

Bloating Presidency – South Africa needs answers

Honourable Chairperson,

The budget allocated to the Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) has more than tripled from R208.2 million in the 2014/15 to a R717.7 million in 2015/16. This huge increase is as a result of transferring national planning and youth oversight, including the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) functions, to the DPME.

The DPME seems to be well on its way to achieving its self-imposed target of an annual budget of more than R1 billion in the medium term – by subterfuge.

On 13 November 2014 the DA warned from this platform that the DPME had embarked on a rapid expansion exercise. We indicated that the Minister in the Presidency, Hon Jeff Radebe, had requested National Treasury to increase the department's annual budget by more than R600 million to more than R1 billion over the medium term to end 2017/18.

We were told then that the additional funds would be expended to create more than 750 new posts in the department. The DA warned that this smacked of empire building and would only serve to deepen the ANC's crony network by opening up further underserved opportunities for cadre deployment.

On 15 April 2015 we were told that the Minister in the Presidency has made a further submission to the Minister of Public Service and Administration for the expanded structure of about 1050 posts and a request had been made to National Treasury for additional funding for the envisaged bloated departmental structure.

We repeat our call to National Treasury not to accede to this request until substantive reasons have been given for the request such as:

- Why does the Minister want to expand the department so rapidly?
- What will these new positions be?
- What will be the specific functions of these positions?

We need answers but urgently.

In the meantime, the DPME seems to be taking another route to achieve the same goal by attaching to itself the National Planning Commission Secretariat, Youth Development, and transfer payments to the NYDA, as a programme, transferred from Vote 1 to Vote 8.

We foresee further attachments to grow the DPME annual budget to more than R1 billion.

That question is – what drives the desire for the creation of this apparent fiefdom?

The DA remains unconvinced about the need for a DPME. Line function managers in the various government departments should routinely monitor and evaluate the performance of their departments, with the DPSA performing the co-ordinating role.

However, while DPME still receives budget allocations, the department should remain lean, efficient and productive.

But there are serious constraints in this regard. It only “recommends corrective measures”.

The DPME’s budget programme 2, Outcomes Monitoring, is mandated: *to advance the strategic and developmental agenda of the government through monitoring, reporting and recommending corrective measures on the implementation of the NDP and the MTSF targets and evaluating key government programmes.*

But, the department, the Public Service Commission and the Auditor-General generally complain of a lack of authority or power to enforce implementation of their recommended “corrective measures.”

They have no authority to actually take the action necessary to make changes.

And so, the lack of compliance and consequent poor performance in many government and provincial departments continues.

Here are illustrative examples from the results of the DPME’s 2013 MPAT (Management Performance Assessment Tool). The MPAT assessment process is designed to build internal monitoring and self-evaluation capacity.

- Governance and Accountability: Seventy percent of departments (79% in 2012) are still non-compliant with the standard for service delivery improvement: “This situation is an anomaly given that improving service delivery is a priority in the NDP,” says the report. We agree.
- Human Resource Management: 90% of departments (88% in 2012) were assessed as non-compliant for the standard related to management of disciplinary cases.

This can also translate into millions of rand in costs to the state, as the following example shows. In response to a question I asked the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services recently, we learned that the government has paid out R25.6 million for 419 employees of the department of correctional

services who had been “on suspension with full salary” for the period 1 January 2014 to 31 January 2015. We believe this is a true case of fruitless and wasteful expenditure.

This is a very serious problem across many national and provincial government departments.

But how did we get here?

The DPSA gave our portfolio committee an insight into a probable answer in a recent briefing on its budget: The DPSA said that employment of people in human resource management who simply do not have the competences and skill to do the job or are too scared to take the necessary disciplinary steps against offending deployed cadres and comrades, means wrongdoing is simply not punished.

The results of MPAT 2014 are due later in the year. We look forward to significant improvement in all the 31 standards being measured, to see whether any progress is being made in the quality of service delivery to the nation.

Honourable Chair, we all know that where there are no consequences for poor work or non-performance, mediocrity and failure become the norm.

Honourable Chair, we have made this plea before but it is worth repeating because of its importance. The DA holds that the single hybrid portfolio committee for the DPME and DPSA cannot do effective oversight over the two departments.

The Hon Minister Radebe has rightly said this is parliament’s problem to address. We now again urge the Speaker and the relevant committee to address this serious shortcoming as a matter of urgency. We believe the oversight work of members of the committee to hold the executive and their departments truly accountable is impacted negatively by this anomalous arrangement.

In this regard, Parliament and the nation keenly await the outcomes of performance agreements signed by the Ministers with the President. It has now taken over a year for these to be presented to Parliament.

The DPME has to ensure that these reasonable expectations of the nation are met.

I thank you.