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## Through the eye of a needle?

### *Choosing the best cadres to lead transformation*

A National Working Committee discussion document

#### **Why should we discuss this issue?**

1. As a movement for fundamental change, the ANC regularly has to elect leaders at various levels who are equal to the challenge of each phase of struggle. Such leaders should represent the motive forces of the struggle. To become an ANC leader is not an entitlement. It should not be an easy process attached merely to status. It should be informed first and foremost by the desire and commitment to serve the people, and a track record appreciated by ANC members and communities alike.
2. Those in leadership positions should unite and guide the movement to be at the head of the process of change. They should lead the movement in its mission to organise and inspire the masses to be their own liberators. They should lead the task of governance with diligence. And, together, they should reflect continuity of a revolutionary tradition and renewal which sustains the movement in the long-term.
3. How do thousands of branches throughout the country ensure that this happens in actual practice? How do we deal with individual ambition, lobbying, promotion of friends and pursuit of selfish interests? How do we ensure that electoral processes do not tear the movement apart? How do we prevent attempts to use the movement as a step-ladder towards self-enrichment?
4. Besides, the door can be left open for corrupt individuals and even enemies of change, to exploit the movement's internal democracy to sabotage the struggle and create their own ANC. Further, those who fail in positions of authority can use all kinds of excuses to cling to power, when the time for change has come.

5. These are difficult questions. But the movement's membership has to find the answers, so we together build and sustain the ANC as an agent for change. To fully understand this challenge, let us first examine the character of challenges in this phase of struggle.

#### **What are the challenges we face at this stage?**

6. According to the Strategy and Tactics document:

*“Our strategy is the creation of a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society. In pursuit of this objective, we shall, at each given moment, creatively adopt tactics that advance that objective. Our fundamental point of departure is that South Africans have it in their power, as a people and as part of progressive humankind, to continually change the environment in which we operate in the interest of a better future.*

*“In this phase of transformation, we seek to expand and deepen the power of democratic forces in all centres critical to the NDR, at the same time as we improve the people's quality of life. Our efforts, which are people-centred, people-driven and gender-sensitive, are founded on five basic pillars:*

- *to build and strengthen the ANC as a movement that organises and leads the people in the task of social transformation;*
- *to deepen our democracy and culture of human rights and mobilise the people to take active part in changing their lives for the better;*
- *to strengthen the hold of the democratic*

*movement on state power; and transform the state machinery to serve the cause of social change;*

- *to pursue economic growth, development and redistribution in such a way as to improve the people's quality of life; and*
  - *to work with progressive forces throughout the world to promote and defend our transformation, advance Africa's renaissance and build a new world order."*
7. Among the priorities that need immediate attention are: building active branches that give leadership to communities; strengthening the Tri-partite Alliance; ensuring that the ANC leads mass organisations; and making decisive interventions in the ideological struggle.
  8. At the level of government, we need to improve the capacity of the state to meet its obligation to citizens in the area of economic growth and job creation, social programmes, and dealing with crime and corruption. Further, the ANC, both inside and outside government, should play a leading role in Africa's renewal and building a better world.
  9. As we carry out these tasks, we will face a concerted campaign to undermine our efforts, by those who oppose change. They will underplay the progress we are making, while exaggerating weaknesses. They will seek to discredit the ANC and its leadership. They will also try to undermine confidence in the institutions of democracy we have set up.
  10. Some will even try to subvert the ANC from within. Because they know they cannot defeat the ANC frontally, they will try to create an ANC that serves their interests.

### **What kind of ANC is required to meet these challenges?**

11. ***A revolutionary democratic movement:*** The ANC pursues fundamental change to create a better life for all. Equality among all South Africans in choosing a government of their choice, using the country's resources to improve conditions of especially the poor, and removing racism in the ownership and distribution of wealth are among our core principles. Within

its ranks, the ANC ensures the participation of members in shaping the movement's policies and programmes.

