

Budget Debate on Vote 19: Social Development

Speech by Bridget Masango MP

DA Shadow Minister of Social Development

Honourable Chairperson,

Honourable Members,

Happy Africa Month and good morning.

As we raise awareness about children's rights during Child Protection Week, we salute all those who work in the sector for their efforts in protecting children of this nation, as the nation's soul is revealed in their tireless and selfless work.

Honourable Chairperson, if the solving of problems that we, as members of the committee, escalate to the Department and its entities were a benchmark of how well the clients of the Department are treated, we would be congratulating the Minister and her Department right now.

Take for example, a lady who is disabled and bedridden, who sends me a WhatsApp message to say she is concerned that she will not get her social grant due to her SASSA card expiring. SASSA officials' spring into action and the problem is solved within 48 hours.

An elderly lady is sexually abused by a young man. While colleagues are dealing with SAPS, they ask me to involve DSD for trauma psychosocial support for the lady. It takes a WhatsApp to a Deputy-Director in DSD, late at night, for her to swiftly get assistance for the lady.

What about a gentleman who has been holding a 777 identity document that expires after some time and blocks his social grant. One email to a SASSA executive and his team solves the problem until the ID expires again.

These are a small fraction of the many queries that receive urgent attention and I would be failing in my duty if I didn't sincerely thank the Department and its entities for rising to the occasion on these desperate issues, some of which are a matter of life and death.

Here is a sad situation, chairperson, the above are an exception to the rule – where those who don't know to contact members of Parliament, languish in despair as they

have no way of contacting SASSA due to a total of 435 and 175 SASSA offices experiencing system and telephone problems respectively.

This is an entity that has experienced a myriad of changes in its social security offering, from cards expiring, to migration to cardless services, to SAPO offices closing in droves, and SAPO ceding its agreement to Postbank – the list goes on. Without proper and real-time communication lines and alternatives explained clearly, many people are left destitute.

DSD is one of the Departments tasked to lead the charge on the fight against GBVF. Yet, the victims of GBVF keep increasing quarter after quarter, year by year. They have no hope that their cries are being heard by their government.

Chairperson, I am not ignoring the budget vote, I am merely trying to link numbers on a presentation on a Wednesday morning to the real lives of South Africans whose daily struggles we dare not reduce to targets and plans and summits as has been the case – at great detriment to the lives and livelihoods of those on whose behalf we exercise oversight over the Executive. The struggles these people experience get lost in translation of percentages, targets and programmes.

In her remarks on the occasion of the briefing by the Department of Social Development on the 2023/24 APP and budget, the honourable Minister describes the 2023/2024 Annual Performance Plan as the Department's final formal performance commitments within the MTSF 2019-2024, and she said "by definition, this demands that, through this APP, the Department should round up and visibly, meaningfully, and responsively deliver on the commitments of the Sixth Administration of our democratic government".

This noble summation by the honourable Minister loses its meaning when you factor in the lived experiences of programmes and NGOs in Gauteng for example, that serve the elderly, children and people with disabilities that had their budgets slashed to such an extent that many would have had to close their doors, while others were forced to cut vital programmes and services.

We call on the honourable Minister to ensure that there is a seamless and tangible correlation between what she says and what takes place on the ground.

High unemployment has increased the numbers of those who have been converted to clients of the Department of Social Department, with the Department's programmes crumbling not only because of sheer numbers but because of woeful ineptitude in some areas, blatant lack of care and total disregard for the Department's noble mandate.

The challenges facing South Africans are seeping away any hope, resilience and fortitude they have become known for.

The Democratic Alliance, has, without fail, provided solutions to each of the concerns we have raised – to no avail. Stuck between a Department and government that stopped caring for their people a long time ago and deepening poverty and hunger, we are left with no choice but to ensure that we implement our solution offering when we govern this country, come 2024. The Moonshot Pact is real and South Africans can expect to be top priority of a government that has heeded their cries and witnessed their plight as we have crisscrossed this country.

Thank you Chairperson.