

The South Africa/Canada Program on Governance:

an experiment in supporting democracy



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The South Africa/Canada Program on Governance: an experiment in supporting democracy

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Abstract: The South Africa/Canada Program on Governance is a CIDA-funded initiative that assisted South Africa's transition to democracy in 1993 and 1994 and since then has supported the country's leaders in building the basic systems of government. It has done this by making available to senior South African elected and appointed officials Canadian public-service practitioner advice, focusing always on the key people, key places, and core processes of government. The program has provided advice on constitutional arrangements, the establishment of a representative public service, support to the centre of government, planning and budgeting, and services delivery through its special advisers resident in Johannesburg, through workshops, through study visits to Canada for South Africans, and through the assignment of Canadian public servants to carry out projects in South Africa. Much of its work has been carried out under the auspices of twinning arrangements between six Canadian provinces and six South African provinces and their respective national departments of public works. As the program draws to an end, the authors, two of the program's special advisers, argue that in addition to providing important assistance during the transition to democracy, the program has been successful in a number of identifiable ways by supporting good governance in South Africa. They also argue that there is good reason for continued Canadian assistance in this area.

Sommaire: Le Programme de gouvernance sud-africain, une initiative financée par l'ACDI, a facilité en 1993 et 1994 l'évolution démocratique de l'Afrique du Sud et a aidé les leaders de ce pays à ériger les systèmes essentiels de gouvernement. Le Programme a réalisé cela en offrant aux cadres supérieurs et aux élus sud-africains les conseils de praticiens de la Fonction publique canadienne, en se concentrant chaque fois sur les personnes-clé, les endroits-clé et les processus fondamentaux du gouvernement. Grâce aux efforts de conseillers spéciaux à Johannesburg, à des ateliers, aux voyages d'études du Sud-Africains au Canada et à l'affectation de fonctionnaires canadiens à des projets en Afrique du Sud, le programme a prodigué des conseils sur les arrangements constitutionnels, la mise sur pied d'une Fonction publique représentative, le soutien aux organismes centraux du gouvernement, la planification et la budgétisation ainsi que la prestation de services. Les activités du Programme ont été réalisées grâce au jumelage de six provinces canadiennes à six provinces sud-africaines, ainsi que des ministères des travaux publics respectifs des deux pays. Sous sa forme actuelle, le programme viendra à échéance bientôt. Selon les auteurs, deux des conseillers spéciaux du programme, ce dernier a réussi à favoriser la bonne gouvernance en Afrique du Sud en plus d'aider le passage à la démocratie. Toujours selon eux, il serait judicieux de continuer à offrir de l'assistance canadienne dans ce domaine.

This article examines the experience of the South Africa/Canada Program on Governance (hereafter, the program), a Canadian government-sponsored experiment, in supporting the transition to democratic governance in South Africa. We review the program's underpinnings and its methodology, and we summarize what we as two of the program's senior staff members think has "worked" over its lifetime and what we have learned from this experiment. After over seven years of operations, the program in its current form is being wound up in mid-2000, and this seems to be an appropriate time to reflect on its main features.

The structure and work of the program have been well documented both internally and in an external evaluation of the program carried out by Dr. Sharon Sutherland in early 1998. An abbreviated version of Dr. Sutherland's evaluation, *Supporting Democracy: the South Africa/Canada Program on Governance*, was published by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in 1999. In this article we draw on that documentation and on the records and recollections of Dr. Al Johnson, the eminent Canadian public servant who established the program and who worked in South Africa as its special adviser in charge from early 1993 through 1998. And, of course, we draw on our own experiences as special advisers with the program.

We should start by explaining what we understand governance to be. Readers will be aware that, during the past decade or so, both the theoreticians and the practitioners of economic development have accorded increasing importance to the role that "governance" plays in establishing the framework and conditions within which development can occur. For example, support for new democratic institutions in Eastern and Central Europe following the collapse of communism was viewed by many as being a crucial complement to the strengthening and the unleashing of market forces. The failure of decades of economic development efforts in Africa began to be attributed, in part at least, to the predominance of dictatorial and corrupt regimes on the continent, that is, to the absence of effective governance.