12. ***A non-racial national movement:*** It is critical that our struggle brings about an end to apartheid relations in all areas of life. The ANC believes in the equal worth of all human beings. We seek to unite South Africans across racial and ethnic differences, taking into account the central role of Blacks in general and Africans in particular, given their exclusion under apartheid. We practice these principles within the organisation.
13. ***A broad national democratic movement:*** The ANC represents the mass of forces that pursue social transformation. Individuals belonging to different classes and strata form part of these forces, because they stand to gain from fundamental change. However, the ANC is keenly aware of the social basis of apartheid. It recognises the leading role of the working class and pays special attention to the poor.
14. ***A mass movement:*** The ANC seeks to bring into its ranks as many South Africans as possible who accept its principles and policies. As a legal organisation, it does not target only particular advanced political activists for recruitment. As long as one accepts its policies and takes its oath, anyone can become a member.
15. ***A non-sexist movement:*** Over time, the ANC has embraced the principle of gender equality as one of the central features of national liberation. This is reinforced through the equitable representation of women at all levels of the movement, and it requires the conscious implementation of affirmative action within our ranks.
16. ***A leader of the democratic forces:*** Because of what it stands for, and its track record in the fight against apartheid colonialism, the ANC emerged as the leader of the forces who pursue a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa. It seeks to unite all these forces and their organisations into a movement for fundamental change. Its leaders and members should win the confidence of organisations of the people.

17. ***A champion of progressive internationalism:*** The ANC's objectives are informed by the aspirations of the people of SA, Africa and millions others in all parts of the world. Over the years, it has contributed to, and benefited from, struggles across the globe for a just, equitable and humane world order; and it remains committed to these ideals.

### **What informs the principles of ANC Organisational Democracy?**

18. ***Elected leadership:*** Leadership of the ANC is elected in conferences or, at branch level, in general members meetings. In all these instances, it is the individual members of the ANC, directly at branch level, or through their delegates, at other levels, who decide on the composition of the leadership structures.

19. ***Collective leadership:*** Individual leaders are elected into collectives which should work as a unit, fulfilling their mandate as dictated to by the constitution. No single person is a leader unto himself or herself, but a member of a collective which should give considered, canvassed guidance to the membership and society as a whole.

20. ***Branches as basic units:*** The branch is the basic and most important unit of the ANC. This is where members give leadership to communities, where they bring programmes to life and where they consider and make proposals on policies of the movement.

21. ***Consultations and mandates:*** Regular meetings of branches, regions and provinces, as well as national conferences provide the membership with the platform to assume collective ownership of the movement's fate. They set out the mandate that guides the leadership, and are important fora for report-backs and consultations across the movement.

22. ***Criticism and self-criticism:*** It is to be expected that in leading social activity, leaders and members will from time to time make mistakes. The most important thing is that these individuals and collectives should have the capacity and humility to honestly review their work critically, and correct the weaknesses.

23. ***Democracy as majority rule:*** Individual members and leaders will have differing opinions on how particular issues should be addressed. The strength of revolutionary organisation lies among others in the ability to synthesise these views and emerge with the wisest possible approach. Once a decision has been taken on the basis of the majority's views, it binds everyone, including those who held a contrary view.

24. ***Status of higher and lower structures:*** Lower structures have the right to influence decisions of higher structures. And, within their mandate the higher structures have a responsibility to take decisions. Once these decisions have been taken, they bind all the relevant lower structures: they have to be supported and implemented.

### **What are the constitutional guidelines for elections?**

25. Every member of the ANC has the right to vote for, and be elected into, leadership positions. Like all rights, this goes along with the obligation to understand and pursue the objectives of the ANC. Further, in order to ensure that leaders are elected for their track record in serving the people, qualifications apply in relation to leadership positions: to be on the BEC a member should have been in the ANC for at least a year; for the REC it's 2 years; 3 years for the PEC and for the NEC it's 5 years.

26. In the conferences or AGM's where leaders are elected, this happens after discussion on the political and organisational environment and challenges facing the ANC. Out of these discussions emerges the political programme for the next term of office. Broadly, it is on the basis of these discussions (which start before the relevant conferences) that an appropriate leadership collective is decided upon.

27. Branch members are the electoral college for all elective positions. At branch level, this happens at an AGM where all members take part. In regional, provincial and national conferences, the delegates are mandated by the

branch membership. However, each delegate has the right and latitude to influence and be influenced by delegates from other branches.

