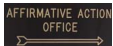


## Empowerment Needs Reviewing: Zuma

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

Wednesday, 11 March 2009 10:10 -

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The way broad-based black economic empowerment is put into effect needs reviewing, ANC president Jacob Zuma said on Tuesday.

Zuma said affirmative action and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBEE) programme had increased the black middle class substantially.

"(But) we are not convinced that it has succeeded in addressing the structural economic and social inequalities in our society," he told the Confederation of Black Business Organisations (CBBO) in Sandton.

Zuma was accompanied by ANC treasurer general Mathews Phosa and ANC head of policy Jeff Hadebe.

The Marula Room at the Sandton Sun Hotel was packed to capacity with delegates overflowing into another room.

ANC NEC member Tony Yengeni was also at the event, along with the presidents of black professional organisations such as the Black Lawyers Association.

The ANC had long been saying BBEE should benefit broader sections of our society.

"We have said that in its current implementation BBEE has benefited the few and has not been broad-based enough," Zuma said.

"When we talk about a review of BBEE, such a review should concern itself about how effective we are in applying this policy, how we can strengthen it so that it can better deliver for our the majority and thus become broad based."

Zuma said putting into effect the policy, which was meant to restore imbalances from apartheid, was always a "challenge" with "many obstacles".

He, however, reiterated the ANC's commitment to affirmative action as a policy, saying it was "unthinkable" for the ANC to abandon it.

"We wish to emphasise that the ANC is committed to ensuring the continued implementation of our affirmative action as well as the BBEE programmes," he said.

The ruling party's presidential pick said "more and better communication" about the elements of BBEE was needed and the "bottlenecks" in the policy's implementation had to be identified.

"We need to identify where the current bottlenecks are in implementation, and implement BBEE in such a manner that it becomes genuinely broad-based and promotes the ownership and control of productive assets by black people, women and youth."

Harmonising government procurement policies to ensure that they complied with the BBEE

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Act and the codes of good practice was a priority, he said, adding that the ANC government should not issue tenders to companies who did not "qualify and comply with BBBEE codes of good practice".

"It is not acceptable that government officials who are empowered to deal with such matters only concern themselves with price only at the expense of equity," he said.

It was necessary to beef up communication between black business and government to "resolve issues" where government departments slip up.

Zuma was aware that government had failed to pay small and medium enterprises (SMME's) timeously, resulting in their demise.

"It is unacceptable for our government to be seen to be contributing to the demise of black businesses through not timeously paying for services rendered. This has to stop," he said.

The ANC government intended beefing up its oversight capabilities through a Planning Commission in the presidency for it to intervene when the implementation of policies were "frustrated by government departments".

Zuma called on black professionals to return to the public service to help improve the lives of the people, telling them they could "make money in the private sector later".

"You can do it at least for a few years and then go and make money in the private sector later!"

"National service also includes being part of the public discourse on transformation issues," he said.

The CBBO comprises over eight black business and professional organisations.

CBBO president Jimmy Manyi said Zuma had addressed the CBBO's concerns which it raised at a previous engagement with the ruling party in December.

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