This might be called an instrumentalist view of governance. In this view, good governance means facilitating economic growth and structural adjustments through such things as the establishment of democratic institutions and a legal framework that protects individual and property rights, setting out clearly the rules under which business will be conducted, promoting private-sector growth and investment, reforming and reducing the size of the public service, and attacking the high levels of corruption that characterize authoritarian regimes. We risk overstating the case, but this view sometimes seems to define democratic institutions, the laws that protect human rights, and so on, simply as means to achieve the end goal of economic development within the classical liberal framework.¹

While the case for good governance as a necessary condition for sustained economic progress is a very powerful one, so is the argument that good governance is an end in itself. A very bulky chapter of human history since World War II, for example, tells the story of how people in almost all parts of the world overthrew an astonishingly varied range of oppressive governments, not because they wished to pursue any particular model of economic progress, but because they wanted to be free to make their own decisions in

their own ways. This was certainly the case in South Africa, which is the setting for the program we discuss in this paper.

In this broader context, which is where we situate ourselves, governance is much more than a device through which to pursue normative economic policies. Governance is about the core laws, institutions and processes through which people make their fundamental choices, and it is about the state's capacity to execute decisions, enforce laws, raise revenues, spend money efficiently and effectively, promote social stability, encourage public participation in representative institutions, and the like. The adjective "good" in this context denotes a democratic and transparent approach to governing. It follows that a governance program should aim at assisting people to establish the core institutions, key processes and skills that in turn will enable them to put into place the policies of their own choosing, within the framework of democracy. The South Africa/Canada Program on Governance, as it has operated in South Africa for over seven years, provides an interesting and instructive example of this type of endeavour.

This article has three sections. The first of these outlines briefly how the program came about and summarizes its funding and administrative arrangements. The next section describes the various ways in which the program has provided Canadian public-service practitioner advice in support of good governance, while the final section offers our assessment of the program's results. In addition to providing very real assistance to South African leaders during the country's transition to democracy, we think that the program has been successful in a number of identifiable ways in helping South Africans establish the basic systems and processes of governing. We also think that a good case can be made for continued Canadian support for governance in this remarkable country.

Program origins, resources and administrative framework

The South Africa/Canada Program on Governance began as a foreign policy initiative, following a 1992 request by Nelson Mandela to Canada's then-prime minister, Brian Mulroney, to help the South African leadership manage the process of transition to democracy. Dr. Al Johnson accepted the responsibility of designing an appropriate programming response, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) began to fund the program in early 1993. The agency made its funding available through the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), which had a respected presence in South Africa and which agreed to act as the program's executing agency, providing it with administrative support and office space in Johannesburg.

We estimate that, counting the time spent by Canadian officials working in South Africa and those hosting South Africans in Canada and the time spent in preparing for and following up study visits, Canadian governments contributed over twenty staff-years of senior officials' time to the program during the five years, between mid-1994 and mid-1999

Initially, the program provided advice to the democratic movement in the period leading up to South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994. Following these elections, the

program continued its support of the new dispensation, advising senior political leaders and public officials in both national and provincial governments on issues dealing with the organization, systems and processes of governing. Over time, the program has established twinning arrangements – relationships between two institutions that facilitate the provision of professional advice from the Canadian to the South African partner – in six of the nine newly created South African provinces and has devoted much of its effort to working with these new administrations. At the time of writing, the program is actually engaged in eight of the provinces and works as well with a number of national departments and commissions.

The Canadian International Development Agency has funded the program in three stages. The first covered the period to April 1994, the second and third phases covered the subsequent period to June 2000. The total funding used by the program during this nearly seven-and-a-half years has been about \$14 million, an average level of spending of about \$2 million per year.

