**FRIDAY, 21 MAY 2021**

***PROCEEDINGS OF MINI-PLENARY SESSION - NATIONAL ASSEMBLY***

Members of the mini-plenary session met on the virtual platform at 10:00

House Chairperson Ms M G Boroto took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.

The Chairperson announced that the virtual mini-plenary sitting constituted a meeting of the National Assembly.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms M G Boroto): Hon members, before I proceed, I wold kike to remind you that the virtual mini- plenary is deemed to be in the precinct of Parliament, and constitute a meeting of the National Assembly for debating purposes only. In addition to the Rules of virtual sittings In addition to the Rules of virtual sittings, the Rules of the National Assembly, including the Rules of debate shall apply.

Members enjoy the same powers and privileges that apply in a sitting of the National Assembly. Members should equally note that anything said in the virtual platform is deemed to have been said to the House and may be ruled upon.

All the members who have logged in shall be considered to be present and are requested to mute their microphones and only unmute when recognised to speak. This is because the microphones are very sensitive and will pick up noise which might disturb the attention of other members. When recognised to speak, please unmute your microphone and connect your videos. Members may make use of the icons on the bar at the bottom of their screens, which has an option that allows a member to put up his or her hand and raise points of order.

The secretariat will assist in alerting the Chairperson to members requesting to speak. When using the virtual platform, members are urged to refrain or desist from unnecessary points of order or interjections. We shall now proceed to the order which is a debate on Budget Vote No 4: Government Communications and Information Systems. May I take this opportunity to invite the hon Ntshavheni.

*Sepedi:*

Nako ke ya lena mma.

**APPROPRIATION BILL**

Debate on Vote No 4 – Government Communications and Information Systems:

*English:*

The ACTING MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY: House Chairperson, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Communication, hon Boyce Maneli, members of the portfolio committee, hon members, Director-General of Government Communications and Information System, GCIS, Ms Phumla Williams and her team at the GCIS, ladies and gentlemen, and the Deputy Minister, the hon Thembi Siweya, good morning. We are here today to present Budget Vote No 4 for the Government Communications and Information System for the financial year 2021-22. We are tabling this budget when the world is still in the grasp of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic that is leaving behind a trail of deaths in our communities, families, places of work, even in this House, we continue to lose members – our dearest colleagues.

As we continue to pray for our country, nations of the world, our families and self, those infected and those who have lost loved ones, the responsibilities entrusted to the GCIS during its conception have never been more relevant. Just for collective memory, the government communications system was created with the following objectives in mind. Firstly, to ensure coherence in the communication such that all citizens and communities have access to information that adequately allows them to take advantage of the opportunities to improve their lives and take part as citizens in the public affairs. Secondly, to drive government to speak with one voice. Thirdly to maintain a citizen-focused continuous dialogue, and fourthly, to harness goodwill for productive purposes by helping to shape the national mood and nation-building.

Faced with continuous emergence of new waves of infections; new variants of the virus; vaccines hoarding by developed or vaccine producing nations; decimation of livelihoods and lives; worsening hunger and conditions of living, and mixed economic recovery prospects. The global picture has never been this depressing at least in our lifetime. The responsibility for government to work to restore hope is paramount and the Government Communication and Information System must not only

coherently communicate this hope but the work that government is doing to rebuild the nation.

When COVID-19 hit our shores, government activated the state of disaster to enable access to key resources and the reprioritisation of budgets to save lives and livelihoods. At that point, it was clear that the global community had limited resources for medical interventions, and South Africa was not an exception. Government had to strengthen partnerships - what we commonly refer to as social compacts with communities, business and labour for an effective response to the pandemic.

The social compacts required South Africans to become our first line of defence as a nation by adhering to the Disaster Management Regulations and implementing the nonpharmaceutical health protocols. As a country, we owe a debt of gratitude to my late colleague, Minister Jackson Mthembu and the GCIS team that led the mobilisation of South Africans behind the calls to ‘Stay Home and Stay Safe’, to wear masks, wash hands with soap or sanitise with 70% alcohol-based sanitisers, and maintaining 1,5 metre social distance.

Through these campaigns, South Africa was able to get through our first wave of COVID-19, and the devastation of the second- wave. Although it was harsh, we were spared the worst.

Unfortunately, it was the second wave that could not spare us the life of Minister Mthembu, our many other colleagues and many other South Africans. However, the collective effort, that social compact amongst South Africans enabled us to come out of the second wave. We were highly rated across the world, maybe the best paraphrase was by renown *CNN* medical correspondent and associate professor of neurosurgery, Dr Sanjay Gupta, who said and I quote:

That steep decline is not because of vaccines ... That is a reminder that basic public health measures work. South Africa reminds us what is possible.

In the 2021-22 financial year, the GCIS is required to deliver on the four objectives that I have stated earlier but on four key programmes of government, which are: To mobilise South Africans to continue the fight against COVID-19, and this would be done in two ways – one, by promoting continued adherence to the nonpharmaceutical health measures of wearing masks in public, washing hands with soap or sanitising them

with 70% alcohol-based sanitiser, and maintaining a social distance of 1,5 metres. Two, to mobilise South Africans to join the COVID-19 vaccination programme, because it is only when the country attains population immunity through vaccination that our new normal life will commence. The second programme is providing adequate information about the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan to enable citizens to take advantage of the opportunities to improve their lives.

Thirdly, to mobilise South Africans for the fight against corruption and a quest to build a capable state as part of citizens’ contribution nation-building. Fourthly, to enhance and maintain continuous national dialogue on the fight against gender-based violence and femicide and the pursuit of safe communities.

The budget we are tabling today will never be sufficient for the task at hand and updating the institution to the communication system of the future – which has become the communication system of today – of digital technologies and other related technologies. Over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, MTEF, the GCIS has been allocated a total of

R2 17 billion, which is a continuous declining budget. This

budget include includes allocations for BrandSA and Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA.

The allocations are as follows, for GCIS in the 2021-22 financial year, the allocation is R749 684 million. But that allocation includes an allocation of R213 4 million to the BrandSA and R33 million to the MDDA. The actual allocation to GCIS is R503 284 million and the actual MTSF allocation for GCIS is therefore R1 347 billion.

An allocation to BrandSA is made when we are fully aware that the founding prescripts of this agency envisaged an entity that will be self-sustaining and not be reliant on the fiscus. The objective of a self-sufficient BrandSA remain elusive and material conditions make it impossible for BrandSA to can commence a path towards self-sustenance. In 2019, Cabinet took a decision to rationalise BrandSA and Tourism South Africa into a single marketing entity of the Republic.

