

Parliamentary Budget Vote Debate 17: Social Development
Input by
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Honourable House Chairperson, the Minister of Social Development, Members of Parliament

There is no doubt that Minister Dhlamini and her team, is a team at work. They have, year on year, managed to successfully extend the provision of social grants.

While the IFP strongly supports welfare assistance, we have since our inception been strong proponents of self-help and self-reliance. We contend therefore that without a much stronger emphasis on these principles, we are cultivating a welfare state, which is in stark contrast to the vision outlined by the National Development Plan – and which our shrinking economy and stagnant tax base simply cannot sustain.

Can we really celebrate the fact that in some provinces, one in three people are dependent on a grant alone? What happened to slogans like “a nation at work”?

We simply cannot afford a situation where millions of people remain trapped in poverty, and dependent on government alone.

Hon Chair, gender-based violence remains a cause for great concern. But our haphazard approach to dealing with the crisis is also a worry. It is against this background that this Department’s Command Centre needs a closer look.

The Centre, in the form of a 24-hour telephone hotline, was launched very close to the 2014 election.

But how effective is this Centre? How many women know of its existence? And, if they do, do they have the means to access it?

Moreover, the expenditure on consultancies associated with the Centre is projected to grow to R16 million. This, despite the fact that a similar toll-free helpline is already in existence, managed by the NPO, Lifeline. Given the duplication of existing services, and the costs involved, the Centre is perhaps better viewed as cause for concern.

Allow me also to highlight the following issues -

Minister Dhlamini has articulated her vision of one social worker per ward. To this end, her Department has been granting bursaries to students from disadvantaged communities to study social work. Yet, due to budget constraints, the Department cannot absorb all the social work graduates. The question must therefore be, considering the emphasis the National Development plan places on the need for more social workers in the country, “What is Plan B?”.

It must also be said that our response to the rise in drug abuse has been wholly inadequate. The National Drug Authority is underfunded and seemingly also ill-equipped to rise to the challenge.

Let me again state today that I believe many people with disabilities remain on the fringes of our economy, marginalized and forgotten. And I content that our response as a country to the many challenges faced by people with disabilities are lacklustre at best.

Hon Chair, NGOs are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain their activities. They play a vital role in our society and deliver vital services on behalf of the State in many instances. The IFP appeals to National Treasury to consider increasing the budget of the National Development Agency, which is tasked with poverty elevation and Early Childhood Development initiatives.

Lastly, Minister, I often learn about events and programmes of your Department through social media, which is totally unacceptable. Moreover, your Department should ensure that our portfolios committee is always informed of events and decisions that have significant budget implications.

Finally, with many by-elections routinely taking place and with impending 2016 Local Government Elections, we are all too aware that wherever there are elections, this Department suddenly becomes very generous in hosting social outreach programmes where a variety of items are handed out. While we do not oppose such initiatives, they must never be politically driven.

In conclusion, the IFP wishes to thank all those who so selflessly give of their time and personal resources to support build their respective communities. Many thanks also go to the officials of the Department of Social Development and my colleagues from the portfolio. The IFP will support this Budget Vote.

I thank you.