This is a small program, relative to the contributions in South Africa of other donor countries and agencies. Its core consists of its special advisers, present or former very senior Canadian public servants resident in South Africa, who plan and direct the program's activities from there. The staff complement has ranged from a minimum of one special adviser to three special advisers, a project director and two support staff for one eight-month period in 1997-98; the average complement has been two special advisers and two support staff (themselves IDRC officers seconded to the program).

The program's own staff resources are supplemented by a major contribution of time spent by senior officials from Canadian provincial governments and the federal government, which these governments have made available for particular projects undertaken by the program. The level of commitment by Canadian governments to the program's work in South Africa may be gauged by the size of their investment. We estimate that, counting the time spent by Canadian officials working in South Africa and those hosting South Africans in Canada and the time spent in preparing for and following up study visits, Canadian governments contributed over twenty staff-years of senior officials' time to the program during the five years, between mid-1994 and mid-1999.

How the program has operated

Readers will be aware of South Africa's rich and difficult social and political history, but they may be less familiar with the extent to which the country's institutions of governance have been radically restructured and how political and public-service leaders have changed in the past few years. The scope and scale of the transformation in politics and public administration are enormously challenging, both for those who are trying to manage the new structures and processes and for observers trying to understand these dynamic changes.

The creation of nine new provinces has been one of the most significant aspects of the new governance regime in South Africa. It has also been a very difficult process. The basic administrative resources for the new provinces had to be established from the former

regional and homeland administrations; in many instances, there was little useful infrastructure available to adopt. New legislatures had to be established, elections held, governments formed, and the processes of governing begun. In each instance, nationally as well as provincially, the very essence of the transition to democracy was that new political leaders took on the responsibilities of governing and began to select their senior officials, many of whom having no previous experience of their own on which to draw. These critically important individuals had been in the democratic struggle within their country and in the border states, in NGOs, in universities, in exile, or in prison. They were smart, educated and able. Their problem was that they simply had not governed before.

From its inception, the program has used workshops or seminars to address crucial aspects of governance ... [this] has proven to be an effective way to present information on some of the most difficult and sensitive public administration and governance questions facing the country and to facilitate frank discussions among South Africans about these issues

In these circumstances, Dr. Johnson concluded that the most effective type of support that the program could offer to South African leaders was practitioner advice, provided in several different ways – by the special advisers resident there, through workshops on key governance topics, through study visits to Canada by South African elected and appointed officials, and by the assignment of other Canadian public-service practitioners to work on particular projects there with South African counterparts. The focus of the work evolved from its early concentration on the constitution and issues of transition to an emphasis on effective support for decision-making at the centre of government, planning and budgeting, and delivery of services to citizens.

The following section first describes each of the program's main types of interventions and illustrates these with specific examples. We then examine the twinning arrangements the program has brokered between six South African provinces and six Canadian provinces, and between two national departments, which provide the framework within which the bulk of the program's interventions are carried out.

The role of the resident staff

From the outset, the special advisers have guided the program on the basis of their understanding of the evolving South African context and their knowledge of and experience in public administration. They are proactive in identifying particularly important problems of governance and in suggesting how these might be addressed. They are also reactive, responding to requests for assistance, information and critical analysis in a number of ways, including providing their own advice on what are often very sensitive issues of governance. The fact that all of the program's special advisers are very experienced public servants has made this type of response possible.

In the program's first years, for example, Dr. Johnson, working largely alone, gave considerable advice to the senior officials responsible for guiding the process of transition to democratic government, framing the country's new constitution, and establishing a professional public service that was representative of the entire population of the country.

Subsequently, Dr. Johnson and the program's three other special advisers (the two authors and Ms. Anne Evans) provided advice on issues ranging from how to improve service delivery, to the executive-legislative relationship and the support required for effective government decision-making, to how to link decision-making and budgeting.