The bulk of the work towards the rationalisation of the two entities was done by my predecessor, the late Minister Mthembu, together with the Minister of Tourism. Some of the measures he instituted was the introduction of a moratorium on

the filling of executive positions. Given developments that also affect TourismSA, the Minister of Tourism has now instituted measures that triggered the need to commence the rationalisation and we will work together towards this. In addition, the acting Minister is considering proposals from both the Board of Trustees and the GCIS on how to improve the performance of BrandSA as we work towards a rationalised entity.

Given the challenges that beset BrandSA over the years, the acting Minister has directed the Director-General of GCIS to work with BrandSA on the programmes that must be implemented to ensure the agency executes in line with its mandate as per the founding papers. Therefore, the tranches to BrandSA will be transferred based on agreement on programmes except the tranches related to administration, for example cost of employees, accommodation and related costs. This will be transferred beforehand.

Regarding the Media Development and Diversity Agency, popularly known as the MDDA, the budget allocation to the MDDA will support the work to transform the media industry. The development of the Media Development and Diversity Amendment

Bill, 2021, which will review the Media Development and Diversity Agency Amendment Act to align it to key technological developments in the sector and good corporate governance practices has commenced. In addition, the MDDA will submit comments on the amendments of the Electronic Communications Act and the SABC Act because the opportunities for advancing media development and diversity will be widened by the digital migration that the Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies is leading. This opportunity must be used optimally to advance true transformation of the media and enable participation by blacks, women, youth and persons with disability in the sector which ownership is still almost exclusive.

Budgeted Programmes for GCIS’s budget is as follows: Administration, R275,1 million for cost of employees, R125 million for administrative costs, that is office accommodations, information technology contracts and other related work. We also have a R50 million Special Covid-19 Communication allocation. The production and distribution

budget is R178 2 million. The Provincial Outreach Programme is R13 million, and research R5 million.

We continue to prioritise these limited and continuously declining resources to fund the execution of such critical mandate. To mobilise South Africans to continue the fight against COVID-19, through this budget the GCIS will continue to implement our outreach programmes designed to reach people where they work or reside. These will include taxi ranks, mall activations, panel discussions on local community media, and mainstream radio and television stations. Messages will continue to be packaged in all the 11 official languages. I must concede that getting messages across to the people has been a mammoth task, but one which GCIS has embraced and made considerable gains in this front through a combination of old- style outreach activities and activations, and coupled with a massive presence in the digital age of government websites, social media and other messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and webinars. Our communication approach was based on the need to inspire behaviour change and instil hope.

As indicated earlier when I quoted the words of Dr Sanjay Gupta of the CNN, the response to GCIS campaigns and social media drives have been positive. South Africans in their numbers have continued to adhere to the call to wear masks in public, observe social distancing, and wash their hands with

soap and water or 70% alcohol-based. And we call upon South Africans to continue to adhere to this nonpharmaceutical health protocol.

As our country commences with the mass vaccination programme and despite the challenges of access to vaccines that have plagued majority of the vaccine nonproducing countries, GCIS is leading the mobilisation of South Africans to register for vaccination through the Electronic Vaccination Data System, EVDS. To date, over 1 606 million senior citizens and over 850 000 health care workers have signed up on the EVDS. Working with the national Department of Health, provincial departments of health, the Offices of the Premiers and community health workers, GCIS is co-ordinating, through its provincial offices, the registration of those with no access to technology through home visits whereas the Department of Health continue to assists with manual registrations at vaccination sites.

The new normal forced everyone to adapt and change how they did things, and this was more noticeable in how GCIS adapted its communication interventions. GCIS introduced family meetings led by the head of the family of South Africa, His

Excellency, President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa. Initially, GCIS held weekly briefings with Ministers which were disrupted during the second wave because we needed to protect lives of not only Ministers but staff who had to enable them even when they moved virtual. For the first time in the history of our nation, GCIS facilitated a virtual imbizo.

The plan is to re-introduce more family meetings that are not only focused on the fight against the pandemic but will provide information about the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan to enable citizens to take advantage of the opportunities to improve their lives but also to mobilise South Africans for the fight against corruption and a quest to build a capable state as part of citizens contribution to nation-building; and enhance and maintain continuous national dialogue on the fight against gender-based violence and femicide and the pursuit of safe communities. These will be supported by media briefings led by Ministers. Therefore, the GCIS will continue its co-ordination of the Cluster Communication Programme although the agenda will be more programme based to ensure a single message – different angles communication, which is more impactful.

In addition, various virtual platforms such as webinars continue to be used to enable participation of both experts and ordinary South Africans on various national dialogues. The GCIS, like other departments equally adopted virtual platforms to interact with its stakeholders and its staff across the country to communicate in real time and more frequently.

Regular meetings to share ideas and information, and to identify and ultimately solve challenges became possible without leaving the comfort of one’s home or desk. The GCIS has been able to interact with communicators across all the spheres of government more regularly. These interactions have deepened our understanding of each other’s roles, responsibilities and challenges. These types of interactions will continue even beyond the new normal as they are cheaper.

Community radio became one of the most effective platform we utilised during this pandemic. In the process, GCIS increased its network of community radios from 60 to about 199 connected community radio stations. This increased network has sharply challenged progress attained in the transformation of the media through community media. The experience we have had has proven that the current model is not sustainable and does not impact on transformation of the media as envisaged when we

established the MDDA. The GCIS has been directed to work with the MDDA and the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, led by Minister Ndabeni-Abrahams to review the model with the current legislative reviews. We are counting on the support of the Parliament to ensure that any legislative review benefits the transformation agenda of our country, and the media sector is not left out.

One of our flagship communication product - the South African Government News Agency - SAnews.gov.za, continues to grow its presence in the digital media and communication space. Its content provides hard news, human interest features, social media links and audio inserts, photographs and videos. The agency has been at the forefront in providing pertinent information to citizens daily, including on health-related COVID 19 protocols. This financial year, the coverage will include the other 3 key government programmes. The GCIS continues to challenge itself in ensuring most of their products reflects all the official languages of the country. The government website, managed and maintained by GCIS continues to provide its visitors with all information they need on government. For the past financial year, we were able to record 83 million page views.

Furthermore, GCIS continues to maintain the multilingual *Vuk’uzenzele* newspaper to provide government-related information and opportunities, mainly to persons without access to the mainstream media. The GCIS prints about

850 000 copies every two weeks, which makes it the largest print circulation in South Africa. It reaches even the most remote parts of the country and it is also produced in Braille, online and on the government App. Given the penetration of digital media and for the protection of our trees, GCIS will survey the utilisation of the hard copies for possible switch and the protection of trees and management of costs.

Throughout this period, GCIS also relied heavily on our colleagues in the media to carry messages from government to homes and communities and we are indebted to this support. We are determined to sustain and build on the partnership with the media in the years ahead, including with media houses from across the continent and all other foreign correspondents.

These partnerships will, however, not dilute our aggressive drive for direct and unmediated communication. In the 2020-21 financial year, the direct communication reached approximately

53 million people, obviously some were repeat audiences.

