**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**THURSDAY, 13 MAY**

**14:00 – 16:15 MINI-PLENARIES (VIRTUAL)**

1. **Vote 18: Health**

**[Hon. MD Hlengwa]**

**Report of the Portfolio Committee on Health on Budget Vote 18: Health, Annual Performance Plan of the Department of Health, and its Entities, dated, 11 May 2021**

Honourable Members, as we consider the Committee’s Report on the Department of Health and related Entities’ budget - we cannot ignore the grim reality of our current situation. We are amid a deadly pandemic that directly calls into question our Government’s efforts to roll out vaccines.

The President, in his recent newsletter of 10 May 2021, called for global solidarity to ensure that Covid-19 technology is accessible to all, to allow for the local production of vaccines. The IFP fully agrees that equitable access to vaccines is critical. However, this does not answer the looming question about our Government’s slow roll-out response. We must face the facts. South Africa fares very poorly in the global roll-out of vaccinations. This is not only in comparison to rich countries but also in comparison to our neighbouring countries. In the United Kingdom, according to a research group, Our World in Data, 52.25% of the population had already been vaccinated by 10 May with one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine. Namibia, at this date, had already vaccinated 1.29% of its population. However, South Africa, in comparison, had only vaccinated 0.67% of the population.

We cannot accept our Government’s slow response. The public has a right to be properly informed of the Government’s vaccine programme and we fully support the Committee’s view that the Department should strengthen its communication regarding the roll-out programme.

Honourable Members, the enormous task of vaccinating at least 40 million people by the end of the 2021/2022 financial year, as the Department of Health envisions, must be seen against the fact that our primary healthcare facilities, as noted by the Report, may not be properly equipped to assist in this enormous task. Adequate infrastructure is a critical aspect, which needs to be urgently addressed. We must ensure our primary healthcare facilities have adequate storage, infrastructure and systems available to administer the vaccine programme.

The IFP is also concerned about the impact of the enormous cut of 16.3% in indirect grants, which will inevitably have a significant effect on national programmes, especially infrastructure projects, it seems. It is alarming that the Report notes that the establishment of oncology services in vulnerable provinces, which is a longstanding and critical issue, will inevitably be further delayed by these budget cuts. The IFP strongly endorses the Committee’s recommendation that the Department must furnish the Committee with an action plan aimed at addressing the infrastructure backlog.

Honourable Members, the fight against corruption remains a constant battle. In these desperate times, we cannot allow access to healthcare services to be undermined by corruption and lack of governance. The Auditor-General and her team are working endlessly to monitor the financial management of Covid-19 initiatives and we salute their hard work and commitment to ensuring accountability. The IFP strongly supports the Committee’s recommendation that the Department should provide feedback on implementing the Auditor-General’s recommendations and the IFP will closely monitor such progress reports.

The IFP supports the report.

1. **Vote 3 & 15: Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs**

**[Hon. SA Buthelezi]**

Honourable Speaker/Chairperson,

The IFP has repeatedly voiced its concern about the state of municipalities across the country. The level of mismanagement and irregular expenditure has reached an unacceptable high, and it seems that this wave of corrupt conduct on the part of public officials is unabating. In light of the critical role that local government has been tasked with playing during the pandemic, the state of affairs is concerning, as citizens are left at the mercy of corrupt officials to provide emergency water, increased sanitation of public transport and facilities, food and shelter for the homeless, as well as basic and community services.

The IFP wishes to express concern that over the last three years, the Department has received negative audit findings. For a Department charged with handling billions of Rands from the public purse, this is an alarm to which we must collectively respond. It is indicative of a culture of impunity when it comes to unlawful conduct and misappropriation of funds. Further, the Office of the Auditor-General had noted that despite these unfavourable audit outcomes, corrective action to address the previous period’s qualification areas, particularly relating to accruals, payments and irregular expenditure, have yet to be implemented.

The IFP echoes the Auditor-General’s concern regarding some projects spending almost all their budget but having very low performance. Disparities like this speak to the heart of poor governance and lead to the trust deficit that currently exists between the public and the government.

The IFP notes, with concern, the reduction in the Department’s overall budget allocation. This reduction has implications for institutional development and the Community Work Programme. Further, the funding model for the Municipal Infrastructure Support Agent is worrying, as this will hamper MISA’s ability to execute its mandate effectively. The IFP strongly suggests a re-evaluation of this model for optimal operation.