In addition to providing advice directly to South African public servants, the special advisers design the other kinds of projects (discussed below) that the program undertakes. They also maintain and cultivate the essential networks of South African and Canadian senior executives. The South African half of the program's network evolved from Dr. Johnson's initial work with the leaders of the transition to democratic governance, who became senior elected and appointed officials in the new dispensation. This part of the network is a source of information, analysis and insights into South Africa's public administration and a bridge of continuity in an environment characterized by the high mobility of senior leaders. The Canadian half of the network participates directly in program activities or provides access to other public servants. This involvement of Canadian public servants has been endorsed and supported by political leaders across the country.

In 1994, the program added a resident project director, and then two resident support staff, in order to establish a professional administrative base for the program itself. The program's first project director, Keith Ogilvie, contributed enormously to building the provincial twinning arrangements. The support staff's ability to make the many complicated logistical arrangements associated with the program's activities flow smoothly has been an important ingredient in the program's success.

Workshops

From its inception, the program has used workshops or seminars to address crucial aspects of governance. The workshop format is commonly used in South Africa; it is familiar and comfortable. It has proven to be an effective way to present information on some of the most difficult and sensitive public administration and governance questions facing the country and to facilitate frank discussions among South Africans about these issues.

The program's workshops (there have been nine in total) are geared to meet the specific needs of the most senior public officials in either the national government or the various provincial governments, or both, depending on the circumstances. The impetus for each workshop differs: it may be a specific request by a national department, for example, or it may arise through the process of testing an idea with a number of provincial executives. Each workshop is co-chaired by a South African, and senior South African elected and appointed officials, such as former premier of Mpumalanga, Mathews Phosa, and the Reverend Lulamile Mbete, cabinet secretary of Gauteng, always present their perspectives on the various topics covered. Workshops also bring together a number of Canadian experts in a given field – political leaders such as Allan Blakeney, former premier of Saskatchewan, current and former deputy ministers, and other senior officials – who are able to provide wide-ranging and practical advice on the particular topic.

Individual South Africans refer to their Canadian visits as continuing sources of both new ideas for managing their own programs and their resolve in implementing them

The two workshops that bracket the program's experience in this area provide good examples of the importance of the subject-matters taken on and the level and calibre of expertise of the South African participants. The first was the Conference on Constitutional Development, held in Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal in July 1994. Its purpose was to provide comparative constitutional information and analysis for the senior elected and appointed South African officials, and their advisers engaged in framing a permanent constitution to replace the interim constitution negotiated prior to the 1994 elections. The most recent workshop, convened in Johannesburg in January 1999, dealt with the support required by premiers and cabinets of South African provinces in making and executing government decisions; its participants included the majority of the nine South African provincial cabinet secretaries, as well as a range of other senior officials in the provincial administrations.

Study visits between Canada and South Africa

Study visits of South Africans to Canada, and diagnostic visits by Canadians to South Africa, comprise a very important part of the work sponsored by the program. Starting even before the 1994 elections, the program designed and facilitated study visits intended to give South Africans an opportunity to become familiar with the "look" and "feel" of one model of a mature democratic government. For example, three premier-candidates of the African National Congress each visited a separate Canadian provincial government in early 1994. Over the years, these familiarization visits have had the added benefit of introducing the respective South African and Canadian politicians and public servants to each other and in building the Canadians' interest in and commitment to their South African counterparts.

The program has sponsored a very wide range of study visits, including trips by premiers, ministers, cabinet office officials, and senior public servants working in transportation, agriculture, health, public works, human resources, finance, and other fields. The program's roles are to help define the objectives for each visit as clearly as possible and to work with both the South Africans and the Canadians involved to ensure that the visit's program of activities concentrates on the right objectives. In the case of a study visit involving officials of South Africa's Department of Public Service and Administration that focused on a range of human resources and labour relations policy issues, the program's briefing of planners and participants in Ottawa and Toronto asked them to stress to the South Africans that the close examination of implementation issues is an integral part of the policy development process – that there is no point, in other words, in developing policy that cannot be implemented. The program also makes all the necessary logistical arrangements for these visits and debriefs participants as to visits' effectiveness or otherwise.