The period ahead will be one of the most challenging in the history of our nation. Many new challenges lie ahead as we seek to rebuild our lives and our economy through both nonpharmaceutical health measures and the mass vaccination programme. The country will have to hold the local government elections under the new normal but GCIS is ready to work with Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs and the Independent Electoral Commission, IEC, to get the public ready for the local government elections.

I hereby table Budget Vote No 4 of the Government Communications and Information System to achieve the goal of an informed citizenry that is empowered to participate in the nation’s public affairs. We want to also again plead with hon members, members of the South African society, all citizens of our Republic, and all those who are within our Republic to continue to adhere to nonpharmaceutical protocols of wearing mask when they are in public, washing their hands with soap and water or sanitising with 70% alcohol-based sanitisers, and maintain the 1,5 metre social distance so that we prevent and minimise the impact of the third wave.

*Tshivenḓa:*

Ndi a livhuwa.

*Xitsonga:*

Inkomu.

*Sepedi:*

Thobela.

*English:*

Thank you.

Mr L E MOLALA: Hon House Chairperson, hon Minister Khumbudzo Ntshaveni, Deputy Minister Siweya, hon members, it is with great sadness and regret that this Budget Vote debate takes place exactly four months since the passing of our beloved Minister, Jackson Mphikwa Mthembu. Covid-19 has once again stolen one of our country’s greatest treasures.

He was Loyal to government’s constitutional mandate to provide information to the citizenry. Minister Mthembu, through the Government Communication and Information System, GCIS, had been hard at work ensuring that government as a whole was able

to communicate its work across different spheres of government, particularly on the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is now upon us to take the baton and continue the fight against the coronavirus in order to save the lives of our people. We say to uMvelase and his family, we will pick up your fallen spear and continue the war on poverty, under- development and all forms of corruption that plague our country.

Drawing inspiration from his exemplary leadership, we will strengthen our resolve to ensure that the economic reconstruction and recovery plan is implemented in such a way that it brings about inclusive growth and transforms the economy to benefit all South Africans.

It is on the basis of this backdrop that the department will be deliver this financial year and focus on: Defeating the pandemic; accelerating economic recovery; economic reforms aimed at inclusive growth and job creation, and the twin objective of fighting corruption and building the capability of the state.

The overview of the department’s appropriation over the MTEF period is: R749,7 million for 2021-22, R710 million for 2022- 23, and R711,9 million for 2023-24. Compensation of employees comprises on average 38%, while transfer payments in respect of the appropriation to two public entities, Brand South Africa and the Media Development and Diversity Agency, comprise 35% of the budget over the medium term.

This budget reaffirms the ANC’s resolve to use technological and digital streams of communicating as we are in the 4th industrial revolution. This is the direction that all government departments ought to take so as to ensure more effective and efficient communication with the citizens of South Africa. It is also commendable that this budget, in line with the department’s APP’s, prioritises the employment of women and persons with disabilities. This is crucial for the ANC’s transformation agenda.

GCIS messaging on matters of national importance Various existing content platforms such as the government website, [*www.gov.za*,](http://www.gov.za/) *Vuk’uzenzele* newspaper, *My District Today* newsletter and *GovNews*, were used to disseminate information on COVID-19. Community media, especially community radio, and

direct communication with citizens through the distribution of pamphlets, were also used prominently.

The economic reconstruction and recovery plan announced by the President on 15 October 2020 continues to be the major communication programme for the current financial year.

Collaborating with the Economic and Investment Cluster role- players, an integrated communication approach programme was infused with COVID-19 messaging, especially as the country moved to the risk adjusted levels 3 to 1. Gender Based Violence and Femicide, GBVF, messages continued to find expression in all the department’s print products, online distribution and mass mobilisation at local level.

In the effort towards ensuring that government amplifies its message to drive the delivery of services in an integrated and efficient way, the district development model, DDM, will increasingly take centre stage. The DDM seeks to provide an integrated, district-based service delivery approach to fast- track service delivery and ensure that municipalities are adequately supported and resourced to carry out their mandate.

The department will keep communities and stakeholders abreast

of government’s progress on the implementation of the DDM in

44 districts and eight metropolitan municipalities across the country. To this end, the ANC is pleased that the Department will hold 1 140 community and stakeholder liaison visits and

1 140 development communication projects per year over the MTEF period. Spending for these activities is largely driven by goods and services items, which account for 16,9%, which is R62,4 million, of the total budget in the Intergovernmental Coordination and Stakeholder Management programme.

The ANC government’s policies such as broad-based Black Economic Empowerment, B-BBEE, are directed at overcoming the legacy of apartheid with the ultimate aim of ensuring that the injustices of the past are overcome and that we build an inclusive economy that encourages black, women and youth ownership and control of new and existing enterprises. In this regard, the Charter for Marketing, Advertising and Communication, Mac, seeks to facilitate transformation within the Advertising, Public Relations and Communication industries as marketing vehicles in all media including digital platforms.

After various initiatives aimed at transforming the sector stalled despite the fact that the MAC Charter Code had been gazetted in December 2016, on 3 September 2020, the late Minister Mthembu gazetted a *Call for Nomination* for the general public and sector to nominate members to serve on the Mac Charter Council.

The *Call for Nomination* adverts were also placed on various platforms such as the *Sunday Times*; *Sowetan* and *Vuku’zenkele* Newspapers in order to maximise public awareness.

To date GCIS has completed the security and academic verification process of those nominated and the Minister will soon appoint the Mac Charter Council.

Functions of The Mac Charter Sector Council include: Overseeing the implementation of the Mac Charter Sector Code; monitoring compliance with the Mac Charter Sector Code; providing guidance on matters relating to BEE in the Mac sector; developing baseline indicator for all different elements of the B-BBEE; engaging and advising the sector, GCIS and other relevant regulatory entities regarding the Mac Sector Code; and vailing themselves for presentations and

meetings in Parliament regarding the state of transformation in the sector.

Our determination to drive transformation in the South African economy is clearly articulated in our manifesto, where we said, “We will build an economy in which all our people have a meaningful stake and from which they can all benefit”. This charter is one of the instruments that the ANC government has put in place to ensure that we achieve radical economic transformation and turn the tide in favour of the majority of our people who experience gross disparities in the sector, in the past. Therefore, The ANC will support this Budget Vote 4 on GCIS. Thank you.

*IsiXhosa:*

Mnu Z N MBHELE: Sihlalo weNdlu, mandibulise kuni nonke.

*English*:

It's good to see you again, Minister Ntshavheni, it seems that even with the change in our respective portfolios ...

*IsiZulu*:

... siyalandelana ...

