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Future of provinces one of "big decisions"

Zuma

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DEMOCRACY and governance experts are divided on whether the government should reduce, abolish or retain the nine provinces and legislatures.

However, Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister Sicelo Shiceka says the future of provinces is one of the big decisions the new government is tasked to make.

"There is a policy document that we will be discussing around the future of provinces," Shiceka said the document dealt with whether they should remain, be done away or reduced.

Kwandiwe Kondlo, director of democracy and governance at Human Sciences Research Council, said scrapping some provinces would be the best decision.

But the future of provinces had been on the table for years, and it was unlikely that a decision would be made any time soon.

"The best situation will be when we have fewer provincial governments. It saves taxpayers' money... the (more) slender the bureaucracy the better it is for the release of funds," he said.

Thabo Rapoo, director of the Centre for Policy Studies, disagrees, saying such a move would take away citizens' democratic rights at "subnational" level. "If we still believe people need to be given a chance to chose their leaders that are closer to them, then the nine provinces should be retained."

Rapoo said leaders who pushed for the scrapping of provinces were claiming they were an obstacle in the implementation of national government policy. "What needs to be addressed is the efficient implementation of policy and elimination of corruption.

"Getting rid of provinces would not eliminate corruption."

Rapoo said that the claim that provincial government structures and legislatures were a waste of taxpayers' money held no water. "It is the people that are employed that are wasting money."

He questioned the creation of the two ministries in the Presidency to monitor implementation of policy, and said it was a move to render provincial legislatures redundant. "The work of provincial legislatures is to monitor implementation."

Rapoo warned that the move to cut the number or do away with provinces could count against the ANC because people in senior positions in provincial governments were its deployees. "There will be a lot of unemployed people... reducing the number of provinces will be a short-sighted view."