

Nomsa Marchesi: Women need tangible interventions that will bring positive change

Honourable Chairperson,

In July 2014, a Presidential Proclamation revised the focus of this Ministry to Women and necessitated the review of its strategic approach to attain its goals.

This aims to champion the socio-economic empowerment of women and gender equality.

The Department's 5-year Strategic Plan tells us that gender inequality and divisions are to be considered within the historical context of Apartheid.

Honourable Chair, it is well known that Apartheid compromised the fabric of our society particularly the family structure, however in order to move forward this department's budget needs to reflect that it is truly committed to addressing the gender equality that still, today, punctuates society.

South African Leaders must recognise that gender discrimination and its related violence is a worldwide phenomenon, grounded in cultural values, prejudice and preconceived ideas that go well beyond Apartheid. Let us all wake up to that!

Honourable Chairperson, South Africa is a signatory to a number of regional and international treaties that try to address gender discrimination and gender equality; a societal ill world over, which amongst others, prevents economic growth and the eradication of poverty.

This department is now located within the Presidency for a reason; to review all existing legislation and be consulted on all proposed legislation to ensure that Gender Mainstreaming and gender equality happens at all levels!

Yet, when we look at the Revised Strategic Focus of the Department of Women, the interventions are not clearly outlined, they lack measurable outcomes and clear goals. The Department's Budget, which continues to be the lowest, remains utterly insufficient.

The Department's mission is to accelerate socio-economic transformation and implementation for women's empowerment and participation through oversight, monitoring, evaluation and influencing policy. However, it will take over 15 years for all National Departments to comply with Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB). Is this the acceleration the Department is targeting? Is this how long it will take for South African women to see GRB within government?

With regard to Gender Based Violence (GBV) intervention, a decrease of 12% per year, over 5 years, is targeted.

Minister, we still have cases like the Alexandra Balaclava Serial Rapist who continues to elude police who blame understaffing for their inability to catch him. How can this reduction in GBV be achieved? Where is the commitment?

In the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Intervention, 2000 women a year will be inducted and trained. Who is funding such programs and is there appropriate funding? Moreover, who will ensure that these qualified women are eventually employed?

In terms of the Promotion of Women's Access to Industrialisation and Beneficiation Intervention, we see no plan.

Yet Honorable Speaker, amongst various problems that Eskom faces, beneficiation is one of them, and there have been squabbles and in-fights between connected female individuals and Board Members.

This makes a mockery of the BBBEE process.

In the promotion of women's access to opportunities, can the Honourable Minister consider revising the Collateral Banking System, which is a well-known impediment to accessing funding for women?

There is a need to find non-traditional ways of accessing credit and entrepreneurial support and that is where you should start Minister!

Honourable Minister, as the Departmental Organogram remains outstanding, its Executive in fact gets the highest budget for Training.

These staff should already be well qualified. What warrants such further academic training?

Could the Department not use such funds for scholarships for underprivileged girls?

With regards to the Maintenance Bill, Honourable Minister, it is all too common to see parents not supporting their children. Maintenance defaulters must face the full might of the law as the children are usually the ones disadvantaged. The DA maintains that Clause 11 must be reinstated in the Bill to stop irresponsible parenting. Irresponsible parenting is not prevented by handing out condoms to 10 year old girls nor will this foster the changing of social attitudes.

Honorable Chairperson, the recently freed girl hostages of Boko Haram in Nigeria tell us that political will is all it takes to achieve results.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Minister, this Budget does not reflect on any revised focus nor any different strategies from what this House has seen before. An inflation adjusted Budget of R119.4 million, of which R80.5 million (67%) is for Administration, leaves R39 million for its mammoth task.

Women need real interventions that are tangible and that will bring a change in their lives and our Country. The DA therefore rejects this Budget.

Thank you.

Denise Robinson: Department has no will to deliver on its mandate of improving the lives of girls and women in our country

Honourable Speaker

The Department of Women in the Presidency was established in 2014, having been divested of the additional responsibilities of Children and Persons with Disabilities, which were transferred to the Ministry of Social Development.

This Ministry has been mired in controversy since its establishment due to a lack of clear direction, lack of leadership and clear policy.

It has shifted its focus towards an emphasis on the socio-economic empowerment and equality of women through mainstreaming, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation.

But what is being done? How effective are the measures undertaken?

In 2015/16 it received its first stand alone budget of R187 million which is expected to increase to R200 million by 2017/2018. This is the smallest allocation of all departments and is concerning when one considers that this department is responsible for the socio-economic interests of 50% of the population.

This budget clearly needs to be managed very carefully to achieve its mandate and to battle the plethora of societal ills that it is tasked with combatting.

Given this, it must then be asked why it was necessary for a consultant to be appointed to design a communication strategy at great cost? How successful was it?

In a country ravaged by gender violence, where women and children often have to flee for their lives, more shelters and Thutusela centres are needed. How can government turn its back on the mothers and children of this country?

Perhaps the same lame excuse that there is no extra funding and budget cuts have to be applied will be regurgitated once again. But why does government not apply its cautionary penny pinching mentality to gross luxuries, excessive travel and the personal indulgence of a vast homesteads like Nkandla?

It is a sad, sad story that government pays little attention to those who put them into power except when distributing a food parcel at election time.

In total, 80% of this department's budget will go to Administration, "to provide effective leadership, management and support services to the Minister and other branches in the department".

There is an urgent need for gender rights education and awareness programmes from Early Childhood Centres to Primary and Secondary schools, throughout the country and in rural areas and towns. In these programmes, the dignity of women and girls must be reinforced, and our people must be given the knowledge and affirmation that girls and women are not second class citizens.

Men and Boys need to be involved so that gender stereotypes and social attitudes can be changed.

The incidence of gender based violence against LGBTI persons also continues unabated.

The Commission for Gender Equality receives by far the largest allocation of funds from the Ministry, at just over R67 million. It is mandated to promote, protect, monitor and evaluate gender equality. Yet it spent 64% of its 2013/2014 budget on compensation of its employees! How effective have they then been at carrying out their mandate?

The incidence of sexual crimes in South Africa is extremely high – there were 171 sexual offences committed every day in 2013/14. We are so used to these figures that we are so inured to them and they no longer shock. But what are the Ministry and the CGE in particular doing to try to decrease the rate of violence?

Regarding child Maintenance defaulters – over 9 million children are growing up in single parent households, the majority headed by mothers. The campaign launched by the DA Women's network has received resounding support from communities across the country and yet Clause 11 which would allow for the blacklisting of offenders, has been removed.

Areas in which intervention is needed are endless but it seems that the CGE preoccupies itself with working on employment quotas at universities and other institutions instead of focusing on major issues of gender inequality and violence on the ground. What about the everyday horrors that many have to endure in their homes, in the streets and playgrounds and not least, and in schools which are often no longer safe spaces for children!

The failure of the much applauded National Council for Gender-based Violence in South Africa is a serious setback to gender justice.

It was meant to lead and monitor the implementation of a 365 Days Plan of Action against gender-based violence for Children and People with Disabilities. It was a high level, multi-sectoral national response to the scourge of gender-based violence, to be chaired by Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe and Minister Lulu Xingwana.

Sadly, lack of proper planning and funding led to its closure.

There are many issues and problems that desperately need attention and intervention from this department. Unfortunately it seems that the Minister is content to spend the majority of the department's budget on administration rather than supporting projects that could make a real difference to the lives of the girls and women of this country.

I thank you.