*English*:

... everywhere. The GCIS is that rare instance in our public sector where one is compelled to give praise and credits where praise and credits are due. From its rapid dissemination of government information related to the lockdowns and other responses to the COVID-19 pandemic; to maintaining clean audit outcomes for the past six financial years, this entity has proven to be adaptive and effective. As I expressed, during the committee budget hearing last week, the GCIS is to be commended on the quality of the gov.za websites, both for the comprehensiveness and detail of information on the portal as well as generally being kept up to date.

I've always found the websites enormously useful when needing to find the contact information for the offices of Cabinet Ministers to send correspondence or especially last year during the higher level lockdowns, to find the latest lockdown regulations as they were amended and promulgated. And also just generally to find documents such as the Acts of Parliament, the Green and White Policy Papers and other government gazettes.

But Chairperson, if I may take a sidebar detour, I wish to raise a matter of concern that relates to the arena of government's communications. Now, of course, it is entirely legitimate for any governments to use public monies to promote its policies, programmes, and performance achievements but that must always be above board and with due recognition of the importance of a free and independent media sector that both informs and educates the public, but also acts as a watchdog and accountability mechanism on the government. That is why the DA was and remains deeply concerned by the shocking allegations brought before the Zondo Commission by Sidney Mufamadi two months ago that the State Security Agency, SSA, had colluded with the African News Agency to skew news reporting in favour of the former President, Jacob Zuma, and the ANC government.

The DA believes that it will be highly inappropriate for the SSA to have allegedly paid-for the production and publication of positive stories about the South African government because that is the mandate of the GCIS and even then any paid for promotional content for the government would have to be carried in the form of advertorials and not news coverage.

In a country plagued with the rot of corruption that has been allowed to take root in seemingly every nook and cranny of all the spheres of government, media independence is vital for our constitutional democracy. That is why we have called for an urgent investigation by the Hawks and the National Prosecuting Authority into the corroboration allegations that the African News Agency was paid R20 million over a period of eight months to write positive stories about the previous administration and to provide, “Multimedia training to the SSA agents”.

Noting that the GCIS enters the period ahead with a focus on the national COVID-19 vaccination roll-out programme, I have confidence that they will make every effort within their capacity and resources to carry out this task. It is therefore a shame that the GCIS is will have minimal contents to push out in this regard given the slow and shambolic starts of South Africa's official vaccine roll-outs by the national government and seemingly with very little sense of urgency.

Only 2,6% of vaccination sites were ready to operate this week, just 87 of the more than 3 000 sites promised. More sites would have registered if backup generators weren't required for vaccine fridges.

It has been a tragic case of ANC and Eskom failures compounding ANC vaccine failures. The poor communication concerning the logistics of this crucial endeavour is no fault of the GCIS given that no detailed roll-out programme was published and what little information there was, was communicated to the public in a piecemeal and haphazard fashion by the National Health Department. South Africa is heading into a third wave, unprotected and vulnerable, lives and jobs will be lost unnecessarily and the blame falls fairly and squarely on the national government with its obsession with centralised control. The private health care sector has been inexplicably underutilised with only four private sector sites being operational when the clock hits T minus zero. This is astonishing when one considers the thousands of General Practitioners, GPs and pharmacies across the country and the enormous potential of the private sector to deliver jabs to arms. It is inexplicable by so few permits have been issued to private sector operators to approve them as vaccination sites. The solution, quite simply, is to decentralise control to harness the full capabilities of the private sector. And when the value of the public-private partnerships is fully harnessed, then the GCIS can deploy its full arsenal of talents, skills, and capability to inform the public about

their options and avenues to access the range of service points and channels for getting in the appointment queues.

We all want the vaccine roll-out programme to succeed. We all need to have engines firing on all pistons. And when that is the case, there are no doubts that the GCIS will optimise its performance in promoting maximum public knowledge and plugin to vaccination. In our reports on the GCIS Annual Performance Plan and budget, the committee recommended that the Minister in the Presidency should ensure that there is proper monitoring of the implementation of the COVID-19 vaccine roll- out programme and provide regular updates to the committee.

But, they will be little to monitor and little for the GCIS to report to the committee if the vaccination programme itself is stillborn and falls victim to delays, bottlenecks and mismanagement.

Turning to the public entities that receive transfer payments from these Budget Votes, it is patently clear - and has been for a long time - that Brand SA needs to give up the ghost and close shop. There is little to no discernible, unique and proportionate value add that is obtained from this outfit.

Investment and tourism attraction to South Africa should be

front and centre of the agenda of our foreign missions. And there is no compelling reason why the purported function of Brand USA cannot be mainstreamed into the programmes and projects of our embassies and consulates abroad.

*IsiZulu*:

Masiyivale lento ngokushesha ...

*English*:

... one time. The Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA, as the second entity to receive transfer payments, plays a crucial role in supporting and encouraging a diversified media landscape. And we want them to succeed in their mandate. Thus we're happy to back their investment in the intended three research projects per year, over the medium-term to develop a sustainability model for community and small commercial media projects. This enterprise will require creativity, out of the box thinking, and willingness to embrace partnership building that leverages all available resources from business, civic and philanthropic sectors.

Without doubts, there are reader, viewer, and listener audiences out there for the various community and niche media

outlets on the landscape as well as potential sponsors and advertisers to tap into that can make this a sustainable, if not profitable arena. The imperative of enabling historically disadvantaged communities to gain access to as well as to build the capacity, to produce media, whether through the storytelling of community and cultural narratives or independent citizen journalism, is too important to fail.

If there is one area where I would propose that the GCIS could add more value to their already sterling work, it would be in piloting, championing and driving of project where they and other government departments buy regular airtime slots for open call-in shows on mainstream and community radio stations with the President and the Cabinet Ministers would take calls and SMSs from members of the public about their queries and complaints relating to the government policy and service delivery which would then be logged and followed up on through internal channels for resolution and feedback. This was previously implemented in Cape town through the monthly premier and mayor show on Heart FM and currently through mayor Dan Plato’s monthly radio show on Bush Radio, Radio Helderberg, One FM, Radio Zibonele, Atlantis FM, Radio Tygerberg, and the Voice of the Cape FM. Radio remains the

most widespread and accessible media conduits for most households to access news and information. And so the ability to call in. and report the issues and concerns of their communities, live on air, directly to the Ministers and the President would give our citizens a true sense of connection with those who govern much of their lives.

If we are serious about bringing government closer to the people that is certainly one feasible way to do it. In closing, and without meaning in any way to negate, demean or diminish the excellent work done by the practitioners in the GCIS, our government simply needs to do better in terms of service delivery and giving our citizens and taxpayers value for their money in the absence of that. As is far too often the case and has been for far too long, the GCIS is left with the unenviable task of trying to decorate a turd with gold spray paint.