28. Because of the central role of branches and their delegates in these processes, two critical challenges face all branches. Firstly, we must all the time ensure the integrity of the membership system, so that only genuine, bona fide members of the ANC exercise this important responsibility of deciding on policy and leadership. Secondly, where branch members delegate individuals to represent them, they must ensure that these are members capable of influencing others, and at the same time, able to weigh various arguments and acting in the best interest of the movement.
29. Delegates from branches elect Regional Executive Committees. For purposes of Provincial Executives, nominations from branches are canvassed at Regional Conferences, for regions to reach broad consensus. For purposes of National Conferences the same process also happens at Provincial Conferences.
30. This allows branches to share ideas, information and knowledge around various candidates. Through all these levels, a broad mandate is given to delegates: but each delegate has the responsibility to weigh views even at Conference itself and take decisions that, in his or her assessment, serve the best interests of the struggle.
31. At Conferences, nominations are also allowed from the floor, from individual delegates. Relevant minimums of support are set for the nominees to be included in the lists. This allows for individual delegates, regions or provinces to put forward names of those they deem capable but could not emerge through the nomination process.
32. Voting at Conferences is by secret ballot, and each delegate has one vote of equal value. In other words, delegates are not voting fodder, mechanically and unthinkingly bound to lists and subject to the whip. While delegates should be guided by the broad mandate of their branches, regions or provinces, each individual delegate is expected to exercise his or her judgement on the basis of his or her assessment of the movement's interests.

### **What then are the broad requirements of leadership?**

33. As a revolutionary organisation, the ANC needs revolutionary cadres and leaders. It should put in place leadership collectives that satisfy the character of the ANC defined above: a revolutionary democratic movement, a non-racial and non-sexist national movement, a broad national democratic movement, a mass movement and a leader of the democratic forces.
34. An ANC leader should understand ANC policy and be able to apply it under all conditions in which she finds herself. This includes an appreciation, from the NDR stand-point, of the country and the world we live in, of the balance of forces, and of how continually to change this balance in favour of the motive forces of change.
35. A leader should constantly seek to improve his capacity to serve the people; he should strive to be in touch with the people all the time, listen to their views and learn from them. He should be accessible and flexible; and not arrogate to himself the status of being the source of all wisdom.
36. A leader should win the confidence of the people in her day-to-day work. Where the situation demands, she should be firm; and have the courage to explain and seek to convince others of the correctness of decisions taken by constitutional structures even if such decisions are unpopular. She should not seek to gain cheap popularity by avoiding difficult issues, making false promises or merely pandering to popular sentiment.
37. A leader should lead by example. He should be above reproach in his political and social conduct – as defined by our revolutionary morality. Through force of example, he should act as a role model to ANC members and non-members alike. Leading a life that reflects commitment to the strategic goals of the NDR includes not only being free of corrupt practices; it also means actively fighting against corruption.
38. There are no ready-made leaders. Leaders evolve out of battles for social transformation. In these battles, cadres will stumble and some

will fall. But the abiding quality of leadership is to learn from mistakes, to appreciate one's weaknesses and correct them.

39. A leader should seek to influence and to be influenced by others in the collective. He should have the conviction to state his views boldly and openly within constitutional structures of the movement; and – without being disrespectful – not to cower before those in more senior positions in pursuit of patronage, nor to rely on cliques to maintain one's position.
40. An individual with qualities of leadership does not seek to gain popularity by undermining those in positions of responsibility. Where such a member has a view on how to improve things or correct mistakes, she should state those views in constitutional structures and seek to win others to her own thinking. She should assist the movement as a whole to improve its work, and not stand aside to claim perfection out of inactivity.
41. The struggle for social transformation is a complex undertaking in which at times, personal interests will conflict with the organisational interest. From time to time, conflict will manifest itself between and among members and leaders. The ultimate test of leadership includes:
  - 41.1 striving for convergence between personal interests – material, status and otherwise – and the collective interest;
  - 41.2 handling conflict in the course of ANC work by understanding its true origins and seeking to resolve it in the context of struggle and in the interest of the ANC;
  - 41.3 the ability to inspire people in good times and bad; to reinforce members' and society's confidence in the ANC and transformation; and
  - 41.4 winning genuine acceptance by the membership, not through suppression, threats or patronage, but by being principled, firm, humble and considerate.