The twinning arrangements provide to the South African partners "their own," as it were, sources of Canadian public-service practitioners, who can be made

available for specific projects, and their own Canadian counterparts whom they can visit, whose practices they can observe, and whose experiences they can draw on.

It does appear as though even short visits have been useful in giving many South Africans a sense of what the Canadian model of government looks like, how it works, and the fundamentally important role that is played by a professional public administration. Individual South Africans refer to their Canadian visits as continuing sources of both new ideas for managing their own programs and their resolve in implementing them. As well, short visits can still be very intense and focused. A study visit designed to address a specific topic – such as the process of local government reform or the development of human resources policy – can provide very useful examples of how particular problems are addressed and can also provide South Africans with Canadian contacts with whom they can discuss issues and concerns on an ongoing basis.

Shorter visits by Canadians to South Africa can be described as diagnostic and assessment missions. The Canadians study the South African situation in a particular area (cabinet office organization, or financial management, say), identify what processes and skills are needed to support government operations in these areas more effectively, and discuss with their South African counterparts how solutions to particular problems might be implemented. The program has made it a priority to arrange visits, and corresponding return visits, by Canadian secretaries of cabinet to their counterparts in the twinned provinces and has generally succeeded. Canadian executives return home knowing much more about the South African public-service context and with some understanding of the extraordinary challenges faced by senior South African public servants in their working environment. This is crucially important in building effective longer-term working relationships between Canadians and South Africans.

Longer assignments

Over time, the program has tried to encourage and support longer-term assignments for Canadians to South Africa, a trend that is welcomed by South Africans. These longer assignments provide opportunities for work on system design or re-design, greater transfers of skills, and the establishment of closer personal relationships, with all the advantages those offer for frank discussions and mentoring. For example, a Canadian assigned to a provincial department in South Africa can help assess a set of problems, develop and propose solutions, advise both political and public-service leaders about some of the pitfalls likely to be encountered, help the senior managers understand their roles in facilitating change, and leave behind a business plan for further work.

The area of service delivery provides a very successful example of this approach. In an early study visit to Canada, officials from the Northern Cape province became very interested in New Brunswick's "integrated service" model. They drew up plans to develop their own one-stop service delivery (OSSD) system for regions of their province that were in many respects "un-served." Over a period of years, a senior official of Service New Brunswick has made several extended visits to South Africa to assist with planning and design issues, implementation and staff training. Responsible South African officials have

visited Canada to learn, both on the job and in related management courses, how to develop and run such a project. In the periods between visits, the South African officials correspond by e-mail with their mentors in New Brunswick to ask for advice and information. The first OSSD centre was jointly dedicated by premiers Dipico and McKenna during the latter's visit to South Africa in 1997. It officially opened some months later, and two other sites have opened since then.

Another recent long assignment was carried out by a former deputy minister from British Columbia, who spent nearly two months working in the Eastern Cape's finance department. He provided critical advice on the review of tenders for changes to the province's financial management system, on performance contracts for all senior officials, on new treasury guidelines, and on strategic planning within the department. This assignment has generated substantial ongoing follow-up work. In another case, an expert in Canadian fiscal arrangements from Manitoba has spent a year working with South Africa's Financial and Fiscal Commission, particularly on the processes of intergovernmental relations and the design of methods of allocating national revenues to subordinate levels of government.

The centre of government is a third area in which the program has designed and sponsored longer-term assignments. In two separate instances, cabinet office officials from Saskatchewan and British Columbia have worked for three months in the premiers' offices in their respective twinned provinces, to provide advice on the cabinet decision-making processes.

Twinning

The program has brokered twinning arrangements between six South African and six Canadian provinces and between the respective national departments of public works. The provincial pairs are Eastern Cape and British Columbia, Free State and Saskatchewan, Gauteng and Ontario, Mpumalanga and Alberta, North West and Manitoba, and Northern Cape and New Brunswick. Gauteng has not drawn on its relationship with Ontario extensively; in lieu of work with Gauteng, Ontario has provided considerable informal assistance to the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

These twinning arrangements represent one of the program's key features. We have mentioned a number of the activities that have taken place under them to illustrate the program's operations. But it is worth examining these arrangements in more detail, especially given the current discussion in international aid circles with respect to the usefulness of twinning.

