



cover story / cabinet

for it to act cohesively and take collective responsibility for decisions and their implementation.

"What South Africa needs now is a more decisive and deepened agenda for economic and other reforms if we are to achieve the economic growth we need and many millions more jobs," she says.

"A large cabinet filled with divergent viewpoints could very likely be a place to which any serious proposal for reform will go to die slowly as it is white-anted away through endless consultation and procrastination."

A huge construction zone

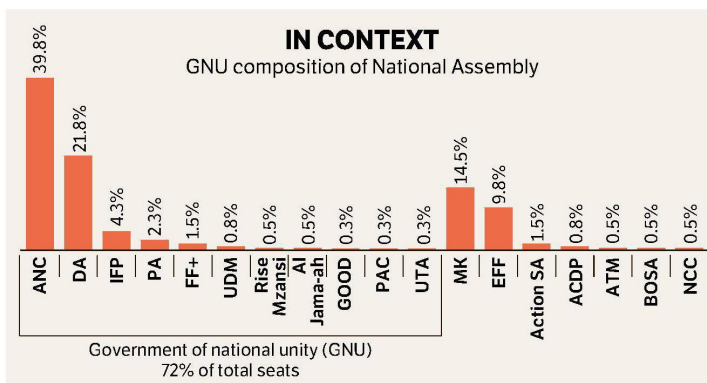
Of the ministries allocated to the DA, four (public works & infrastructure, agriculture, home affairs, communications & digital technology) are likely to have the biggest economic impact in the short to medium term, though nothing is more important than education for the country's longer-term prospects.

South Africa suffers from huge infrastructure backlogs in energy, roads, rail and ports. This constitutes the biggest drag on economic growth, but the previous government largely failed to galvanise public and private fixed investment to deliver the huge infrastructural push it promised would drive up the growth rate.

This is partly because of a lack of project preparation and technical skills within the government but also because of the ANC's inherent resistance to partnering with private capital.

If the new DA minister of public works & infrastructure, Dean Macpherson, the party's former shadow minister of trade & industry, can overcome these obstacles, billions of rand in private fixed investment into public infrastructure could be unlocked.

Macpherson tweeted that he looks forward to working with his ANC deputy, the former head of the same ministry, Sihle Zikalala, whom he has known for many years. "Together we will make a great team to turn South Africa into a massive construction zone which will drive much-needed job creation," he tweeted.



Source: Citi research, parliament

Removing the skills constraint

Home affairs is the ministry that is possibly ripe for delivering the quickest wins, given that much of the reform legwork – the overhaul of the work visa system and expansion of the eVisa system to 34 countries – has been completed.

Despite these reforms, the department isn't doing nearly enough to alleviate the skills constraint by making it easier for skilled immigrants to enter the economy. This is both because of inefficient staff, systems and processes and because of a deep-seated ambivalence to allowing foreigners entry for fear that they rob locals of job opportunities.

In fact, study after study has shown that skilled migrants create more jobs for locals, more growth and more wealth – as the DA well knows.

The new minister, Leon Schreiber – DA leader John Steenhuisen's strategy



Dean Macpherson: Public works & infrastructure minister

that there's been a tendency for new players to throw out old DGs and not realise that things go faster if they build on the good that's already there – sometimes all that's needed is a bit of reshaping or strengthening of delivery modes. "If new parties think they can make fast change by driving new policies and replacing staff, that they are smarter than everyone who was there before, they will find they are still talking about it in 2029 and delivering little," she warns.

However, when it comes to agriculture – now headed by Steenhuisen – Bureau for Economic Research director Prof Johann Kirsten predicts "the road ahead is littered with traps set up by government officials that could lead to the minister's failure".

He says the department – which previously included land reform & rural development – was known for its inefficiencies and poor staff and skills. There is also "ample evidence" of deliberate attempts by middle management to stall the implementation of new initiatives, including President Cyril Ramaphosa's ambition to establish a land reform agency and release state land to the intended beneficiaries.

Kirsten fears making land reform & rural development a separate portfolio could allow the rot in the land reform programme to persist.

But this doesn't mean Steenhuisen should think there's a need for new plans.

"South Africa's agriculture sector has the potential for inclusive growth and job creation," says Kirsten. "However, this cannot materialise if there is a continuous introduction of new plans without properly implementing the existing ones and addressing the funda-

& communications adviser – will likely light a much-needed fire under this sclerotic department.

A road filled with obstacles

The million-dollar question is whether DA ministers will be able to pick their own directors-general (DGs).

Prof Miriam Altman of the University of Johannesburg's school of economics notes