

DA FREE STATE REPORT ON FOOD PARCEL DISTRIBUTION – 27 APRIL 2020

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New research revealed by the HSRC on 26 April 2020 indicates that 25% of the general population in South Africa do not have enough money to buy food under lockdown conditions, while in certain areas it could be as high as 66%. While more affluent people are not in danger of starvation, and the unemployed and elderly are largely covered by social grants, it is the missing middle group who are bearing the brunt of the economic impacts of the Covid-19 response. Research conducted by UOFS indicates that 40% of the Free State economy is informal. This means people of all races are engaging in various informal activities to put food on the table. From taxi operators, roadside vendors, hair salons, garden services, daily wage labourers, home baking, car repairs, etc., all are now denied the ability to earn their daily living. Very few of these people would already be accessing social grants. We believe that it will only be through a partnership with civil society and non-government operators that the Free State government has any hope of reaching the estimated 625 000 people currently in need of assistance in the province.

Government has embarked on a large scale food parcel distribution across the country. Judging from reports received from 26 councillors in 14 Free State municipalities, social media posts, (examples attached) and community complaints, it is clear that the distribution of food parcels in the Free State is out of control and is being manipulated by politicians, specifically ANC politicians. The Premier, MEC's, Mayors and Speakers in almost every municipality including the Mangaung Metro Municipality are implicated in abusing the Social Relief of Distress programme for political ends. We see daily photos or media statements of MEC's or Mayors out and about distributing parcels.

Stories have emerged of ANC councillors forbidding opposition councillors to have any knowledge or any participation in the food parcel distribution programme, of ANC councillors physically hijacking private food parcels donations, of ANC politicians demanding donations of food parcels from private businesses, and of ANC structures registering as NGO's and then given food parcels to distribute.

The process of applications has been abused by ANC councillors making up their own lists based on unspecified criteria, of delivering food parcels to family, party members and activists.

The system being administered by SASSA and the Department of Social Development has been captured by the ANC in many areas of the province. The guidelines which were drawn up by SASSA are full of loopholes which politicians find it easy to abuse. On 10 April, the Premier Ntombela, advertised her own 'criteria' for applications which could include virtually any person, living or dead. Finally SASSA had to ask her to withdraw the advertisement as they were being completely overwhelmed with requests.

We have names of people who have made legitimate applications for food parcels, have been approved and contacted, but have not yet received any parcel. In the meantime we know that in almost every municipality parcels are being delivered to homes. It is not clear if these people applied for parcels, and if so where and how they applied.

We have heard from several sources that parcels were bought by Mayors with 'funds received from the District' or 'money sent by the Premier'.

It seems that loopholes in the SASSA memo of 24 March make it possible for politicians in municipalities to make bulk applications under the provision 2.4 for 'social relief to groups of people in shelters'. We know that the term 'shelter' includes other institutions such as old age homes.

The application form provided by SASSA for Covid 19 relief includes questions on Local Municipality, Ward No, and Institution Reg No. It is quite conceivable that ANC Ward Councillors and branches are managing the process of application and distribution in their wards. Neither SASSA, nor the Department of Social Development have the manpower to distribute the vast number of applications received. We have numerous photographs of ANC councillors, accompanied by ANC activists dressed in ANC regalia, distributing food parcels to homes.

This seems to be contrary to lockdown regulations as activists are not registered essential service providers. We also have photos of SAPS assisting with the distribution of food parcels, and in some cases actually distributing the food parcels.

We know and can identify some of the network of CNDC's (Community Nutrition and Development Centres) in the Free State. These are registered NGO's or NPO's who are used as the backbone of the procurement and distribution of food parcels in communities. Some of these are known to be run by staunch ANC members. In Intabazwe, Harrismith community

members may go directly to the CNDC to apply for a food parcel. Without any discernable verification process they are told to collect the parcel next morning.

We know that in most cases NGO's, churches and other community charity groups are not being used to assist with applications or distribution. In fact, in most reports it is clear that the politicians are extremely antagonistic towards private institutions, (Hennenman in Matjabeng Municipality and in Mantsopa Municipality) going so far as attempting to have the leaders arrested, or taking the food parcels from such institutions.

In most cases DA Ward councillors are being completely side-lined and forbidden to have anything to do with food parcels. This makes it obvious that the food parcel distribution is being used as a political tool.