In every case, the program's twinning arrangements have started with visits by and the sponsorship of very senior officials, in most cases the provincial cabinet secretaries. In the case of South Africa's Department of Public Works, its deputy minister first visited Canada on his own initiative and then asked the program to arrange a working relationship between his department and Public Works and Government Services Canada. This level of sponsorship, and the requisite endorsement by premiers in the case of the provincial arrangements, has brought not only commitment but very high levels of

expertise and knowledge to the relationships. Cabinet secretaries in both countries take an interest in fostering the relationships, in trying to ensure high-quality exchange visits, and in selecting appropriate officials for the specific assignments.

The twinning arrangements provide to the South African partners “their own,” as it were, sources of Canadian public-service practitioners, who can be made available for specific projects, and their own Canadian counterparts whom they can visit, whose practices they can observe, and whose experiences they can draw on. The cultivation of personal relationships makes possible the informal exchange of information, advice and support between formal visits.

The Canadian twinned provinces and departments have entered into and sustained these arrangements, broadly speaking, for two reasons. Twinning gives them a means of helping South Africans, whose struggle they have long supported. But, as well, the experiences of Canadians in working with South African counterparts are seen as strengthening Canadian public services themselves. Canadian officials who take on challenging assignments in South Africa bring a broader perspective back to their own jobs. Through their work there, a number of Canadians have identified areas in which South African practice appears to be stronger than their own; for example South Africans run exemplary consultation processes and demonstrate the ability to actually listen to what other people say. Certainly, the experience often proves personally very satisfying. As more than one Canadian participant has observed, they appreciate more the chance to help build a professional public service than to tear one down.

Although it has not been their primary purpose, the twinning arrangements have played a role in promoting trade relations between Canada and South Africa, and several Canadian and South African provincial trade delegations have visited their “twins” during the past few years. The twinning relationships also continue to reinforce the high regard with which Canada is viewed in South Africa.

While twinning is an arrangement made between two entities – provincial governments or national departments – it is a relationship among three partners. The third partner is, of course, the program itself, which plays several roles in supporting twinning. It helps to focus the exchanges on areas that are critical to the development of governance capacity. It advises on how best to undertake specific projects. When changes in governments occur, or individual senior officials in either country change jobs, the program helps re-knit connections that have been broken. It funds the exchange visits, makes the travel and accommodation arrangements, briefs officials for their assignments, and debriefs participants at the end of each project. The program’s own capacity is enhanced considerably through being able to draw on the expert practitioners of the Canadian partners. In addition, the special advisers often learn things they didn’t know and gain new insights from the visiting Canadian public servants, which makes them and the program as a whole more effective.

Over time, several twinned provinces have focused their collaboration in the area of planning and budgeting. For example, Alberta provided a four-week intensive orientation to public finance management and budgeting for a dozen senior officials from

Mpumalanga, which was followed by the assignment of Alberta officials to work in counterpart departments in Mpumalanga, and a study visit by the Mpumalanga finance minister and his deputy to Canada. North West and Manitoba have had a series of exchanges related to budgeting and financial management, with Manitoba first sending a large team of senior officials to work with their counterparts in South Africa and North West then sending its senior finance officials to spend several weeks in Manitoba to focus on specific skills and processes. British Columbia has provided extensive support to the Eastern Cape's Finance Department in strategic planning and in the training of key personnel.

