

South Africans need hand-ups not hand-outs

Speech by Bridget Masango MP, DA Shadow Minister of Social Development

Honourable Speaker

We welcome the Honourable President's announcement that the Social Relief of Distress grant will be extended, while other grants will also be increased. It would even be more welcome if the grant payment system used to process and distribute grants was not so dysfunctional. If grant applicants were able to speak to a living person when they contact the SASSA call centre and SASSA offices throughout the country. If people, whose grant applications are approved were paid on time – and did not have to wait for months – to receive the grant that was meant to be an emergency grant and meant to stave off hunger.

Regarding the increase in other grant types, the announcement would provide much-needed relief and hope to recipients of elderly, disabled, and child grants if they did not have to wait for days or weeks before receiving their promised grants.

Since November 2022, millions of grants have repeatedly not been paid on time. This caused people to pay multiple expensive transport fares to access their grants and buy expensive food while attempting to receive a grant, which was rightfully theirs – and which ought to be a seamless process.

Grant payment system flaws, combined with a lack of effective communication with grant recipients, have resulted in total chaos and mayhem that have reached crisis proportions. In addition, a system that pays grants to non-eligible applicants while declining the unemployed, makes it difficult to believe that the extensions and increases of grant budgets will make the difference it is meant to make.

Between November 2022 and February 2023, hundreds of thousands - if not millions - of grant beneficiaries have waited for long periods, due to what we are told are 'system glitches'. This Honourable Speaker affects people who are already struggling, who cannot afford to struggle for another day, let alone battle on for weeks for unpaid grants. Even the most resilient break under these circumstances.

Honourable Speaker, these are not gripes from an opposition party but the lived reality, the day-to-day, month-to-month dire straits experienced by millions of South Africans, trapped in poverty, and food insecurity caused by a government that stopped caring about its poor 29 years ago.

In a country buckling under a 43% expanded unemployment rate, where no less than 30.4 million people live below the upper poverty line, and where 27% of children are stunted (a

phenomenon called slow violence of malnutrition), the Department of Social Development ought to be at the forefront of the fight against these social ills.

This Department should have the systems, resources and partners geared towards ensuring services are rendered without glitches, are robust enough to absorb the shocks, and are communicated proactively and effectively.

Sadly, what we find is the complete opposite, and is exacerbated by the value of the grants being further undermined by the exorbitantly high cost of living we are burdened by.

According to the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group affordability index, a basic food basket to feed a household of 5 currently sits at R 4 228,82 – a scandalous increase of R380.33 from January 2022 that reduces any value that could have been gained by the increase.

It is time for the ANC to consider proposals and recommendations made by the Democratic Alliance in the spirit of working together for South Africa's poor and vulnerable populations. It is for this reason that the DA calls for the child support grant to be increased to at least the lower bound food inflation price of R945, which is way below the basic food basket costs, but high enough to make a dent in the crisis of food insecurity.

We have also responded with firm, well-thought-out proposals to tackle the high levels of poverty and food insecurity caused by the drought and the much-abused COVID-19 pandemic, the looting that took place in 2021, and the floods that affected many households, particularly in KZN, the Eastern Cape and North West –these proposals were to no avail. These proposals include:

- Cutting fuel taxes and levies to lower the cost of transport.
- Reviewing the list of zero-rated food items.
- Reviewing import tariffs on some food items
- Providing private title to all land reform beneficiaries on state land and landholders in communal areas.

Honourable Speaker, along with calling for these immediate relief interventions, the DA will continue to call for economic reforms that open up the economy for jobs and growth. Millions of job opportunities will be created if we make South Africa a place that attracts investment and scarce skills, a place where small businesses can easily start and grow.

Getting people back on their feet by getting them into jobs is the best way to build resilience against food and other price shocks. The Democratic Alliance supports giving people a Hand Up not a Hand-Out.

I thank you