

Blaming the apartheid past isn't enough, says Morobe

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Cape Town – The former chairman of the Financial and Fiscal Commission (FFC), Murphy Morobe, yesterday called for a cool-headed review of the deprivation caused by apartheid as opposed to what he now believed was a “new deprivation” since 1994.

Deprivation could be due to historical reasons, “but I think ... many of us can attest to the fact that there is deprivation” that had developed since the first democratic elections and it was becoming difficult to “draw a line and say this was the old deprivation, this is the new deprivation”.

This was a result of resource allocation under the present economic system, “especially where it continues on the basis of relegating the majority of people to the margins of society. After another 10 years, it will be very hard to even suggest that this is historic, apartheid-designed deprivation. It deals with what our responsibility has been in the past 10, 20 years towards exacerbating some

of the conditions. So very soon, these things will merge.”

Part of the solution could, however, lie in empowering people by making more information available about the options open to the government.

The key challenge facing the nation was how to “bridge the gap between deprivation and the whole

notion of rights”, Morobe said.

Morobe believed the government had “made significant strides in that direction” through legislation such as the Access to Information Act, compared with previous governments that had deliberately deprived citizens of relevant information.

He said the ever-increasing political majority of the ANC government strengthened rather than lessened the importance of institutions created by the constitution to advise the government on how to deal with the deep socioeconomic disparities.

Now a deputy director-general in charge of communications in the presidency, Morobe said at the opening of a three-day conference to mark the founding of the FFC that the commission would continue to play an important role even if a one-party state developed due to, for example, a snowballing of the defection of political parties to the ANC.

“I just want to put up an orange flag that we do have a constitution and we created these institutions ...

and if the rain goes, it does not mean that you throw the umbrella away.”

If the way this was done was “not properly clarified, you run the risk of significant wastage in the system”.

Most newspapers today carried reports which indicated “how sharp this debate is becoming” and what needed to be done. Morobe said the FFC had to balance the imperative of nation building and maintaining its autonomy when recommending the best ways in which services could be delivered by all three spheres of government in consultation with a broad spectrum of the public.

This represented a clear break with the past, when the government had made decisions “for the people, and not with the people”.

The commission’s challenges now included strengthening its role in advising parliament and the provincial legislatures as there were doubts about whether they had “the capacity to fully utilise the output of institutions like the FFC for its oversight function over the executive”.