

Debate on the State of the Nation Address

UCDP: Hon MN Matladi

Tuesday, 15 February 2011

The lay-out of the State of the Nation address was meant to take us from the known to the unknown; start with the 'feel-good' rhetoric, and not give details on pertinent issues. For instance, it is good that 81% households now have electricity, but what is the plan with regards to the remaining 19%?

The president dwelt so much on the unemployment issue but there seems to be very little that could be yielded from the promises. UCDP appreciates that real money is attached to the creation of jobs. But it is with shock to note that only a meagre 7000 jobs were saved by the R7 billion scheme, when almost a million jobs were lost. Really now Mr President, why must we compliment such a total failure?

When the President listed the five priorities, he also said we had done well in these areas, I ask, on what do we base such a conclusion? Out of 1.2 million households living in informal settlements, we are told that only 400 000 will have security of tenure and basic services by 2014. I find this appalling. It is more appalling when you view it in light of the unanswered question by Portia Mrwetyana quoted by the president. What is it that renders a government that can throw parties costing millions, unable to deliver basic services to Portia's community? We give you the same vote, why treat us differently?

This question under-pins most ills and ironies that we have seen in service delivery and we had expected a decent answer to it than just blaming apartheid.

Efforts to fight corruption are appreciated but the focus cannot be on such easy-to-track cases such as the R44 million recovered from public servants. Important as it is, but we need to rid corruption perpetuated by politicians and decision makers, especially in tender processes.

Poverty has reached such critical stages in our communities and we expected the President's acknowledgement of this and a concrete plan to curb it. Half the households in our population survives on R524 per month and the president does not think this deserves utmost attention. There is no mention of how poor households would be cushioned against scheduled massive increases in water and electricity.

It is no wonder why the president has been given the name 'artful ducker' by the media. The promises made were populist in nature with nothing to pin down on anyone. For instance, the president states that social grants will be linked to economic activity and community development, no details are given as to how this shall be done and by who.

We cannot afford to celebrate the controversial increase in matric pass rates. We have seen a steady decrease in matric results from 70% down to 60.6% between 2004 and 2009. Poor matric results speak directly to the employability of our youth and it is time that we took advices from experts in education and stop working in silos. However, we welcome the move of converting loans to bursaries for final year students regardless of the fact that this also, still speaks of access to education and does not address quality in our education.