Twinned provinces have also engaged in considerable work in the area of support to cabinet decision-making. The Canadian cabinet secretaries have been particularly instrumental in this. For example, former cabinet secretaries Claire Morris and Don Leitch have each spent two to three weeks at a time with the senior officials in their respective twinned South African provinces, advising on issues related to government machinery and processes. As we noted above, two Canadian provinces contributed senior cabinet office officials for three-month assignments in South African premiers' offices. Exchange visits of cabinet office officials in both directions have focused on nuts-and-bolts issues such as the management of cabinet agendas, the recording and storing of cabinet minutes, and how to foster the appropriate working relationships between the centre of government and the operating departments.

Reflections

As we said at the outset, the work of the program has been an experiment in assisting one country in its transition to democratic governance. As this stage of the experiment draws to a close, we find ourselves asking some basic questions. Has the program worked? Has its operating methodology been appropriate and effective? Just how long should it take a country such as South Africa to build its governance capacity to the level such that help from outsiders is no longer needed?

One thing we obviously cannot do is judge the program by whether or not democracy flourishes or founders in South Africa. The program is far too small for its impact on the democratic experiment in South Africa to be measured. If democracy in this nation of over forty million people goes from strength to strength in the future, it would be silly to suggest that this were attributable to the efforts of an average of three or four Canadians working here over a period of seven years. It would likewise be silly to blame those same Canadians if things turn out badly.

What we have to do is look at more modest indicators of the program's effectiveness, or lack thereof. There are two of these that provide at least some insights into whether or not the program has worked: first, what those of us involved with the program have been able to see and assess ourselves; and, second, the feedback we get from those who have participated in its activities.

We start from the premise that the basic systems and processes of governing are fundamentally important to the health and well-being of democracy. Effective cabinet

decision-making, being able to put together a budget, and delivering services to citizens effectively all matter. At least they matter if one subscribes to the definition of governance that we adopted in the introduction. These processes do not determine a government's policy choices, but they do determine whether or not it is organized and supported to take the political, policy and budgetary decisions necessary to accomplish its goals.

Through the twinning arrangements, the program has had access to professional expertise that can be brought to bear on many different aspects of governance and service delivery, from the question of the appropriate role of a cabinet secretary to the intricacies of fleet or property management.

We can point to important program initiatives in all three of these areas that our experiences suggest to us have been successful. Early projects were instrumental in helping establish functioning processes of cabinet decision-making in the Northern Cape and the Free State, for example. A range of other initiatives, including a number that flowed from the 1999 workshop on the support for the centre of government, have visibly strengthened capacity in several provincial cabinet offices.

In the program's planning and budgeting work, what we have observed is that the nature of the assistance being requested from us has evolved in a significant direction over time. The starting point in many cases was a very basic question such as, "What sort of information is required to do a 'real budget'?" Subsequent requests focused on financial management and comptrollership issues and asked for our participation in estimates reviews and our advice on the redesign of budget processes. Most recently, several provinces have expressed considerable interest in improving the capacity of their analysts to assess budgets more critically than heretofore. There is a logical progression in these various requests, with one stage building on another.

The Northern Cape's very successful One-Stop Service Delivery project has recently been hailed by South Africa's national government as a model in this field. The Canadian practitioner advice brought to bear under the auspices of the program was critical in persuading officials to reject an unworkable "high-tech" solution and to move the project forward incrementally. The continuity of support for this project, which New Brunswick has provided for several years, has been another key ingredient in its success.

The feedback about the program has been good. When Dr. Sharon Sutherland spoke with South African participants in the program during the evaluation she carried out in 1998, they consistently told her that they found the program to be relevant to their needs, easy to access, professional and helpful. They essentially asked for "more of the same," with modifications such as the assignment of Canadian practitioners for longer periods of time to South Africa – which we have tried to arrange whenever possible.

Since then, the feedback received by the program has been consistently positive. Requests for assistance are phrased in ways such as, "Sipho and I went to school together, and when I told him what my problem was, he said, 'Phone the Program on Governance'"; or, "I know we can get help from other donors, but it will take six months or more and a nightmare of form-filling, and you just ask, 'What's the problem and how can we help?'"

