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GENDER PARITY AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE SANDF: KEY POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

On 20 May 2021, the Chief Human Resources of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) will brief the Joint Standing Committee on Defence (JSCD) on initiatives by the SANDF to enhance gender parity and youth development as well as related structures and mechanisms to support these initiatives. This is an important consideration given the focus placed on gender parity in various Department of Defence (DOD) policy documents as well as broader government planning.

This paper is prepared for the JSCD meeting on 20 May 2021 and provides a brief introduction of gender parity and youth development in the DOD at policy level. Members may note the mandate of the JSCD that applies to this engagement on gender parity and youth employment as per Section 228(3)(d) of the 1993 Interim Constitution:

*The committee shall be competent to investigate and make recommendations regarding the budget, functioning, **organisation**, armaments, policy, morale and state of preparedness of the National Defence Force and to perform such other functions relating to parliamentary supervision of the Force as may be prescribed by law.*

Members are reminded to refer to the background documents distributed with this research document. The peer reviewed journal articles from Professor Lindy Heincken provides valuable background information on aspects related to gender parity in the SANDF as well as youth development.



2. GENDER PARITY IN THE DOD

2.1 Policy directives on gender parity

Several policies inform the DOD's approach to gender parity, including the following:

- **The National Development Plan (NDP).** The NDP notes that “focused efforts are required to eliminate gender inequality. Promoting gender equality and greater opportunities for young people are integrated themes that run throughout this plan.”¹ The NDP further notes several focus points that should guide the DOD in its endeavours to ensure gender parity:
 - Public employment should be expanded to provide work for the unemployed, with a specific focus on youth and women.
 - The transformation of the economy should involve the active participation and empowerment of women.
 - The role of women as leaders in all sectors of society should be actively supported.
 - Social, cultural, religious and educational barriers to women entering the job market should be addressed.
- **The Medium-term Strategic Framework (MTSF).** The MTSF notes that “addressing gender equality between men and women and dismantling patriarchal systems remains a key challenge in ensuring women’s inclusion in the country in the short, medium and long term.”² To this end, various related interventions and targets are referred to in the MTSF:
 - Ensure the implementation of the Employment Equity Act to eliminate gender and race wage disparity.
 - 50% increase for women, youth and persons with disabilities by 2024 in each indicator category.
 - Mainstream gender, youth and disability rights in programs on access to universal education, life skills, skills development and training and in different field of study, including STEM.
 - Outreach initiatives to change behaviour in relation to gender and xenophobia.
 - 50% decline in the gender pay gap by 2024.
 - Monitoring implementation of Gender, Youth and Disability responsive planning, budgeting, monitoring, evaluation and auditing framework.
 - Advance and comply with Gender, Youth and Disability obligations in United Nations, African Union, Southern African Development Community, Common Wealth, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, BRICS nations and other institutions hosted in South Africa.
 - Women, youth and disability empowerment and gender equality advanced through multilateral forums and engagements and compliance.

¹ National Planning commission (2012) p. 24.

² MTSF (2019) p. 18



- **The 1996 White Paper on Defence.** The White Paper notes, in terms of Human Resources (Chapter 6) that “the overarching goal is to establish a new institution which is professional, efficient, effective and broadly representative. Representativeness refers to the racial, and gender composition of the SANDF.” It further states that “in order to secure the legitimacy of the armed forces, the DOD is committed to the goal of overcoming the legacy of racial and gender discrimination. It will ensure that the SANDF, and its leadership in particular, is broadly representative of the South African population.” Finally, the White Paper also notes that “The DOD acknowledges the right of women to serve in all ranks and positions, including combat roles.”
- **The 2002 Defence Act (No. 42 of 2002).** Section 205 (1) of the Defence Act states that “in order to secure the legitimacy of the armed forces, the DOD is committed to the goal of overcoming the legacy of racial and gender discrimination. It will ensure that the SANDF, and its leadership in particular, is broadly representative of the South African population.”
- **The 2015 Defence Review.** Chapter 11, on Future Military Leaders, notes that “The Defence Force is broadly representative of the people of South Africa, with due consideration being given to matters of equity, including gender and otherwise enabled persons.”³ With specific reference to the warrant officer and non-commissioned officer corps, the Review states “The Defence Force will be an equitable, broadly representative and gender-aligned national asset. A through-life assessment and selection system will be established to inform merit-based career advancement for all soldiers, coupled to education, training and development achievement.”⁴

2.2 Current indicators on gender parity in the DOD

Members may focus on two key aspects for follow-up during the engagement with the SANDF on gender parity, namely the overarching monitoring function related to gender parity and actual advances made.

