

Budget Debate on Vote 19: Social Development

Speech by Alexandra Abrahams MP

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Do you see the impact of DSD's multi-billion rand budget in your community?

The Department of Social Development (DSD) budget vote, brings into question what measurable impact these multi-billion rand budgets, funded by an ever-shrinking tax base, have on the ground, lifting the 18.2 million South Africans out of extreme poverty and reducing inequality.

Despite the portfolio committee's continual requests since 2019 for impact reporting from DSD and its entities, we still only receive polished presentations, very often a contradiction to the lived realities on the ground.

Instead, we told x number of youth attended a once-off imbizo or youth camp in x number of provinces. Box ticked. APP Target met. Job done. DSD and the government has addressed the plight of the youth.

But because there is no follow-up process on where in a year or two these young people end up, the question must be asked did the once-off imbizo actually have an impact? When the facilitator said: stay in school and don't do drugs. Did the child actually complete matric? Did the child not do drugs or join a gang or became a teen parent?

Chairperson, news articles, research reports, and the like, all point to an increase in social ills.

Teen pregnancy is on the increase. Children as young as nine are drug addicts, gun runners for gangs, or sold into prostitution. Our secure Child and Youth Care Centres have never been fuller and the age of convicted and sentenced rapists and murderers, getting younger and younger.

There is no guarantee the billions spent are in fact having the intended impact because there is no follow-up and more importantly no permanent presence for youth to return too. This is contra to the 12 permanent Western Cape government-funded Youth Cafes located throughout the province providing youth with access to skills, personal

development training as well as economic and social development opportunities. The Youth Café doors are always open and young people know where to find them.

The impact of the National Development Agency also inspires little confidence, Chairperson.

A once respected institution, now a mere shadow of its former self, reduced to a secondary research arm of DSD. Doing so poorly that National Treasury and the Presidency considered removing the entity's budget entirely.

The NDA spends 68% of its budget on employee salaries, 21% on admin costs and only 8% on delivering on its mandate: strengthening civil society organisations (CSOs) involved in eradicating poverty.

If the NDA was a private company, with little to show for its multi-million rand annual budget, it would not exist. But this entity, and many more, continue as taxpayer-funded places of employment for ANC cadres.

DSD recently won an international Good Practice Award titled: "Gradual extension of social security coverage to vulnerable children".

How does South Africa celebrate this award when there are still children dying the slow and violent death of malnutrition, scavenging in landfills, and eating sand and wildflowers to survive?

When we all know, R500 a month for a household is absolutely nothing in our current economic climate. And I say household because in reality that's what it's spent on, never the child alone.

The DA has long called for the child support grant to be aligned with the food poverty line. An achievable goal if for one, the ANC Ministers and Deputies searched their souls for a shred of humility and compassion and let go of their excessive Cabinet perks.

How do orphaned children celebrate this award, when the Child Support Grant Top-Up, the solution to a foster care crisis created by the national government, still has no dedicated budget? Instead, the money is taken from savings from existing social grants.

Speaking about savings, Chairperson, in 2022/23 DSD declared a total of R9.162 billion in savings.

How can this Department have savings when South Africans are suffering under job-killing load-shedding and skyrocketing cost-of-living? Families facing eviction, are

unable to afford their own homes, but they are forced to pay for ANC Ministers' multiple homes.

Savings when NGOs are underfunded yet expected to mend our broken communities.

Savings when neglected children in abusive homes wait for a social worker who will never come to rescue them because there is no money to employ more social workers. Interestingly, DSD presented a costing, not a budget, a costing that in order to fulfil the NDP Vision 2030 to reach 55 000 social work professionals, it will need approximately R9 billion.

The Adjusted Appropriation Bill bulldozed through this parliament by the ANC's majority, supported by ANC-aligned parties, saw DSD's R9.162 billion rand, which could have funded the employment of social workers or provided some food relief to households, shifted to Transnet, the failing South African Post Office, the Department of Defence for the deployment of soldiers in Mozambique, and to top it all off, R300 million was shifted to the Department of Home Affairs for political party funding of which the ANC will receive the lion share.

Every party and member of Parliament who voted in favour of these anti-poor bills should hang their heads in shame.

23 years ago this Department changed its name from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Social Development, but when 96.5% of the budget is spent on social grants, with little impact or social improvement on the ground, is it not still just, a social welfare department?