### **How has the base of leadership widened in the past few years?**

42. With its unbanning, the ANC set out to build a mass movement, drawing members from the mass of the South African people. This also made it possible to introduce profound open democratic practices, with activists of the anti-apartheid struggle and communities in general taking part in building their movement. A culture of open mass participation helped root the ANC in all areas of the country. It improved its standing as a people's movement both in terms of its policies and programmes and in its mass composition.
43. As it developed from being a movement of cadres thoroughly processed and systematically educated in its policies, it attracted huge numbers of people many of whom developed in its ranks. Many of them were prepared to face the might of state-sponsored violence for 'the last push'. However, some individuals may have joined for the prestige associated with the changes happening at the beginning of the decade; as well as the personal opportunities that would arise when the ANC came into government.
44. Over these years, young people, women, community leaders of various hues, veterans of previous struggles, professionals and business-people found political home in the movement as it emerged from the underground. Cadres from prison, exile, underground formations and the mass movement have come together at various levels of leadership. All this has brought a dynamic political chemistry into the evolution of the organisation. It has also provided a wide and deep pool of experience within leadership.
45. In this period, and especially with the achievement of democracy, the ANC had to put together teams at various levels to develop and implement policies of a democratic governance. Without much formal training, these cadres have over the years acquitted themselves well in defining the constitutional framework, developing and implementing legislation and programmes for transformation, and building a state with the capacity to serve the people.

46. The Youth and Women's Leagues have also served as critical schools of the revolution and a source of cadres who are continually assuming leadership positions within the ANC. So have many other formations allied to the movement, including COSATU, the revolutionary student movement, civic associations, religious structures, the women's movement and some professional bodies. Further, it should be emphasised that, even if they may not be elected as a formal part of ANC leadership structures, leaders of these mass formations who are members of the ANC are also, in their own right, ANC leaders.

**What are the negatives challenges that have emerged in the new terrain?**

47. Entry into government meant that a great many cadres of the movement moved en masse from full-time organisational work. This was a necessary shift arising from the victories we had scored. However, this was not done in a planned manner. As a result, for the first few years, there were virtually no senior leaders of the ANC based at its headquarters. This had a negative impact on the task of mass organisation. While progress has been made in this regard, further work needs to be done to ensure that ANC structures operate as an organisational and political centre for everything the ANC does.
48. Because leadership in structures of the ANC affords opportunities to assume positions of authority in government, some individuals then compete for ANC leadership positions in order to get into government. Many such members view positions in government as a source of material riches for themselves. Thus resources, prestige and authority of government positions become the driving force in competition for leadership positions in the ANC.
49. Government positions also go hand-in-hand with the possibility to issue contracts to commercial companies. Some of these companies identify ANC members that they can promote in ANC structures and into government, so that they can get contracts by hook or by crook. This is done through media networks to discredit other leaders, or even by buying membership cards to set up branches that are ANC only in name.
50. Positions in government also mean the possibility to appoint individuals in all kinds of capacities. As such, some members make promises to friends, that once elected and ensconced in government, they would return the favour. Cliques and factions then emerge within the movement, around personal loyalties driven by corrupt intentions. Members become voting fodder to serve individuals' self-interest.
51. Media focus on government and the ANC as a ruling party also means that individuals appointed into various positions are able to acquire a public profile in the course of their work. As such, over time, they become the visible members who would get nominated for leadership positions. This is a natural expression of confidence and helps to widen the base from which leaders are elected. However, where such practice becomes the main and only criterion, hard-working individuals who do not enjoy such profile get overlooked.
52. Influenced by a culture alien to the ANC, a tendency has also developed to assess individuals totally outside of the political context which is the core mandate of the ANC. Artificial criteria such as acceptability to the media, eloquence specifically in English, and warped notions of "sophistication" are then imposed on the movement's approach.
53. Further, false categories of "left" and "right", pro-this and anti-the-other, "insider" and "outsider" are introduced by so-called analysts with little, if any, understanding of the movement's policies, programmes and culture. These are then accepted by some of our members. This is usually whispered outside formal structures, and bandied about opportunistically in the build-up to the organisation's conferences.
54. The process of social transformation is a difficult one, with possibilities of committing mistakes from time to time and with the speed of change not totally dependent on our will. Some individuals exploit these weaknesses by creating an impression that they could do what

the ANC leadership as a whole is unable to do. Thus is born populism.

