

## **Community Works Programme is falling apart while COGTA fiddles**

By **Eleanore Spies MP** – DA Deputy Shadow Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA)

163 municipalities are under financial duress;  
108 municipalities have unfunded budgets; and  
29 municipalities have been placed under administration – this is the real state of local government in South Africa.

Yet a whopping R4.3 billion of this Department's budget programme is spent on the community works programme. This constitutes 85.1% of the funds directly administered by the Department and excludes transfers to municipalities, SALGA, the Municipal Demarcation Board, the Municipal Infrastructure Support Agency and the South African sister cities network. Government support and intervention only gets 2.6% of the budget, institutional development 1.5%, the municipal systems improvement grant 2.7% and the National Disaster Management Centre is at 2.1%.

The community works programme is definitely not serving its intended purpose and there's definitely no return on investment whatsoever. Minister, there is no justification for spending R4.3 billion on this programme as this is not the core function of this Department. What is worse, is that the R4.3 billion does not benefit the very people that this programme is intended for. Community works programme participants on the ground earns a meagre R880 per month and every month it is a battle for them to get this money paid to them on time.

I'm speaking on behalf of the thousands of CWP workers who must beg for this stipend for days on end each and every month. Each time and after numerous questions and enquiries to the Minister, I get the same answer, “... *we have implemented a new remodelling policy and we are having challenges with the implementation of this new system ...*” We have been struggling for eight months, Minister.

For Mr JP du Toit from McGregor in the Western Cape, that means another month of unpaid debit orders – not paying his family's funeral policy on time. He is the one who has to face his two colleagues who are forced to beg for food for their children. He is the one that must take his last and share it with his colleagues so that they don't go to sleep hungry.

The purpose of the community work programme in municipalities is to create access to a minimum level of regular and predictable income from work opportunities for those who need them through targeting areas with high levels of poverty and underemployment.

Female participants in Kannaland, one of the poorest communities in the country, shared stories of how they have to use their own tools – carrying spades from their homes daily – because there is no supply of tools and material for them. Yet the implementing agents, mostly non-profit organisations appointed by this Department to facilitate this programme, get millions of Rands. The people who do the actual work remain poor and unemployed.

Minister, you have a choice. You can decide to keep on throwing money at a programme that is not working for the people on the ground or you can incorporate the community works programme into local municipalities.

In principle, the DA supports a review of the CWP programme to ensure that CWP workers, not third parties or implementing organisations, are the beneficiaries of the programme. To this end, the DA proposes that CoGTA stops administering the CWP budget as this does not form part of its core function. Instead, the CWP budget should be allocated to the municipality administered public works programmes with the caveat that they provide quarterly reports on programme implementation. Using municipalities will cut out the fees paid to implementing agents and save the taxpayer millions of Rands. This will result in huge cost cutting and a better chance of participants being taken up in jobs either in municipalities or in the private sector.

This, Minister, is a real return on investment and if done properly can improve service delivery in so many of the dysfunctional municipalities across the country.

Minister, I beg you on behalf of the thousands of underemployed people, consider these recommendations for what they are and not who it is coming from.