We know from our oversights and constituents work at the grassroots that things are not rosy. That much is lacking and that there is major room for improvements. Our government needs to fix the fundamentals and get the basics right so that the picture that is painted in government communications is

matched by a real, daily lived experience of the communities on the ground. I thank you, Chair.

Ms N K F HLONYANA: Chairperson, the EFF rejects the propose budget for the Government Communication and Information System, and we reject it with the contempt it deserves. There is no government communication in South Africa because there is no service delivery. The failure to properly position the GCIS has undermine one of our important pillars of our democracy, which is access to information by all. Instead, what we have in GCIS is a propaganda machinery for the ruling party that serves to sanitise the failures of government. The little that GCIS does on a daily basis amounts to nothing because government departments do not have the capacity and competence to communicate plans and achievements because there is none.

As the EFF we have constantly raised our concerns that the mandate and the capacity of the GCIS is being wasted as the department now trying to be the President’s communication and the public relation, PR, desk and they also double up as the ruling party’s graphic design and communication desk.

This is made worse by the fact that GCIS capacity and budget has been reduced drastically in the recent past without any response in terms of how to reposition government communication. One of the most devastating government communication is its printing component. We have made proposals in the past that GCIS must be centralised and be linked with municipalities to ensure that it does not only exist in Gauteng near national departments.

While we appreciate that the world is moving with time towards a paperless service delivery-based system, the reality for millions of our people in rural areas and townships is that they do not know the services they deserve and how to access these services because there is no communication from the government.

We said, if you cannot send the messages, send pamphlets and inform them about their rights to water, electricity and many other services. Print pamphlets to inform them about how to access Home Affairs service, land and rural development services, mineral and energy services, responsibilities within individual government departments, [Inaudible.] We proposed that GCIS offices be decentralised so that each and every

municipal has the capacity to communicate with citizens and to be the link between all spheres of government and the people.

We proposed that GCIS be decentralised because this will build local economies for small black businesses in townships and rural areas who are involved in communication and information system, not only in businesses based in Paarl here in the Western Cape. We propose that GCIS must work closely with PanSALB, the constitutional institution responsible for the development of all indigenous languages so that we move away from communication with people only in English and Afrikaans when they access government services.

More than 25 years since the advent of our democracy, the majority of our people cannot access government communication or information system that improve their lives, let alone access to communication in their own languages.

We propose that GCIS work closely with Statistics SA so that our people have access to information to make informed decisions to engage government [Inaudible.] But the government is cutting both GCIS and Statistics SA’s budgets.

Chairperson, GCIS should be on the forefront of the transformation of the broader communication industry. The majority of government tenders for outdoor and all other forms of advertising are still being given to white-owned companies. The majority of COVID-19 communication including social media, should have been used to allow black media-owned companies to play an active role in communicating COVID-19 protocols in such a way that our people relate to government messaging. But because the same old white-owned companies are printing billboards, creating advert messages and everything else this also play a role of too much mismanagement of what was supposed to be communicated from the onset and GCIS has failed to play a meaningful role.

Lastly, GCIS is supposed to be at the forefront of government communication modernisation, but there is no believable plan on how this is going to be achieved. Instead what we see every day is a government communication machinery. That has come to a standstill. There is no government communication in South Africa and our people are left in the dark. The EFF rejects this budget, Chairperson. Thank you very much.

Ms Z MAJOZI: Hon Chairperson, the IFP applauds the efforts of the department of GICS in promoting active citizenry in active participation in uniting all South Africans around the common goal. In keeping the country informed about issues affecting the country the Ministry, in the 2019-20 financial year has distributed 19,35 million copies of the Vuk'uzenzele newspaper

- a free newspaper published every fortnight. The distribution of this newspaper through knock and drop at access points include the SA Post Offices and Thusong Service Centres has enabled the newspaper to be accessed in some hard to reach remote areas. However, as much as we applaud these efforts we find the delivery model of the Thusong Service Centres lacking. Established with the aim of operationalising the government’s communication approach as well as addressing information and services gaps to historically marginalised areas. These centres have their own share of problems. We note with concern the millions spent to construct each one of these centres. How some of them are now dysfunctional.

The launch of a campaign to fight corruption by the department, the anticorruption Thuma Mina campaign launched on 07 August 2018, in collaboration with Business Unity South Africa, is also worth mentioning. This marked an important

turning point in the history of the country in the fight against corruption and it shows commitment by the department to end this problem. Most importantly this displayed an end to the denialism by government on the existence of corruption.

Nonetheless, the IFP is of the view that a populist approach to addressing this challenge might be a [Inaudible.] and largely cosmetic. We were therefore not surprised when Thuma mina was seemingly set aside as government officials and tenderpreneurs under various personal protective equipments, PPE, procurement deals displayed the level of rot that still exist in the country. We watched in shock when billions of rands were looted through various PPE scandal in different government departments. More than 600 companies in the country were investigated by the Special Investigating Unit, SIU, over irregular COID-19 PPE contracts at more than R7 billion. The IFP wishes to express its deepest disappointment regarding this matter.

Corruption in this country goes deeper than we think. We support the Ministry’s use of technology in delivering the message from the government to the citizens of South Africa. However, our concern is that there are no plans in this from

the department to bridge the digital divides that exist in the country. Internet access remains out of reach for more than 50% of the rural population, and is not always comprehensive in urban areas.

The department, in its mandate to use technology, to convey government messages need to work with other relevant departments when it want to use this digital device. The IFP supports the budget. Thank you, Chair.

The DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY: Thank you House

Chairperson, and good morning, members of the Portfolio Committee on Communication led by hon Boyce Maneli; - Am I audible?

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms M G Boroto): Yes, you are ma’am.

The DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY: Thank you. hon

members; ladies and gentlemen and fellow South Africans Am

I audible?

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms M G Boroto): We can hear you very clearly.

The DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY: Oh, okay, thank you, House Chairperson. It is a pleasure for me to copresent the Government Communication and Information System’s Budget Vote together with Minister Ntshavheni. Government Communication and Information System, GCIS. So, when I mention GCIS, fellow South Africans and Members of Parliament, just keep in mind that I am referring to Government Communication and Information Systems. We want to appreciate the Minister’s for her keen commitment and willingness to take over the task of steering the Ministry in The Presidency after we had suffered a great loss when Minister Mthembu suddenly succumbed to this virus. Indeed, Minister Mthembu played an important role in laying the foundation for a coherent government communication system that reaches and empowers our citizens. His commitment to the diversification of the media, is as a result of part of what we continuously want to do, which is to ensure that there is democracy.

House Chairperson, the GCIS is indeed an important stakeholder in the diversification and development of the media. Hence, part of their allocation supports the work of the Media Diversity and Development Agency, MDDA. The MDDA is mandated by the Constitution and its own Act to support and promote

media development and diversity. It is also entrusted that these pieces of legislation create an enabling environment which will deepen democracy, ensure the enjoyment of media freedom, and all principles in our Bill of Rights.