55. Related to the above is the danger arising out of the fact that executive positions in government are by appointment. This can have the effect of stifling frank, honest and self-critical debate within the ranks of the movement. This is because some individuals may convince themselves that, by pretending to be what they are not, and being seen to agree with those in authority all the time, they would then be rewarded with appointment into senior government positions.
56. On the other hand, others seek to court popularity by demonstrating “*independence*” from constitutional structures and senior leaders of the ANC, for its own sake. Often, this is encouraged by some media and other forces opposed to the ANC, precisely because it means independence from the mission and discipline of the movement.
57. The tendency is also developing for discussion around leadership nominations to be reduced to mechanical deal-making among branches, regions and provinces. Thus, instead of having thorough and honest discussion about the qualities of nominees, delegates negotiate merely on the basis of, “*if you take ours, we’ll take yours*”. This may assist in ensuring provincial and regional balances. But, taken to extremes, it can result in federalism by stealth within the movement.

### **How do members take charge?**

58. The selection and election of leaders should reside firmly in the hands of the membership. This can only happen if there is open and frank discussion on these issues in formal structures of the movement. Quiet and secret lobbying opens the movement to opportunism and even infiltration by forces hostile to the ANC’s objectives.
59. Such discussion should be informed by the critical policy and programmatic issues that face us in each phase of struggle. To recapitulate, this stage can be characterised as one of a continuing transition and the beginnings of

faster transformation. It is a stage at which we are faced with the challenge of mobilising the people to ensure that they take part in improving their lives for the better. We are also faced with the task of decisively contributing to the mobilisation of Africa and the world for focussed attention on the needs of Africa and the poor across the globe.

60. In debating the composition of leadership collectives, we should take into account such factors as the various historical experiences of movement cadres. We also have to ensure that sufficient skills are harnessed for the task of governance. The contribution of veterans of the struggle in leadership structures at various levels is also a critical element to ensure continuity and the wisdom of experience.
61. In a modernising world, and to sustain the movement in the long-term, we should systematically and consciously take more and more young people into the blast furnace of leadership responsibility. We should, broadly, also ensure race, gender and geographic balances, without reducing this to bean-counting and hair-splitting. And a correct balance must be struck between leaders in government and those in ANC and other mass formations outside government.
62. How do members come to know of cadres with such qualities beyond those who are already in public office? The overriding requirement is that members should inform themselves of developments in their locality, in the regions, the province and at national level. In selecting cadres for branch and perhaps regional leadership, this should be much easier. Other levels will require exchange of views in inter-regional and inter-provincial meetings.
63. But it also means that leadership structures should help give guidance -be they structures of the ANC itself, or the Women and Youth Leagues. Further, the manner in which deployment is carried out should expose cadres with potential to the widest possible base of membership.