1. *Monitoring gender parity in the DOD.* A Gender Sub-Directorate was previously established within the Equal Opportunities Chief Directorate of the SANDF. It should be determined whether this sub-directorate is still active and what exact functions this sub-directorate fulfils.
2. *Current gender parity figures in the DOD.* The 2019/20 Annual Report of the DOD provides a breakdown of its employees according to race and gender (See table on the next page). The table reveals that, **on 31 March 2020, the SANDF had a personnel contingent of 73 987, of which 22 965 are women (31.04%).** This signifies a significant increase since the advent of democratic South Africa in 1994. On 27 April 1994, the SANDF had a force complement of 73 525 of which 9 491 were women (12.91).⁵ By 2002, this figure increased to 20.6%.⁶

³ Defence Review (2015) p. 11-1

⁴ Defence Review (2015) p. 11-8

⁵ Defence Review (1998) Chapter 10.

⁶ DOD (2002) p. 23



Total Number of Employees (Including Employees with Disabilities) in each of the Following Occupational Bands as on 31 March 2020 (Table 3.6.2)

Occupational Band	Male				Female				TOTAL
	African	Coloured	Indian	White	African	Coloured	Indian	White	
Top Management	15	0	0	1	3	0	0	1	20
Senior Management	152	15	18	50	71	9	12	28	355
Professionally Qualified and Experienced Specialists and Mid-Management	3 615	918	173	2 009	1 759	351	99	981	9 905
Skilled Technical and Academically Qualified Workers, Junior Management, Supervisors, Foreman and Superintendents	12 001	2 493	228	2 303	5 183	940	87	1 512	24 747
Semi-Skilled and Discretionary Decision Making	20 421	2 245	186	625	7 461	1 249	65	215	32 467
Unskilled and Defined Decision Making	1 029	136	4	22	1 277	224	8	32	2 732
MSDS	1 961	195	69	138	1 168	171	20	39	3 761
Interns	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	39 194	6 002	678	5 148	16 922	2 944	291	2 808	73 987

Members may consider the following focus areas during their engagement with the DOD on gender parity:

- What is the status of the Gender Sub-Directorate that was previously established within the Equal Opportunities Chief Directorate of the SANDF?
- Given that female representation currently stands at 31.04% in the DOD (2020), what is the ultimate aim (percentage) for the DOD in terms of gender representation?
- How does gender parity within the SANDF compare to other military forces in Africa and the world?
- Members may focus on specific healthcare and other benefits to female soldiers, including the following:
 - Maternity benefits for female soldiers?
 - Military health benefits for female soldiers?
 - Pension benefits for female soldiers?
- Given that women are permitted in combat roles in the SANDF (which is not universally the case), what has been the military training approach to ensure inclusivity while maintaining effective combat standards?
- What has been the experience of the SANDF in terms of female participation in combat in areas of deployment (e.g. the Democratic Republic of Congo)?
- The recent appointment of the first female officer to the Military Command Council should be welcomed. Are there any sectors of the SANDF or specific rank levels where women are significantly under-represented? If so, what are the reasons for this?
- Given the importance of cohesion in the military, what has the approach of male counterparts in the SANDF to the inclusion of females in combat roles?
- What measures are put in place to address aspects of sexual harassment and abuse of female soldiers?
- What are the main barriers to women advancing in the SANDF?



3. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE SANDF

3.1 Policy directives on youth development

Several policies inform the DOD's approach to youth development, including the following:

- **The National Development Plan (NDP).** The NDP notes that “focused efforts are required to ... promote gender equality and greater opportunities for young people are integrated themes that run throughout this plan.”⁷ The NDP further notes several focus points that should guide the DOD in its endeavours to ensure youth development:
 - Provide training for school leavers and unemployed youth with a focus on skills development. The public sector should establish programmes run by well-trained ex-entrepreneurs who have first-hand experience of the sector.
 - The number of young people in cities is growing rapidly. These youths are largely in the working-age category and mainly unemployed or involved in marginal enterprise. This requires a positive response, as disenchanted youth are both a hazard and a lost resource to society.
 - Encourage the development of plans or components of plans that address the concerns of children and youth and reflect their voice.
 - The youth with senior secondary education and above should be targeted by programmes that provide incentives to employers to hire and train them.
- **The Medium-term Strategic Framework (MTSF).** The MTSF notes, as one of its outcomes, the need for “youths better prepared for further studies and the world of work beyond grade 9.”⁸ To this end, the SANDF plays a key role in the absorption of young South Africans to serve in the SANDF where they are skilled in various fields through the institution's training initiatives. Such training is linked to a number of other focus points noted in the MTSF:
 - Develop, implement, support and monitor programmes for equitable job creation, representation and ownership by women, youth and persons with disabilities.
 - Youths better prepared for further studies and the world of work beyond Grade nine.
 - Increase access among historically disadvantaged learners to ‘niche’ subjects such as those focussing on engineering and computing.
 - Youths leaving the schooling system more prepared to contribute towards a prosperous and equitable South Africa.
 - Promote the take up of artisanal trades as career choices among youth.

