

Youth constantly failed by Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities

by **Luyolo Mphithi MP** – DA Shadow Minister on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities

Honourable House Chairperson,

The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities's 2021/22 Annual Performance Plan (APP) was tabled for consideration to the Portfolio Committee. The report was tabled alongside the APPs of the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) and the Commission on Gender Equality. The Department, under Vote 20, received an annual appropriation of R778.5 million. Transfer payments are then done for two entities, namely the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) receiving R89.9 million and R478.7 million to the NYDA, respectively.

The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities remains exactly what it was created to be. A Department for the elite within the ANC and its alliance partners. This is precisely why more than half of its budget is used, not for the development of the lost generation, but on administration and employment costs. The ANC love bloated bureaucracies and unnecessary departments as it gives them additional vehicles to do what the new ANC holds as its ultimate mandate: distributing patronage.

To do that, you must make sure that your cadres are deployed to be the arbiters of patronage. It's why there are such fierce battles between ANC factions to get their grubby paws inside these departments. It's not to rescue the lost generation or care for the future of our youth. It is for the express purpose of buying allegiance with patronage for the next elective conference.

This Department was created to provide services for marginalised sectors of society like women, youth and persons with disabilities. What has become very evident in the APP is that the Department is not even sure of its mandate. The misalignment and lack of leadership in this Department is clearly shown by Minister Maite Nkoane-Mashabane in her foreword of the current APP where she states that the Department will be shifting from being a facilitation Department to one that regulates government programmes and monitors the empowerment and prioritisation of women, youth and persons with disabilities. The Department has clearly distanced itself from doing meaningful work on the ground to being some form of a lobby group.

They have changed many targets from actual services to being a regulations department whilst we face high rates of unemployment amongst the youth, increased gender-based violence cases and the continued lack of access for persons with disabilities. What a shame. The reduction in the budget for service delivery programmes specifically in programmes 2,3, 4 and 5 is demonstrative of the Department's move away from the people of South Africa and into air-conditioned offices.

The total allocation of R12.3 million in Programme 5 which is stipulated to deal with youth development only constitutes 6% of the Department's operational budget. Programme 5 has only 5 targets planned for the current financial year. Much of the targets relate to the production of reports which do little against the fight against youth unemployment.

Furthermore, the department refers to additional activities it intends undertaking for the current financial year, but this was not reflected in the current APP thus holding the Department to account in this regard would be difficult.

On legislation it was clear that the department did not have an overall strategy to reach key stakeholders on a variety of bills. The NYDA Amendment Bill for example, had little to no targets around engagement with the youth particularly in rural areas. The Department had not made any strides to improve its working relationship with the National Youth Development Agency for the benefit of young people.

The DA noted in regard to the NYDA that satellite offices in rural areas do not provide full service for youth in rural areas. In addition, it was noted that certain branch offices of the NYDA had computers that were not operational thus bringing into question how youth would be able to access online information or to be assisted with NSFAS applications by the NYDA. The Department continued to struggle with its ITC infrastructure as there was no online portal available on the website of the NYDA for grant applications particularly during the Covid-19 era thus bringing into question how accessible the services are to youth.

The DA will not support the use of consultants in the Department due to the high number of senior officials in the Department earning over a million rand who are now unable to do the jobs they were appointed for. The truth about this APP is that there is less for our people and more to be consumed by the Department itself. This is the ANC way. The way of countless bloated entities and unnecessary departments often with overlapping mandates and functions all created so that loyal cadres can get and distribute a piece of the pie. It is now up to voters to reject this ANC way and rather embrace the DA way.

The DA way entails streamlining the work of government in confronting the challenges facing our people. This would mean less money used as a form of patronage in the duplication of bureaucratic functions and offices and more money actually working for the people. In other words, less money to fund the business of government and more money to fund the businesses of the youth in this instance.

Young people would be at the centre of all the work of a DA government, not swept aside in a DA Youth run entity. We would have one-stop-shop opportunity centres across the country. Young people won't have to navigate through convoluted funds in tens of different entities and department, they will have one place where they can have their ideas funded and supported and their skills and education facilitated. It is only through adopting this DA way can our young people be put first.