In a few cases we have received reports from DA councillors who have been included to some extent in the food parcel distribution in their wards. Usually they submit a list to the Speaker or Mayor who seems to be administering the applications. In some cases the names submitted by our councillors do receive a parcel, although sometimes not all.

In terms of a Memo (attached) titled GUIDELINE FOR PROVISION OF SRD AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC issued by SASSA on 24 March 2020, and signed by the Executive Manager: Grants Administration – Ms D Dunkerley, 'legislation allows SASSA to provide financial and non-financial assistance to persons with insufficient means to support themselves and therefore experiencing undue hardship.'

According to this memo:

- Individuals can apply for SRD through contacting 'SASSA contact person, municipality, or ProvJOC requesting a relief parcel.'
- Relief parcels can also be provided to 'groups of people housed in shelters.' or institutions.
- Requests can be made at the SASSA grants pay-point

Also, after various authorisations and procurement, 'SCM will issue an order and inform SASSA Operations Management contact person in the region of the service provider *who will deliver relief parcels as well as the date, venue and time*'. This SASSA Operations Management contact person in consultation with ProvJOC will then inform the approved beneficiaries regarding delivery/collection point etc via sms, email or letter.

The memo states further that ‘regions are to ensure that there are officials available to administer and manage the process’.

‘Upon delivery of humanitarian support items, SASSA official in ProvJOC must sign goods received voucher and submit to finance for payment’.

It is doubtful whether any of these processes are verifiable.

A Report to the Provincial Coronavirus Command Centre on 21 April, (attached) indicates that the Provincial Command Committee is established and consists of the Premier, members of EXCO, District Mayors and representatives of political parties in the FS Legislature. (The DA representatives only attended two meetings whereafter virtual meetings failed, the whatsapp group degenerated into a circus, and the DA is now obtaining information elsewhere)

This document states further that District and Metro Coronavirus Command Centres are established consisting of District and local mayors. District and Metro Command Centres must submit weekly reports to higher levels of authority, yet there is no provision for these reports to be submitted to the Legislature or Local Councils.

In this document, under Resolutions of Executive Council 15 and 16 April 2020:

Point 2: Executive Council expressed serious concern with the random and unfortunate distribution of food parcels to destitute communities. Executive Council directed that Social Development should draft a joint programme with SASSA wherein food parcels can be distributed systematically across the province.

A concern has also been raised that truckloads of food have been delivered to Free State House (the Premier’s official residence) during the night.

Reports from DA Councillors in FS municipalities.

I received reports from twenty-six DA councillors representing fourteen municipalities. They reported as follows:

1. In almost all municipalities, councillors were aware that food parcels had been received by the municipality. In some cases they thought these parcels, or some of the parcels, had been donated by private businesses. In one case the Mayor (Mantsopa) has said that no NGO or church or any private individual may distribute food parcels, and that all

donations must come through her office. In other cases they have been told that District had transferred the funds to the municipality, or that the funds had come from the Premier. In very few cases had DA councillors, or Council, formally been informed about parcels received and the distribution plan.

2. In some municipalities councillors thought that 100 parcels had been received, or 100 per ward. It is extremely obscure how and where these parcels are coming from or where they are going.
3. On the question of who was in charge of the food parcel distribution, all councillors said the Mayor, the Speaker or the ANC councillors. Most ward councillors in the Free State are ANC, so in some cases it is thought that ward councillors are arranging the distribution. However, most DA ward councillors in Free State municipalities have been deliberately side-lined, and in at least one case (Mantsopa) been forbidden to have anything to do with food parcels.
4. On the question of who is receiving the food parcels, all councillors said they had no idea. Some had heard a rumour that parcels were going to friends, family and ANC members, but no concrete evidence has been given. ANC members are posting photos on Facebook of themselves and their activists in ANC regalia, dishing out food parcels in homes. It is certain that there is no proper information about who is receiving the parcels, how the lists were drawn up, or what the criteria are for people to receive parcels.

Some DA councillors have been asked for names of people who should receive parcels. These names have been given, and some of these people have received parcels but not all. This indicates that the food parcels being distributed in municipalities by Mayors, are going to beneficiaries identified by councillors themselves. This is outrageous, and of course, given the history of resource capture in the Free State, those councillors will stuff these lists with the names of their family, friends and supporters.

In Ficksburg, Cllrs have reported that 120 food parcels were received and officials of SASSA and the Speakers office distributed according to lists supplied by the Speaker. SASSA apparently first 'screened' the lists? In this case the DA ward councillor had also submitted 20 names of people who did receive food parcels.

