

## **Budget Vote on Basic Education**

**UCDP : Hon IS Mfundisi**

**Tuesday, May 7, 2013**

The Department has been embroiled in controversy for a number of years over varied issues but the past year has been particularly controversial with the Limpopo textbook saga. The sad news is that at the end of April as many as 19 schools in Limpopo were still without all requisite textbooks despite the Department's vehement denials of such facts. If this is true as reported, then the Department is in breach of the October 2012 court order to deliver books.

It is disappointing that threats of disciplinary action are issued against school principals who disclose the Department's failure to deliver. School principals are mouthpieces for the many poor children with no voice and if they are silenced, it means the children in these communities are condemned to a life of poverty and underdevelopment.

The shortage of furniture in some schools is another area in which the department continues to fail dismally. Hundreds of thousands of pupils are forced to learn sitting on the floor because there are no desks in their schools. It is a disgrace that almost twenty years since democracy we still have so many mud schools. The rhetoric that this government has made education one of apex departments is betrayed by the realities that our children face daily.

The slowness with which the Department always responds when pointed towards an area with problems indicates an arrogant attitude with which the Department is managed. It is unacceptable that the Department has to be taken to court by civil society for it to carry out its statutory obligations. What happens to the areas where civil society organizations cannot reach?

We welcomed Minister Gordhan's allocation of R207 billion to the sector and note that the education budget has consistently increased since 2008; however this has not translated to better education for our children. The quality of

education offered in our schools is worse than the inferior education that caused the class of 1976 to take to the streets to challenge and denounce. The children of 1976 advocated for the right not to be taught in Afrikaans.

It is unfortunate that as recently as yesterday it has been brought to light that teachers are incapable to impart skills on reasoning. It is absurd to argue that the teachers in question come from the old order and were trained to teach labourers. Even if that were the case, a responsible government department would have seen to upgrading their skills to meet modern demands. It has of course to be borne in mind that when the ANC said they were ready to govern it equally meant that they were ready and geared to improve the quality of life of the people. Gone are the days of passing the buck.

The department continues to boast of high numbers of enrollments when only less than half of the numbers enrolled reach Grade 12, and an even lesser number attain minimum requirements for University entrance. The importance of good education cannot be overemphasized as it directly impacts on human development and for maintenance socially responsive economic and political systems.

The low numeracy and literacy levels are unacceptable and this department must cease to create excuses for such failures. Without secure foundations of literacy and numeracy, our learners will never obtain high level skills needed by the nation to address poverty and inequality for development and growth. The findings by the National Planning Commission that the quality of schooling is substandard, especially in township and rural schools, clearly indicate a crisis now and for the future.

While strike action is a right the ease with which teachers quickly abandon their duties to take to the streets for their wage demands needs urgent attention. Teaching is a labour of love, leaving classes unattended should be the last thing for professionals. One wishes they could take a leaf from the book of the nonagenarian Umama Qwelane of Mpumalanga whose matric classes pass in flying colours. She really deserves the Baobab order awarded to her by the president recently.

We remain astounded in the manner in which school going children are inconvenienced by being sent from pillar to post as their schools are amalgamated without paying due consideration to issues such as their transport to such schools. It becomes worse when transport providers go on strike as is the case at present.

The merger of schools results is done haphazardly as accounts of the two schools are rarely ever merged resulting in endless pilfering of funds as the very department keeps depositing money into the account of a purported closed school. Such mergers also breed absenteeism by teachers from schools.

The closure of schools needs to be done in a much better and orderly way.