It is not unusual for the South Africans who return from study visits to Canada to tell us that these visits were the most useful they had ever been on, as well as the hardest work they had ever done in their lives. As well, the program's workshops have invariably been well received, and it has a recognized and enviable reputation in South Africa for the number and the quality of the major workshops it has delivered.

When the program's interventions have been less successful than we had hoped, or have come to an abrupt halt, this has usually been because of a political crisis in the South African province or department concerned. For example, the very successful collaboration on budgeting between Mpumalanga and Alberta ended at the time of the 1999 elections, which saw the replacement of the premier, several ministers, and many senior officials in Mpumalanga. The program's efforts to restart this work have not been successful. In another project that was designed to assist several national departments in a large collaborative budgeting exercise, the planned intervention stopped after a major shuffle of cabinet ministers and senior appointed officials.

Just as we consider the main focus of the program's work to be appropriate, we think that its basic operating methodology is sound. The program's strong professional and administrative presence in South Africa has been crucial to its function and its programming successes. It is one thing for a South African provincial government to make a general request for the program's assistance in the area of budgeting, for example. It is quite another to translate that general request into a specific plan of action. This requires professional assessment and judgement and a thorough knowledge of and experience with budgeting processes. Also, it always requires extensive follow-up work with the South African officials concerned, which can only be done in South Africa.

Part of what the program is modelling is a deliberate and planned approach to public administration. But it is quite unrealistic to expect new South African executives in recently established positions, who are charged with creating new provincial government department or national systems or legislatures, to be able to foresee all the circumstances in which they could use what the program offers and to plan accordingly. Plans for specific projects have thus sometimes developed slowly, while in other cases requests for assistance have emerged on an urgent basis. The program's approach has been to respond with as much flexibility as is possible, while always trying to ensure that its interventions will have a follow-up course of action and that they will build on each other.

Through the twinning arrangements, the program has had access to professional expertise that can be brought to bear on many different aspects of governance and service delivery, from the question of the appropriate role of a cabinet secretary to the intricacies of fleet or property management. The range of areas in which the program has supported projects through twinning arrangements has been considerable. The fact that these services have been donated by the respective governments in Canada has magnified substantially the extent of the work that the program has been able to do.

We do not know the answer to the question of how long it should take South Africa to build governance capacity to the point where all concerned can declare victory and move on to other issues. If you, though, think that seven years is long enough, ask yourself this

question: if you were a newly appointed deputy minister of finance, in a newly created province, in which all the departments of government were new and all the ministers and most senior public servants had never been in government in their lives, and you inherited an input-based incremental budget system, but your staff had never worked on a budget before, and you and your colleagues had to implement at least three major national budget-process reforms in as many years, how long do you think it would take you to develop a professional budgetary operation?

We think Canadian efforts to support good governance in South Africa should continue for some time and not simply because the program continues to receive requests for assistance. The machinery of government in South Africa is not static. As an illustration, the place of the provincial governments in South Africa is evolving, and the roles of premiers' offices and cabinet secretaries are also changing in law and in practice. New systems and processes remain in early stages of development. As well, the rapid turnover of senior officials in all parts of government leaves gaps in knowledge and experience; often the "bench strength" behind a senior leader is thin. Our South African colleagues will continue to have to tackle a range of very difficult aspects of governance, and we believe that what they have achieved in the space of a few years merits both the respect and continued support of Canadians.

Note

¹ The literature on the place of governance in economic development has been growing rapidly. We have found the following very useful: John Healey and Mark Robinson, *Democracy, Governance and Economic Policy: Sub-Saharan Africa in Comparative Perspective* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 1992); Carol Lancaster, *Aid to Africa: So Much to Do, So Little Done* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Barbara Nunberg, *The State After Communism: Administrative Transitions in Central and Eastern Europe* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1999); OECD, DAC, *Final Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Participatory Development and Good Governance* (Paris: OECD, 1997); World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1989); World Bank, *Governance and Development* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1992); and World Bank, *The State in a Changing World* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1997).