The IFP recognises the integral role of Cogta in addressing numerous and critical needs across the board, especially in such unprecedented times. However, we remain concerned that the vehicles through which large amounts of public finances are channelled have become sieves for unscrupulous individuals to line their personal coffers. And because this inexplicable siphoning of funds predates Covid-19, there is very little of the current financial predicament that can be assigned to the interruption of projects and diversion of funds by the pandemic.

Honourable Members, the IFP once again demands to see more visible accountability and sanction when it comes to public officials who have been found to have broken the law for self-interest. We simply cannot tolerate this lack of discipline in the financial management of Local Government.

We need to ensure that proper checks and balances are enforced. Failure will be at the expense of those most vulnerable in our society. Those that are desperately reliant on access to essential services will end up paying the ultimate price, yet again.

The IFP supports the Report.

I thank you.

**14:00 – 16:15 MINI-PLENARIES (VIRTUAL)**

**3. Vote 29: Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development**

**[Hon. Inkosi Cebekhulu]**

**REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE 2021/22 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PLANS AND THE BUDGET OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS ENTITIES, VOTE 29, DATED 11 MAY 2021.**

Honourable Members, now, more than ever, our Government needs to carefully consider prevention programmes to protect humans, animals, and agriculture against the spreading of pests, infectious diseases and other harmful substances. It has been reported that our country currently faces four active avian flu outbreaks and it was reported at the end of end of March this year that over 2 000 pigs at a farm in Northwest died of African Swine Fever.

The stark reality is that outbreaks such as the African Swine Fever - which to date has no vaccine and is highly contagious - not only have a major economic impact on our export industry but also hold dire consequences for smallholder farmers. The only solution we have is to ensure proper biosecurity measures are implemented, to minimise the risk. It is therefore alarming that only R3.3 million has been allocated by the Department to the biosecurity Sub-programme. This meagre allocation clearly shows the Government’s lack of commitment to minimise the risk of such outbreaks.

The IFP strongly supports the Committee’s recommendation that the Biosecurity Sub-programme be strengthened and that the Department should develop a functional alert system to promote a proactive response to disease outbreaks. The IFP will carefully monitor feedback on this recommendation, as the cost of a weak Biosecurity Programme could cost our country dearly.

On further analysis of the Committee’s Report, the IFP fully supports the Committee’s recommendation that comprehensive progress reports on the Land Development Support Programme should be submitted to Parliament. The IFP has always maintained that the failure to ensure comprehensive post-settlement support, coupled with corruption, has greatly jeopardised the land reform project. This has been one of the greatest tragedies of land reform. The IFP also supports the Committee’s recommendation that the Department should ensure that proper service level agreements and accountability frameworks are in place with all partner organisations in the implementation of the Land Development Support Programme, in specific.

Honourable Members, the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly impacted food security across the globe. Although the Minister of Agriculture has maintained, in response to written questions, that South Africa has “ample maize to meet the demand in the human and feed market”, we echo the Committee’s concern regarding the stagnant budgetary growth in the Food Security programme. The stark reality is that access to food, in light of the massive economic strain our people are experiencing, justifies the Committee’s recommendation that the Department’s contribution to implementing the National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security should be strengthened.

In conclusion, Honourable Members, this Department fulfils a critical mandate. In fulfilling its constitutional duty, we need to be vigilant as to how this Department is enforcing accountability and ensuring resources are properly managed. The IFP will closely monitor feedback on the Committee’s recommendations.

The IFP supports the Committee’s Report.

**4. Vote 17: Higher Education and Training**

**[Hon. MN Nxumalo]**

**CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ON CONSIDERATION OF THE BUDGET VOTE 17: HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING (FINAL)**

The successes of this generation will be measured against their ability to respond to the global phenomena of their time: their competence to participate in the race to industrialise and to respond to the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies, which all South Africans require for online learning and remote working.

In this light, the Department of Higher Education, Science and Technology (DHET) plays a crucial role in equipping young people with the necessary tools to participate effectively in educational and economic activities during Covid-19.

The creation of a competent workforce, produced by various education and training centres, aligns with the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP), the National Skills Development Plan 2030 (NSDP), the Human Resource Development Strategy for SA (HRDS-SA) and more broadly, the National Development Plan (NDP). Therefore, matters concerning Budget Vote 17 are cross-cutting. The topic of education goes beyond employment; the education of our people has to ensure that skills development aligns with the demands of the job market, so that issues of representativeness in economic activities are addressed. Education also speaks to creating a competent workforce and improving state capacity.