**How 'natural' is the selection process?**

64. How then does selection of candidates happen? Is it a "natural" process where leaders emerge out of some mysterious selection, or is it a conscious act on the part of members? Should members canvass for those they support and/or should individuals promote themselves? Is there a place for lobbying in the ANC?
65. To answer these questions, let us go back to the basics. In the first instance, the ANC constitution asserts the right for individuals to stand for and be elected into formal positions of responsibility. But waving a constitution does not excuse unbecoming conduct. Thus, we need to understand and follow the constitution; but also to learn from the movement's culture while adapting that culture to current realities.
66. Members are not discouraged from canvassing for those they support. And, technically, an individual is not prohibited from canvassing for him-/herself. But it is a matter of profound cultural practice within the ANC that individuals do not promote or canvass for themselves. Historically, this has justifiably been frowned upon as being in bad revolutionary taste. One of the main reasons for this is that when cadres of the movement do their work, this is not meant to be with an eye on leadership positions or some other personal reward; but to serve the people. When cadres are not in formal leadership positions, they should not will others to fail, but assist everyone in the interest of fundamental change.
67. Selecting candidates and ultimately electing leaders is not like the "natural selection" of evolution where things develop by chance. It must be a conscious and well-considered act on the part of each ANC member. But how should this be done? What issues should you, the member, take into account when the nomination and election process unfolds?
68. Nominations take place at constitutional structures such as branch AGM's and regional, provincial and national conferences. Individual members nominate their candidates at these meetings on the basis of an assessment of candidates' qualities and performance. However, declaration of support for a person, or of a willingness to stand, does not guarantee that one would be a candidate. You become a candidate after the proposal has been accepted by a branch or any other relevant constitutional structure.
69. Nomination and canvassing must be done openly, and within constitutional structures of the movement. If a member wishes to nominate a candidate or to stand for a particular position, s/he must indicate this in formal structures such as branch meetings. Outside these structures, it becomes dangerous and unacceptable lobbying.
70. In open engagement within constitutional structures, the member(s) would then motivate why they believe that a particular person would make a significant contribution to the work of the ANC at the various levels. They would also be able to indicate the new and creative things that nominees would bring to leadership collectives. If the nominees have been members of these or other collectives, it should also be shown that they have striven to improve the work of these collectives, raised issues openly and had the courage of their convictions. It does not help for individuals to keep quiet in formal structures and emerge as surprise leaders with the promise to perform better.
71. If they believe that there are weaknesses to correct, those who nominate or wish to stand should be able to show that those weaknesses are real and not the imagination of the media or forces which want to weaken the ANC. They should also show that the weaknesses are those of individuals they seek to replace, and not a result of the objective situation in which the movement finds itself. This would help contain a litany of false promises.
72. It is also critical that individuals whose names are advanced reflect consistency in their work to pursue the ANC's interests. Individuals who target positions of influence and leave when they lose; and then seek to come back only as leaders would have to show how this serves the interests of the movement, and whether they can be relied upon during difficult times.
73. Inasmuch as we should avoid pretenders and opportunists, we should also ensure that leadership structures do not carry deadwood.

If they are already serving in these structures, or have served in the past, leaders should be assessed on how their presence helped the movement in its work. Further, it should be clear how their presence in these structures would help ensure the balances that are required for the movement to fulfil its mission.

74. Individuals who operate in the dead of the night, convening secret meetings and speaking poorly of other members should be exposed and isolated. When approached to be part of such groups, members should relay such information to relevant structures or individuals in whom they have confidence. But it is also critical that proper investigations are conducted, and those accused are informed. Witch-hunts should be avoided as a matter of principle.
75. There is nothing inherently wrong with structures developing lists of candidates and canvassing for them. However, such lists should not be used to stifle discussion in branch and other constitutional forums, and prevent the nomination of other candidates. In discussions around nominees, names on the lists should not take precedence over any other nominations from members. At the conferences, delegates should be guided by lists developed by their branches, regions and provinces through democratic processes. But they are not bound to follow each and every name. Being influenced by delegates from other areas and choosing differently is not an offence.

### ***Through the eye of a needle?***

76. These guidelines indicate the broad parameters within which every member of the ANC should exercise his/her right to shape the leadership

collectives of the movement and ensure that it meets its historical mandate. In one sense they make it difficult for individuals to ascend to positions of leadership in the organisation.

77. In applying these broad principles, members need to be firm. But we should also exercise creative flexibility, knowing that no single individual is perfect. Indeed there are many who may have potential but would not meet all the requirements set out here. But it is critical that they are honest about their capacity, and show a willingness to learn.
78. There are many members of the ANC who enjoy great respect within their communities, but still have to grasp the complex matters of policy. Such individuals should be encouraged to avail themselves for leadership positions. They should however be prepared to develop themselves and to take part in relevant training sessions.
79. It is a matter of principle, revolutionary democratic practice, and a constitutional requirement that, once duly elected, the leaders should be accepted by all members as leaders of the movement as a whole at the relevant level. They should be assisted by all of us in their work. The leaders themselves are obliged to serve, and to listen to, all members, including those who may not have voted for them.
80. The most important message of these guidelines is that you, the member, should be empowered to take an active and informed part in choosing leadership at various levels; or to stand for any position for which you believe you are suitable.
81. So, it may not exactly be through the eye of a needle. But we should strive all the time to ensure that our leaders are indeed made of sterner revolutionary stuff.