In Hennenman (Matjabeng Municipality) foreign owned businesses donated food parcels to the community. Two ANC councillors, Tshabangu and Thelingoane, and an official, Rabulana, heard the news and immediately arrived to take the parcels away. Nobody knows where the parcels went and who received them. The business people

again donated parcels, this time to Meals on Wheels who gave it to a church for distribution. Again the councillors descended on the church demanding evidence that they have a permit for food distribution which they did have. The councillors nevertheless grabbed a lot of parcels leaving the church with not enough for their list of needy homes.

In Mangaung Metro Municipality, which is under Sec 139(1)c administration the Mayor, Olly Mlamleli, has been running a food parcel distribution scheme in mainly the areas of Thaba Nchu, and Bochabelo. The administrators have distanced themselves and the Metro from her activities which consist of her in her capacity as Mayor formally approaching businesses for donations which are delivered at the municipal offices. These are then distributed through ANC councillors. It is not known what system of application or criteria is used for her project.

Also in Mangaung Metro we have received information that in Wards 31 and 35 the Mayor, together with some ANC councillors have been distributing food parcels and hand sanitisers.

Also in Mangaung Metro, the caucus leader of the EFF is claiming on facebook, with photos, that he applied for and has received 1645 food parcels from the Premier, Sisi Ntombela.

5. Some DA councillors have been asked for names of beneficiaries, but other than that they are not informed or involved in any way with the decisions on procurement, the application process and criteria, or distribution of food parcels.

Most DA councillors are involved in very successful community, church or NGO food parcel projects. Some are distributing food parcels in their personal capacity, making it clear that this is not coming from the DA, but from themselves as concerned individuals.

Conclusions

From what we have learned so far, it is quite clear that food parcels are being distributed by ANC politicians in virtually every municipality in the Free State. This is clearly a political campaign strategy, and is enabled through the design of the SRD programme of SASSA and the department of Social Development making use of its patronage network of 'implementing agents'. The political nature of the establishment of the Provincial Command Committee, Provincial Command Centre, and District/Metro Command

Centres, which are in effect ANC structures, has made the politicisation of the food parcel issue inevitable. Even the claim that opposition parties are represented on the Provincial Command Committee is a sham. From the beginning opposition representatives were sidelined, not invited, insulted, ignored, or intimidated at every level. Any questioning within Committees has certainly not been welcomed, and every effort has been made to ensure that reports and information are not distributed to opposition representatives.

In the Free State we see the opposite of what is happening in the Western Cape, where the Speaker of the Provincial Parliament has established an ad-hoc committee, including all political parties, with the stated purpose of providing an avenue for questions, information, transparency and accountability.

The great danger in the Free State is that the entire system for addressing extreme hunger is being manipulated for political purposes. The lack of accountability and transparency inherent in the lockdown regulations, means that loopholes in the procurement and distribution systems can be manipulated by political cadres who have been placed in charge to the deliberate exclusion of opposition public representatives.

In this atmosphere of secrecy with activities taking place in the dark behind closed doors, rumours and speculation are rife. We have already seen various protest actions and uprisings by communities who are really suffering from poverty and hunger. SAPS have been called to various incidents where it is thought that there may be food stored, or distribution is taking place.

It is clear that the correct procedures for the delegation of powers within councils, was foregone in the haste and urgency to address the threat of the virus. Municipal Councils were suspended on orders of the Minister of Cogta, thus emasculating those same elected councils and rendering them impotent to question anything happening now. Municipal Managers and Mayors are simply refusing to provide any information at all, even when approached for answers. The Premier and MECs are likewise reluctant to provide any information.

The establishment of Provincial, District and Metro Command structures in a highly political fashion, coupled with the effective 'suspension' of the democratic checks and balances, and coupled further with the 'emergency procurement regulations' which have temporarily suspended the usual supply chain management processes, has produced a toxic mix.

Politicians intent on benefiting themselves and their supporters are having a field day, in spite of a provincial government policy prohibiting the abuse of state resources for party political purposes that was imposed on instruction of the Public Protector after she found in a 2016 report that the boundaries of party and state had been conflated to the detriment of opposition parties during elections by Ace Magashule's Operation Hlasela Campaign in the province.

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27 April 2020

Attached: reports from following municipalities:

Mangaung Metro

Mantsopa

Letsemeng

Moqhaka

Nketoana

Metsimaholo

Matjabeng

Setsoto

Dihlabeng

Tokologo

Masilonyana