However, there are still shortfalls in implementing provisions. First, the anticipated collaboration between the National Treasury and the DHET on policy and funding options that would inform the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) is not yet underway. This limits the potential for better-coordinated outputs, which are required particularly in taking a multi-stakeholder approach to respond to Covid-19's impact.

In addition to the above limitation, the TVET budget, in keeping with the inflation rate, has decreased, while the Infrastructure Efficiency Grant is projected to decrease by R168 million in 2023/24. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, reducing the Infrastructure Efficiency Grant may have implications on adopting strategic 4IR technologies, which have become indispensable in the era of online learning and remote working.

Furthermore, owing to Covid-19 and the ensuing socio-economic crises, the DHET’s five-year Strategic Plan was revised. Targets in the number of student enrolments at TVET colleges were reduced by 90 000, whereas the number of students enrolled at the CET Colleges were reduced by over 166 000. Even though these adjustments hold prospects for enhancing substantive outputs rather than quantity, on the one hand, the exclusion of over 250 000 students in total will affect students from previously disadvantaged groups the most. On the other hand, this measure will reinforce existing inequalities in the country as a result.

On Budget Vote 17, concerns remain around the governance of funds and accountability. The Government-wide Monitoring and Evaluation needs to protect our democracy and the future of the youth by ensuring that funds that are reserved for education and training purposes – their future – are not misused for personal gain through corrupt practices. While the IFP supports Private-Public Partnerships in line with improving the quality of life of all South Africans, the responsibility is on the state to protect learners within the education system from very high residence fees, as this increases student debt, which threatens to reverse efforts made towards inclusivity in education.

The provision of effective, community-driven and relevant educational, training and development programmes is a focal point of the IFP's reconstruction and social development policy. The declining subsidies for education affect the ability to create a competent workforce, which is one of the tenets of the NSDP 2030.

To conclude, the Party accepts the Budget Vote 17 Report with the hope that the above concerns are addressed with efficiency, so that South Africa’s future, through its youth, is not jeopardised.

**5. Vote 37: Sports, Arts and Culture**

**[Hon. KP Luthuli]**

**Budget Debate on Sports, Arts and Culture**

This Department’s Budget, as contained in the Report, shows its support year-on-year for government’s National Development Plan (NDP). This Plan promises reform and success for stakeholders in this sector. However, the NDP falls short in a number of ways and fails on delivery to sportspeople and artists alike.

As expected, the current administration is over-exaggerating obstacles as a result of Covid-19, when being unable to achieve their targets. This Department is a key vehicle that athletes and artists alike rely upon to ensure that they are able to sustain their livelihoods. For the 2020 Covid-19 response, nearly R300 million was allocated to artists to mitigate the impact of the national lockdown. In reality, as we have come to expect with the current administration, it failed to deliver and the process was riddled with corruption.

Earlier this year we saw artists resort to protest action, as they had not been paid the relief money, with conflicting reports by the Department. In March 2021, artists highlighted the fact that this Department had indeed only paid 50% of its allocated Budget, almost a year since it had proclaimed the allocated Budget. However, it was later revealed that the Department had only spent R57 million of the R300 million.

The issue of mismanagement is not only limited to the Covid relief funds but also in the entity of Boxing South Africa, where there have been huge problems with irregular, wasteful expenditure, with little consequence management and a lack of decisive leadership to deal with corruption.

Government’s trend of empty promises, mixed with rampant corruption, is starting to impact the development and progress of all Departments in South Africa. The once prestigious and sacred Robben Island is facing major budget cuts. Salaries of employees have had to be - or will be - cut because corruption within government is so high that there is no excess to preserve the legacy of our freedom fighters, who envisioned a much more capable and responsible leadership. Again, in Robben Island there is reported corruption and mismanagement at the hands of the current government.

This Department is falling short in so many areas, yet its responsibility to our cultural and sporting growth remains critical.

The IFP believes that legislative competence in respect of arts, culture and heritage should be given exclusively to the provinces. Each province should be free to recognise and nurture its own unique heritage. The IFP proposes the creation of a Coordinating Council for the Arts, which will be responsible, *inter alia,* for the distribution of funds to cultural institutions, NGOs and CBOs. The Coordinating Council will comprise representatives of the provinces. The IFP believes that arts, culture and heritage should be encouraged through appropriate tax relief methods. Spending in arts and culture should be directed to areas that have the potential for wealth-creation and the preservation of heritage sites through strong business practices.

Due to the large number of dependents of this Department, the IFP supports the Budget.