

Budget Debate on Vote 3 and 15: Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs

Speech by Eleanore Bouw-Spies MP

DA Shadow Minister for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs

The fish rots from the head, COGTA is not working!

Honorable Members

Today, I stand before you to address the budget vote and shed light on the current state of affairs in local government. We have witnessed the establishment of various local government improvement programs aimed at achieving the ideal level of performance. However, it is crucial to recognize the shortcomings and obstacles that have hindered our progress.

First, let us reflect on the plans of the past. Despite the establishment of various local government improvement programs, such as Project Consolidate, the Five-Year Strategic Agenda, the Local Government Turn Around Strategy (LGTA), the Policy Review of the System of Provincial and Local Government, and the Back to Basics Approach, Municipalities have fallen short of achieving the ideal level of performance. These plans, while well-intentioned, have ended up as mere acronyms, with little to show in terms of tangible results.

The lack of coordination and implementation, coupled with the persistent patriarchy of cadre deployment within the ANC, has undermined our progress and left our municipalities struggling. While lack of coordination between different spheres of government is often cited as a reason for our failures, it is important to acknowledge the ANC's refusal and inability to implement lawfully promulgated strategies have led us to a point where our plans end up in overflowing dustbins, devoid of tangible results.

Now, let us turn our attention to the District Development Model (DDM)...or should we call it the DISTRICT DREAMING MODEL ...While presented as the solution to our governance woes, it is important to acknowledge its doomed conception. The ANC's hope that the DDM will magically address our challenges is misguided. We cannot rely on empty promises and catchy buzzwords. To date R100mill has been spent on the DDM. What we need are concrete and sustainable proposals that are free from the shackles of cadre deployment. The DDM, in its current form, lacks the necessary coordination, vision, and practicality to bring about the transformative change we desperately need.

To truly achieve a new alignment of processes and ensure the practicality of our plans, we need a fundamental change in leadership. Meritocracy, competence, and integrity must be

prioritized over personal interests. We must move away from the governing party's grip on power, which has impeded progress and stifled innovation. Let's learn from Umgeni's Mayor Chris Pappas, Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis from the City of Cape Town, Grant Riddles from Hessequa and Mayor Annelie Rabie from Overstrand on how to make a municipality work for its people!

As we reflect on the last budget of the 6th Parliament, it is disheartening to note the lack of tangible achievements by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA). The absence of substantial progress underscores the urgent need for a new approach and fresh leadership. We cannot continue down the same path and expect different outcomes.

How do you explain to a community in Mpane in the Eastern Cape that you cannot provide them with basic services but you can easily increase a Department's Office accommodation budget from R51Mill to R74,4Mill.* That the Community Works Program incurred R3,3Bill in irregular expenditure but gets rewarded with an unchanged budget, yet the provision of tools of trade for Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders remains a burden, that despite a decade of traditional leadership transformation the Department fails to include them in their output targets?

*That the Disaster Management budget is reduced from R4,2Bill to R932mill

COGTA undertook to support National Treasury in finalizing a solution to Eskom's Debt burden, and the solution - the Eskom Municipal Debt Relief !!! While aiming to address the debt burden faced by municipalities, it inadvertently robs Peter to pay Paul. The temporary relief provided to municipalities puts additional strain on their financial resources, ultimately impacting the delivery of services to indigent households. This perpetuates the social distance between communities and the government, widening the gap and hindering progress.

Therefore, we must re-evaluate our strategies, address the root causes of our failures, and prioritize the needs of our communities. A paradigm shift is necessary, one that places the well-being of our people, particularly the most vulnerable, at the forefront.

In conclusion, the current approach of robbing Peter to pay Paul is unsustainable. Additionally, the lack of substantial achievements by CoGTA in the 6th Parliament emphasizes the urgency for change and a new direction. We must recommit ourselves to effective governance, transparency, and accountability, placing the interests of our communities above all else. This is our responsibility, and it is crucial that we rise to the occasion.

President Cyril Ramaphosa kept the door open to the wrong people - Thuma Mina!!