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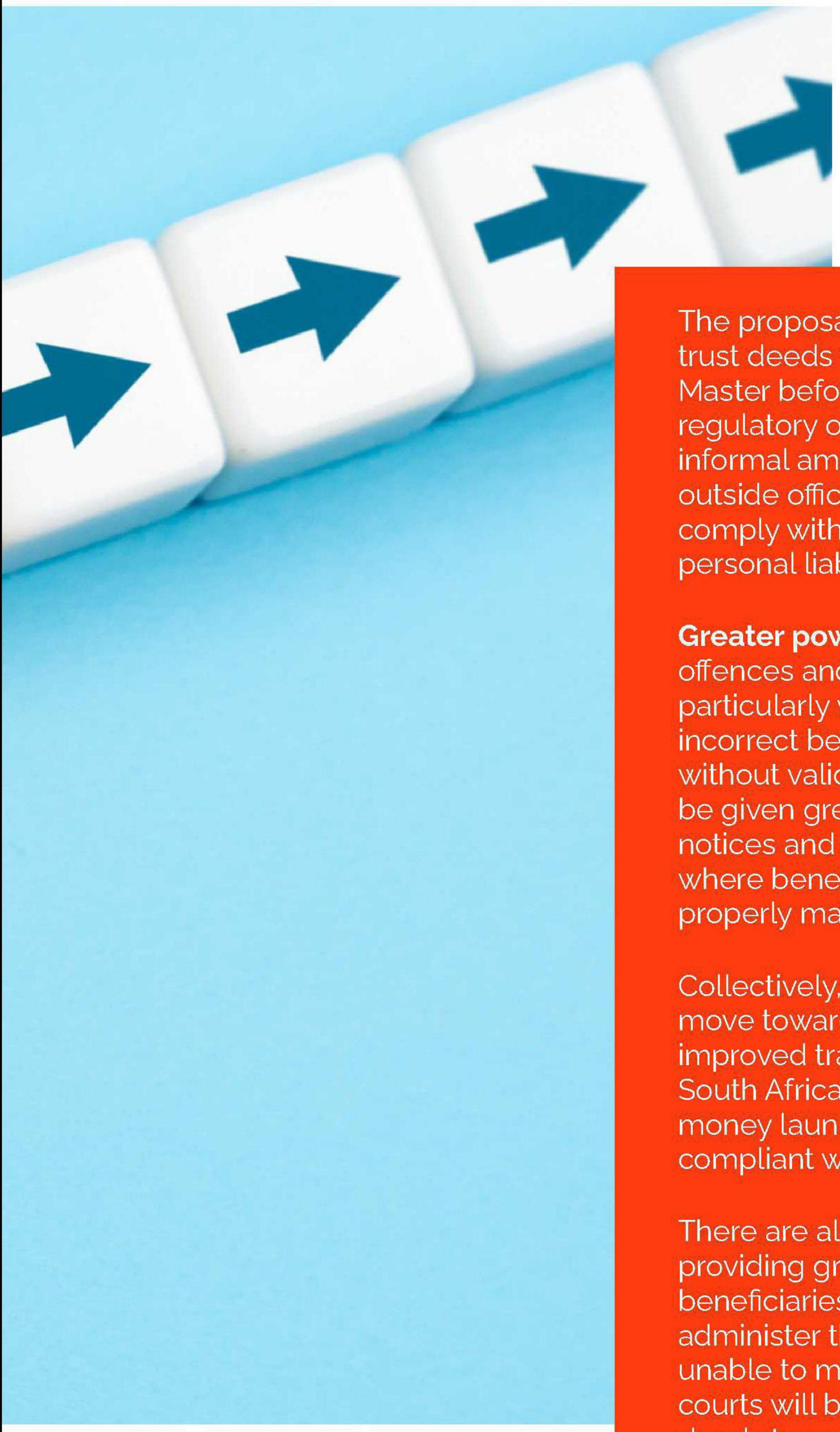

The proposals go further. Future amendments to trust deeds will need to be submitted to the Master before they can take effect, increasing regulatory oversight and reducing the scope for informal amendments that previously occurred outside official processes. Trustees who fail to comply with these requirements could face personal liability.

**Greater powers for The Master** - Additional offences and penalties are also expected, particularly where trustees knowingly maintain incorrect beneficial ownership records or act without valid letters of authority. The Master will be given greater powers to issue compliance notices and administrative fines, particularly where beneficial ownership information is not properly maintained.

Collectively, these measures represent a clear move towards stronger governance and improved transparency, while also supporting South Africa's broader efforts to strengthen anti-money laundering controls and remain compliant with international financial standards.

There are also encouraging proposals aimed at providing greater protection for vulnerable beneficiaries. Where trusts are created to administer the affairs of minors or individuals unable to manage their own financial affairs, courts will be expected to scrutinise draft trust deeds to ensure that beneficiaries' interests are adequately protected before approving the arrangement.

These developments demonstrate that trust administration is becoming increasingly professionalised, with greater emphasis on accountability, governance and protecting beneficiaries.

Legislation, however, is only one part of the picture. Fiduciary practitioners continue to experience significant operational challenges that directly affect their ability to deliver timely s

The Master's Office remains under considerable pressure, particularly because of ageing IT infrastructure, network instability and dependence on Home Affairs systems for identity verification. When these systems fail, essential processes such as issuing Letters of Executorship or Letters of Authority are delayed, creating knock-on effects throughout estate administration.

**Encouraging signs of progress** - Infrastructure upgrades are underway, additional staff are being recruited, and national procedural guidelines are being developed to improve consistency between Master's Offices around the country. Greater uniformity in processes would remove much of the uncertainty practitioners currently face when dealing with different regional offices.

Delays are also being experienced elsewhere in the administration process. Turnaround times at SARS, particularly for deceased estate compliance certificates and estate duty assessments, continue to frustrate practitioners. Banking processes have similarly become more cumbersome, with delays in obtaining certificates of balance and processing estate payments. The transition to digitally issued Letters of Executorship has introduced new practical challenges where QR codes cannot always be verified quickly, further slowing administration.

These operational issues highlight an important reality. Even the best legislative reforms cannot achieve their intended outcomes without efficient implementation and properly functioning institutions.

Against this backdrop, FISA's upcoming annual conference could not be more relevant. Held under the theme "Risk and Reward in Fiduciary Practice," the programme reflects the increasingly complex environment in which practitioners operate. Sessions will explore fraud prevention in estate and trust administration, the growing legal and operational responsibilities of trustees, exchange control developments, tax implications, conflicts of interest, artificial intelligence, and the broader business risks associated with running a fiduciary practice.

One particularly timely session will examine artificial intelligence as a companion rather than a decision-maker, recognising that while technology can improve efficiency, professional judgement remains central to fiduciary practice. Ultimately, the fiduciary profession exists to protect people during some of the most significant and often most vulnerable moments of their lives.

**Legislative reform will strengthen that responsibility, but success will ultimately depend on well-functioning institutions, consistent regulatory implementation and practitioners who continue to place their clients' interests at the centre of every decision.**

**Written by COVER in conversation with Jan du Plessis,** *CEO, FISA*