

Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities: Budget Vote 8

UCDP : Hon IC Ditshetelo

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E249 : 10H00

I'll start from the end and say that I support the budget vote but it is not with conviction that I do it. I'm doing it half-heartedly hoping for some miracle that would turn things around and that would make this Department be what women of South Africa envisaged and hoped it shall be and not just a paper-pusher. Ever since its inception we have been faced with more questions than we get the answers. The extent of confusion surrounding this Department makes you wonder if its creation was not just another populist stance with no real conviction and commitment to further the cause of women, children and persons with disabilities, as vulnerable groups.

I dare allege that thus far the Department is good purely for cosmetic purposes, for South Africa to be seen as seriously addressing gender imbalances and protecting the rights of children when in fact and in reality this is extremely far from the truth. In this budget vote, the Department highlights that it is not a service delivery department; as much as there could be many arguments in support of this, but the question of how they arrived at this conclusion fails me. Who was consulted and how? Is this another top-down decision where the ordinary people will just have to accept and swallow without being consulted? How does this Department intend to monitor and evaluate and with what power shall they do it? What legislation shall they rely

upon and what shall they do if they find deviation from any state organ or department.

The Department states that they hope to exercise sufficient influence over other departments in order to achieve its aims and objectives, for me, this is vague and lacks substance; for one it sounds like a function already performed by various civil society organisations, secondly it lacks the 'how' part and speaks to the question of power and authority.

I find it a bit incomprehensible that 57.2 per cent of the entire budget in the last financial year was used for compensation of employees which is more than half of the entire budget; on the same breath the establishment of the Department is said to have been slower because of a lack of human resources and financial capacity. This seems to lack sense.

R24.5 million was allocated towards the establishment of the Department in the last financial year, but yet again it is expected that about 30 per cent of this budget will be allocated towards the same function, and this again raises questions. Further, there seems to be contradiction between the Estimates of the National Expenditure (ENE) and the Department's strategic plan, for instance the Department in this vote seeks to develop a policy on maternity and paternity in the family and at work, yet the strategic plan is silent on this.

We are made to believe that the Department's core function is monitoring and evaluation and of course this is important, however it baffles me beyond measure that 59.4 per cent of the budget allocation in this code will be towards compensation of employees leaving only R1.176 million towards the programme itself.

It is absolutely disheartening to note that the Department does not seem to have a direction nor a properly comprehended mandate and thus it seems it shall have little or no impact in the bigger stream of things. It is not clear what prompted the Treasury's decision to move the Department from the Governance Cluster to the Social Cluster. Does this mean the Department ought to focus only on social issues pertaining women, children and persons with disabilities?

The Department is said to be in the process of developing a Gender Equality Bill, and I ask if the development of such Bill ought not to be tasked to the Gender Commission? The dismal failure of the Department to produce its first country report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is just another issue I struggle to understand and accept. Just as they say they intend implementing a poverty strategy for persons with disabilities and I ask, how do you implement a programme that you never bothered to include in your strategic plan? Could it be the strategic plan and many other documents produced were just a paper-pushing exercise to blind us towards thinking that something is being done? I wonder!