higher percentage of its gross domestic product on education than almost any other middle-income developing country.

It is clear that "more of the same" is unlikely to work. When we think of education for the poor, why don't we use more incentive-based systems such as vouchers, rather than expecting the state to continue to provide all services itself? If monopolies don't work in other aspects of national life, why do we think they will work in education? (or health?) We have choice for the middle and upper classes, why not for the poor?

What social and political roles should the state play over the next 10 years? How can it be a constructive partner in SA? Incorporated, but retains enough of its independence to promote its own vision of how this country can become a great African success story? Does it still conduct discussions with government in an overly polite tone, to the point of not conveying its views effectively on issues related to economic growth?

Does business sometimes allow itself to be co-opted onto an agenda that undermines its own interests in higher economic growth for SA?

Alternatively, have business leaders really appreciated the political cost of the economic path that government has chosen? And have they thought strategically enough about the role that private sector leadership and resources can play in helping government to defend this approach?

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