We are pleased that the MDDA continues to deliver on its mandate as derived from these pieces of legislation and national policy priorities despite challenges related to budget and the emergence of COVID-19. The groundwork for establishing a diversified landscape is increasingly becoming a reality and many citizens are able to actively participate in shaping their communities. As the MDDA, we continue to ensure that we allow our citizens to participate in this platforms.

Chairperson, the role of community media sector is more visible now as we battle this pandemic. Let me give you examples, the GCIS and many other government departments have relied on community media to communicate about COVID-19 and the messages which we wanted to take to our communities. They have also assisted us to be able to talk to our people in their languages about protocols and regulations of COVID-19. Community media’s reach, example, reaching into remote

communities and it’s committed to broadcasting or publishing in the languages of those communities. What it has also meant to do is that it has been able and continues to be a vital platform for raising awareness of and sharing and giving our people information around critical national issues. These issues we do them in all our official languages.

We must also note, House Chair and fellow South Africans, that this sector was not immune to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the MDDA provided Relief Fund over two phases to a range of community media platforms, and this we did – if you remember, in March 2020, when the President announced that we are going on a lockdown. We have been able to also give relief funding to various community media platforms. The emergence of the pandemic worsened the challenge of sustainability in the sector. In the past years, the MDDA has been in consultation with various stakeholders to build a sustainable community media sector and ensure that it continues to be a platform for community involvement and skills development.

As a result, fellow South Africans and Members of Parliament, the MDDA has launched a major research initiative that will

guide the development of a Community Media Sustainability Model. It is anticipated that this model will define the interventions required to assist the community media sector to become sustainable and dependent on their potential to self- sustainability. In the MDDA, every day when we speak, we say, how are we going to assist the community media sector to be independent.

The model will also factor in the need to upscale the skills for all functionaries. These are all functionaries in the sector. Skills upliftment will be recognized as a key sustainability of the community media sector. In the next five years, the MDDA will work with all key stakeholders to develop a capacity building strategy as part of the sustainability model and they’ll consider all the skills that were identified as critical in the sustenance of the community media sector.

While the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 4IR, and the emergence of new media present to us opportunities for community media ... Now are these new opportunities which are presented by the 4IR? The increasing audience or readership reach. We and the MDDA have also presented new challenges which we have identified as loss of revenue and the lack of

skills in the use of new digital and social media platforms. We want to correct that so that we can move in line with the emergence of the 4IR. The MDDA is intensifying its support to the community media sector to assist it to transition smoothly and seamlessly into the new digital media era. This will be based on the agency’s recently developed digital strategy.

The agency also recognises that its current funders, national government and the mainstream broadcast sector, are themselves faced with cost containment requirements, and competing priorities. These are brought about by new emerging technologies and the 4IR. Therefore, they require us to bring new innovative ways to do things. The agency has therefore developed a funding strategy which it will implement in 2021-

22 financial year in order to attract financial and other support for the community media sector. This will include approaching local and international donors, corporates, government entities and other potential funders.

The demand for funding support is huge and far exceeds the budget capacity of the MDDA. Every year, the MDDA, through its annual call for applications, receives applications for grant funding far in excess of what it can accommodate with its

current sources of funding. Such applications include funds to assist existing projects, many of which are facing closure due to lack of revenue and high cost of maintaining their entities, while others are new applications.

House Chairperson and fellow South Africans, we want to extend our gratitude to all the funders who continue to support the project of diversifying and developing the media landscape. We want to urge communities to take ownership of these community media platform and provide the necessary support. We are grateful to the board, the chief executive officer, CEO, and the entire staff for their commitment to fulfil the mandate of the MDDA. We also want to thank the portfolio committee for continuing to guide and advise us in relation to how we must work with the entity as led by the chair, hon Maneli. Ever since we were appointed to lead and provide political oversight to this institution, we have had clean audits. [Time expired.]

Mr W M THRING: Hon House Chairperson, the ACDP acknowledges the importance of this department. Communication or media is a powerful tool, having both the ability to inform, as well as influence and shape opinions on a variety of subjects.

The ACDP wishes to commend the department on achieving another clean audit as well as attaining a low vacancy rate of 8,8% and for partnering with institutions for persons with disabilities in order to recruit the targeted number of persons from this group.

The ACDP notes the departmental appropriation of R749 million for the 2021-22 financial year, where almost 60% of the budget is allocated to Programme 2, which is Content Processing and Dissemination. Some of the main objectives of this programme are to: Provide strategic leadership and support in government communications by conducting research on public opinion; increase the share of government’s voice and messaging in the public domain.

The mandate of the department is to foster transparency and provide the public with information that is timely, accurate and accessible. It is to ensure democratic strength through rapid communication of government’s achievements, but it is the ACDP’s view that this democratic strength lies in the plurality of voices within our multiparty democracy and not in the voice or manifesto of the ruling party alone.

Clearly, much of the communication in the last year has focused on the National State of Disaster and the COVID-19 lockdown. It is in this area that the ACDP has a bone of contention with the department.

We called, for example, for the lifting of the harsh lockdown as early as May 2020, but you would not listen. We warned that the harsh lockdown would decimate our economy, leaving a worse after-effect than the virus itself, but you would not listen. We warned that millions of jobs would be lost, our gross domestic product, GDP, would contract, and government debt would increase, but you would not listen. We called for the public to be informed of ways to boost their immune systems, as the first line of defense against the virus, but still you would not listen. We called for the unbanning and use of the safe drug, Ivermectin, as a treatment for COVID-19, but you would not listen, until we took the Minister of Health and the *SA Health Products Regulatory Authority,* SAHPRA, to court and won, but still, you do not listen. You called for the roll out of vaccines, still on trial, as so safe, that the manufacturers refuse to accept liability for any death or injury from their safe vaccines, forcing the South African government to establish a Vaccine Injury No-Fault Compensation

Scheme, with some vaccine manufacturers allegedly asking our government to put up our sovereign assets as collateral for their vaccines. Your silence on these matters is deafening. If this department becomes complicit in shutting down every differing voice, while proclaiming to propagate free speech and if the only voice you listen to is your own, then may God help us all. I thank you.

The ACTING HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms T M Joemat-Petterson): Thank you, hon House Chair. The ANC saved time with hon Mohlala. So hon Faku you have an additional time. You may take three minutes and if hon Mthembu is not here you could have five minutes. I call upon hon Faku.

Ms P FAKU: Hon Acting House Chair, hon Ministers and Deputy Ministers, hon Minister Khumbudzo Ntshaveni, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Communication, Mr Boyce Maneli, hon Members of Parliament, esteemed guests connected virtually, ladies and gentlemen, comrades and friends, it is a pleasure for me to be part of the Department of Government Communication and Information Systems Budget Vote 4. The ANC supports Government Communication and Information Systems Budget Vote 4.

