

Dept. of Women and Youth needs to prioritise programmes which empower the vulnerable

By Luyolo Mphithi MP - DA Shadow Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities

House Chairperson,

In South Africa, every 8 hours a woman is killed, and half of these murders happen at the hands of their intimate partner. This makes South Africa's femicide rate five times higher than the global rate.

Youth unemployment is at 55.2%, meaning that the likelihood of being unemployed in South Africa has been and continues to be a norm fused into the fibre of South African society. Youth unemployment is literally killing young people.

The national disability rate in South Africa is at 7.5%, this is around 4.5 million people who continue to face a lack of opportunities and a lack of mainstreaming into South African society.

These sad realities keep many of us up at night. So, Honourable Minister, you can imagine my surprise to arrive at the Committee meeting where your department gave a presentation on its Annual Performance Plan and made no mention of its plan for the youth and the disabled. But how can I be surprised when the previous Committee's comments where, and I quote: "the overall lack of understanding of the department mandate is the key driver for poor performance".

So, I decided to conduct an investigation - I looked at the department's Annual Performance Plan for the past 5 years. I averaged the total targets met for each year in the past 5, and it gave me 44.9%. Another statistic that keeps me up at night.

My investigation continued. The biggest cost driver in the department is the compensation of employees, at just over R91 million, this is 57% of the budget after the Commission for Gender Equality has received its funding. It is devastating that the department is spending more money on salaries and less on its core programmes which are supposed to be on the ground, lifting up the most marginalised people in our societies. A further question is: if we are spending so much money on human capital, why are we failing to meet the targets?

Honourable Chairperson, the programmes of the department are focused on the production of reports that shockingly have cost centres attached to them. Yet, we are spending over R91 million on the compensation of employees. Do we not have skills in this department? At this stage as the committee, we do not even know the organogram or structure of the department, which has decided to set aside so much money for its bloated staff compliment.

The targets set by the department demonstrates its broad challenges. It cannot be that targets measure outputs and not outcomes. You have targets that talk about a production of a report for an entire year? How do you write a report for an entire year? Can we be taken seriously? But then again, how can we in good conscience sit back when this department spent R17 million on renting 3 floors from the Department of Public Works, as was reported by the 5th Parliament's Portfolio Committee

Report. When will this department start to take its role in our society with the commitment that is required? When will it realise that the struggle continues in the most ruthless way in our society?

uMinister uthi idepartment mayi kwaleza

Kodwa iza kwaleza njani

Xa ibusy nge reports

Sidikiwe ngoku

It doesn't take an investigator to see that this department is on its knees. Lost in the desert and wandering without direction. But all is not lost. We urge the Minister to go back not only to a departmental strategy session, but also to the realities that face the most vulnerable in our society. Minister, women are dying in this country because we (us) (men) are killing them. Young people are without jobs, without dignity. Our people living with disabilities are excluded. We have to be doing more, our conscience cannot tell us it is correct for this department to focus on salaries and the production of reports.

So Honourable Minister, allow me to provide you with some advice:

- Salaries need to be audited and we need to prioritize new programmes that will empower our communities;
- It took this department two years to fully function in the previous term, so with urgency, you need to establish all the mitigating factors that will ensure this department functions during this transitional period;
- The department received the smallest appropriation which will impact the work of an important institution like the Commission of Gender Equality (GCE) - we need to increase the budget of the CGE if we are to take the struggles of inequalities seriously;
- The department must speedily understand its mandate and its tangible deliverables - this means they need to review their targets, their strategic objectives and align the department to the issues on the ground; and,
- Officials must come prepared to our committee meetings because we do not have time to correct reports that are incorrect or else kuzoba lit.

In service to your country no one is above the people. We are not above the people of South Africa. Let us adopt humility in all we do. In closing, we are young, fearless and determined. Nothing and no one should side-line or undermine us because of our age. We are here for our constituencies and we will do our jobs. Honourable Minister, if you are doing well, we will support and fight for you. If you are not, we will tell you and hold you to account, because time is against us. This department has no choice but to rise and work. Not for the sake of political parties but for the sake of our people. Azishe.

I thank you.