⁷ National Planning commission (2012) p. 24.

⁸ MTSF (2019) p. 65



- **The 2015 Defence Review.** Chapter 8 of the Review makes specific reference to the role of defence in youth development. It notes the following: “Millions of young South Africans in the age bracket 15 to 25 years lack employment, skills, discipline and educational opportunities. This provides Government with a huge developmental challenge. The collateral utility of the Defence Force can be used to improve the employability of South African youth by means of skills development and community service through targeted interventions. These interventions will not constitute military training and will therefore not contribute to the militarisation of the youth. The focus of these interventions will be citizenship, discipline, teamwork and self-actualisation with the national youth development programme and any other tailored youth programmes. Should specific funding become available, the Defence Force will be able to expand the youth leadership and character-building programme in partnership with government and other entities.”⁹ To this end, the Review proposes the following ways in which the SANDF can support youth development:
 - **Military Training.** Professionally conducted military training is extremely valuable in maturing and socialising young adults, developing in them self-confidence and self-respect and the capacity for mutual respect. A significant Reserve component, whose members are normally occupied with their civilian activities when not on active military duty.
 - **National Youth Service.** Defence will continue to provide National Youth Service (NYS) training in support of the requirements of various government departments and against compensation.
 - **Voluntary Youth Programmes.** Services will continue to provide Voluntary Youth Programmes (such as Young Lions, Siyandiza, Young Falcons and Naval Cadets).

3.2 Current stumbling blocks to youth development

As noted above, one of the main contributions of the SANDF to youth development comes through the form of military training. This takes the form of the SANDF’s **Military Skills Development System (MSDS)**. In 2019/20, a total of 3 761 MSDS members were in the system. It should be noted that this figure represents a cumulative total of 2 years’ military intake. For example, in 2019/20, 1 933 MSDS members were recruited to the military. Three key aspects should be considered in terms of support to the youth through the current MSDS system:

- **Cancellation of MSDS intakes until 2024.** According to a statement by the SANDF’s Directorate of Corporate Communication, the SANDF envisages, as a cost-saving measure, to defer MSDS intakes to every two years. Furthermore, it was announced that no intake will take place in 2022, thus postponing the next MSDS intake to 2024. As such, no MSDS intake will take place between 2021 and 2023.¹⁰

⁹ Defence Review (2015) p. 8-8

¹⁰ DefenceWeb (2020a)



- **The ageing SANDF.** In a recent response to a parliamentary question, the Minister of Defence noted that the average age of the full-time force infantry soldier was 38.¹¹ This is of major concern and was highlighted by academics during the 2020 JSCD mini-symposium. Of specific concern is the high number of over-age junior ranks. The result of over-age personnel, specifically in the Infantry Division, is that the SANDF does not have a truly fit-for-purpose force and it has significant redundancy. There are also higher direct and indirect costs involved in maintaining older personnel.
- **The need for force rejuvenation.** The development of a humane exit mechanism to ensure force rejuvenation and limit the DOD's personnel expenditure has received significant attention in recent years, but implementation by the Department remains lacking. It lies at the core of effective career management. During the 6th Parliament, the Defence Committees have made several suggestions regarding the need for an exit mechanism, including a BRRR recommendation around the need for urgent deliberations between the DOD and National Treasury on the development of an exit mechanism. The JSCD's Human Resources Workshop of 26 August 2020 resulted in a similar recommendation. However, the DOD has indicated to the Defence Committees that it is reluctant to implement an exit mechanism as it may have 'unintended consequences'. *Nonetheless*, in her Budget Vote Address on 18 May 2021, the Minister of Defence noted that she instructed senior military leaders to develop means of rejuvenating the SANDF.

Members may focus on the following aspects on youth development during their engagement with the SANDF:

- What effect will the cancelling of the MSDS intake until 2024 have on SANDF Force Rejuvenation?
- Will the plan to only have a MSDS intake every second year continue after 2024?
- In her Budget Debate speech, the Minister of Defence noted that she instructed the Department to develop rejuvenation means. What are the timelines for the submission of these plans?
- What is the current status of the National Youth Service? When can the programme be expected to resume, assuming that it did not take place in 2020?
- What is the status of the Voluntary Youth Programmes (such as Young Lions, Siyandiza, Young Falcons and Naval Cadets)?

REFERENCES

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