May is Africa month and we must continue to promote the African Union Agenda and strengthening the African Union institutions and policies. We must also implement and bring to life the African Union Agenda 2063; promote regional integration and empower people through knowledge and information. During this year of Mama Charlotte Maxeke whilst combating the coronavirus pandemic, we must improve our efforts in strengthening government communication and repositioning of the South African brand.

With the coronavirus outbreak, we need a resilient disaster management system, well capacitated to lead a disaster management response and an effective and inclusive communication strategy. We also need to strengthen relations between the different spheres of government with communities and nongovernmental sectors. In March, South Africa was already in a vulnerable economy having experienced two consecutive quarters of recession when it was hit by the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic thus deepening the economic crisis.

Capable leadership of ...

*IsiXhosa*:

... uMongameli wethu uCyril Ramaphosa ...

*English*

... assisted when he communicated our determination as a country. In responding to the Covid-19 crisis, he said:

We are determined merely to return our economy to where it was before the coronavirus but to forge a new economy daily in a new global.

South Africa launched an economic and Reconstruction Recovery Plan which has the following three phases: Firstly, engage and preserve, includes comprehensive health responses to save lives and curb the scourge of the pandemic. Secondly, recovery and reform, includes intervention to restore the economy while controlling the health risks. Lastly, reconstruct and transform which entails building a sustainable, resilient and inclusive economy.

The GCIS and its entities together command a link communication and information based. Their roles are central in ensuring together as communities, people, businesses and

all who work to form this new economic. Effective communication is critical and fundamental for us to succeed. Whilst resources are given, the extent task ahead given the financial constraints the budget vote allocation and the annual performance plans, APPs enable GCIS to do much with little right through all three phases of the ERIP.

We need an integrated co-ordinated communication, community and small commercial media and Brand South Africa. Monday 17 May was the celebration of the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, under the theme: Accelerating Digital Transformation in Challenging Times, Digitalisation Digitals,

... [Inaudible.] and Transformation is Key.

As we navigate the battle against the Covid-19 it is an opportunity for us to fast-track our interests into the digital economy. The ANC appreciates the GCIS’ innovative ways to improve and persuade on its mandate. The system needs leverage when opportunities brought up by new technology and digital platforms to carry out the message of government to all South Africans. For example, the public broadcaster which is the SABC is a multiplatform which is called DTT on online, on satellite it is called DTHS.

Some community and small commercial media which is both radio, tv and media are streaming online social media apps. GCIS has also has its multiple media which are digital platforms, radio, print and social media. GCIS needs to invest more in the direction, of produce more unmediated communication using all other platforms to improve communication with citizens. We can also enhance the South African Brand through the use of digital platforms as some innovative opportunities are cost effective.

Brand SA can do more with the limited resources. We acknowledge the GCIS realisation of the new review in its internal business system and its only information technology, strategy in line with the department’s business requirements. The portfolio committee appreciate the improvement in Government Communication and Information Sysrems, GCIS led by the late Minister Jackson Mthembu, uMvelase, may his soul rest in peace as part of the building state capacity.

Ever since the beginning of the Sixth Administration as this responded to all committee recommendations to strengthen government communication, improve use of public, community and small commercial media. We have seen small positive results

arising from the Cabinet’s approval of the integrated government’s communication framework. These are visible to everyone as we were combating the Covid-19’s first and second waves. As you could have seen Chair in many TVs when the President was going to speak many communities were excited. So that is part of the work the GCIS has done.

GCIS will use the same efforts and most similar energies during the vaccination and implementation and third wave to create an informed and knowledgeable society. Information contributes significantly to the fight against the pandemic. We dare not lower our guards and the committee will support government in its work during the disaster management period.

The innovative ideas used to package information improves access to information and partnership should be adopted as ways of improving GCIS going forward. GCIS should through the government communication framework co-ordinate all three spheres of government, ensure through the District Development Models. Not only do we have one plan and one budget but in addition one message and many voices.

Government partnership and usage of public broadcasting platforms and community and small commercial media and languages spoken by our people but relevant information to their needs in their respective districts must improve. The committee hopes that the budget vote and APPs will continue an increase to address the issues of redistribution, gender, justice, poverty and unemployment. The committee appreciates the low vacancy rate in GCIS and the gender balance in this year of Mama Charlotte Maxeke. As the ANC we acknowledge and appreciate the successful woman leadership displayed in the GCIS. Long live ...

*IsiZulu*:

... amakhosikazi. Malibongwe!

*English*:

In closing, I would like to read the following quotation from the late Minister Jackson Mthembu which says:

Government communication must not be news, must not be celebrities and they must be available at all times speaking languages spoken by our communities and be humble. I hope

going forward they will never be news. ANC supports this Budget Vote.

*IsiXhosa*:

Ndiyabulela.

*English*:

Thanks Chair.

The ACTING MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY: Hon Chairperson, I

would like to thank the support of the budget by the hon members in the House with one exception who I will deal with. I would like to acknowledge hon Mbhele that I seem to be following you, maybe you must stop moving so that I don’t move around too much.

On the matters you have raised around the testimonies at the Zondo Commission of Inquiry, we need to allow the commission to conclude its work and give us a final report. But I need to assure you that in terms of the Government Communication and Information System, GCIS, and the six administration, our commitment is that the media dependence is sacrosanct where there is partnership with the media they are upfront declared.

We will not do any shenanigans because we believe in the independence of the media and the objective reporting by the media. We are not necessarily saying the media is always objective but we expect the media to also be objective and therefore, there is no need to buy them.

You raised an issue around the vaccine sites, as I have indicated in this speech, the number of vaccine sites is impacted by the availability of vaccines. As we sit, you are aware that as South Africa we had commitments from Johnson and Johnson, J&J, in terms of their vaccine being available and the large numbers being available. And given the particular strain that is prevalent in our shores, there are few vaccines that are available and that are affordable which is J&J and Pfizer. But with the current situation in the USA where the Food and Drug Administration, FDA, has put a halt until they conclude the investigations, which are now led by the Senate on the J&J, that vaccine is not available.

Government had prepared over 3 335 sites but unfortunately, those sites could not be activated immediately with the roll out of the second phase, the mass vaccination. If you recall, we had explained that the vaccination programme is in

partnership with the business. That is why when we are sitting today, Clicks, Discovery Health, Dischem and also the other private practitioners are able to vaccinate.

Of course, the commencement of phase two has not commence in the manner that we would have wanted because of a limited number of vaccines. In that regard, given the bottlenecks we are facing – not only as South Africa, but all of the developing world who do not produce vaccines. That is why the President lobbied India to start the demand at the World Trade Organisation, WTO, for the waiver of the trips to allow us who have the capacity to manufacture vaccines to manufacture these vaccines in our country.

You know of the efforts we are undertaking as a country between Biovac and Immunity Bio of Dr Patrick Soon-Shiong i, to manufacture vaccines in South Africa. But also, if the trips waiver happens, Aspen will also be able to manufacture the vaccines without reliance on the J&J because the technology, the formulas and the patterns would have been way for them to be able to do.

As a country, we are blessed that we got two very able vaccines manufactures companies within our shores, Aspen which is based in Durban and Gqeberha and Biovac which is partly owned by government as the largest shareholder and the private sector.

Our partnership with the private sector is not limited, it is very detailed and including the communication. That is why even Discovery Health pronounced that they could not vaccinate on the 17th, when we commenced because of challenges on their own part. So, we are vaccinating.

You made a suggestion that we must do open calls, we had started with open calls, but we chose to use community radio stations, as part of increasing the listenership in community radio stations. Because if they have increased listenership it increases their ability to raise revenue and reduce their dependence on the Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA. I for one has done the call-in session through the 199 community radio stations earlier in the year, Minister Lamola has done it and the President is scheduled. Maybe we will have to increase the frequencies of those call-in sessions because they are very informative for the listeners and the public. It

also allows the government to remain in contact with the people.

In terms of the EFF, hon Hlonyana, maybe the EFF need must start to assess its own vintage position because it is obviously delinked with the realities. The world over, the GCIS and South Africa is commended for the sterling work we did in communicating the message around COVID-19 prevention and thus, being successful in managing the numbers. But I am not surprised, even South Africans are starting to reject the noise from the EFF, so you can continue to make the noise but south Africans are rejecting you.

Maybe before the EFF leaves this House, because you are going to leave this House in 2024, when we go to the general elections. Signs from all the by-elections that have been held in the country shows a strong indication that you are going to be history in this House. Maybe, let us educate you. The GCIS does not operate at national level. GCIS operates at provincial level and local level. If you had listened to my speech, we had indicated that GCIS provincial offices have been co-ordinating with the provincial of Departments of Health offices and the Premiers’ Offices. We do that work

because we know the importance of being on the ground. We continue to communicate with our communities and we continue to get feedback. It is through the work that we said GCIS has been doing to mobilise the door to door for registration for those who don’t have access to technology. But of course, you don’t listen, you are good at listening to your own voices, so what do you expect from empty vessels?

Hon Majozi, we appreciate the support you have given to the budget vote and we have taken note of the concern you have raised around the Thusong Service Centres. But let me also take this opportunity to update you that between the Department of Small Business Development, Communications and Digital Technologies, and Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Cogta, in support of the GCIS, we are putting programmes to make ensure that the Thusong Services Centres remain service delivery centres for government or centres where people can go to get information on services delivery. Though the Department of Small Business Development and the Communications and Digital Technologies, we are also considering some of the Thusong Services Centres to implement our digital hubs where we make sure that small business, micro business can have access to information and not only

information but can have access to training and business facilities that they mostly lack. Because we believe that we don’t need to put new facilities in place but we optimise the use of government facilities that are already in existence.

This is in addition to the communication and digital technologies to make sure they participate as digital hubs. The Technical Vocational Education and Training, Tvet, colleges and universities who are now coming in to become the digital hubs or centres for entrepreneurship in our township and rural areas.

Hon Thring, I don’t know what to say to you because we have been proven as government over and over again that the decisions that have been taken by the National Coronavirus Command Council, NCCC, are not the thumb suck. We are informed by science. Last year you were jumping up and down saying

fast-track vaccination and when we finally got the vaccines – because were clear that our vaccination programme will be informed by science and best care in terms of quality and the guarantee of the safety of our people. We got our scientists who told the world that a particular variant that is prevalent in this country is not going to be treatable through the AstraZeneca vaccine. And it is us as the government who said

what then should become the next vaccine programme. It is us as government who said how do we then implement this?

Remember, we were the first country to also enforce the wearing of masks and social distancing when yourselves as the ACDP were declining those things. We told you that science informed us that this thing may be airborne therefore there is a need for wearing of masks and social distancing. When you were demanding that mass gathering must be done – I will not remind you who got infected at a mass gathering – it was us who said congregate settings are not for the spread of the various. We know the Korea example when people got infected in church and who was also infected by coronavirus in church? I will not mention names. The Parliament immunity does not sufficiently cover me. However, hon Thring the decisions for the NCCC have always prioritised the saving of lives and preserving lively hoods.

By the way, we were fully aware that livelihoods can be rebuilt but lives lost can never be rebuilt. Many colleagues we have lost in this House can never be woken up because we were then rushing to save the economy. If you have checked the Stats SA Report and yesterday the Reserve Bank also gave you a

revision of the growth projections, they are projecting a 4,2% growth and not the almost 2% growth we had anticipated.

Because we have committed ourselves to say we are going to put all-hands-on-deck to recover this economy, to reconstruct the economy to make it inclusive.

Quarter in and quarter out since started to reopen the economy we focused on rebuilding the livelihoods because we think we got all in place to rebuild the lives of South Africans. We have started to make sure that the manufacturing sector is growing, the commodity sector which is mining is growing, the trade industry, retail sector is growing, service sector is growing. There is nothing that is not growing in this country.

Amongst all these things the agricultural sector never slowed down, it remained operational because we understood the importance of food security. And those in the retail sector that we important for food security remained operational. We brought those sectors of our economy into the full stream when it was possible, earliest and safest to do so. Because we care of our workers, we don’t only care about the income, we care of the lives of our worker in this country because they are mothers and father and some of them are single parents.

The nations and generations to come need to be raised by their parents. We also know the impact the virus has had on devastating family lives and community lives. Therefore, we could not contribute in that. that is why we have always advocated for the protection of livelihoods but our priority has always been the saving of lives.

As we speak today, the economy of South Africa is in the cusp of growing faster we had anticipated even before the lockdown. South Africa’s manufacturing sector is about to exceed the expectation of the manufacturing sector of the last two years. Because we have put programmes in place through Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan such as the localisation drives, that priories supporting the entrance or growth of manufacturing in the small medium and micro enterprise, SMME, sector.

We have prioritised the skilling of our people in the digital skills and making sure that what was termed future of work which is the present day of work our people are there. We have implemented programmes that make sure that the majority of our youth absorbed or given the opportunities in the work sector

and therefore preparing for the marker. Not only as job seekers but also as employment creators

So hon Thring, we thumb suck, we use don’t use other wishes, we are a government with plans informed by science and facts and research

The ACTING HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms T M Joemat-Petterson): Thank you very much Minister and Acting Minister in the Presidency, thank you hon Chairperson Boroto, the staff and hon members that brings us to the end of business for today.

Debate Concluded.

The mini-plenary rose at 11:33.