

Budget Debate on Vote 9: Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

Speech by Zak Mbhele MP

DA Shadow Minister in the Presidency

The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation carries the mandate of supporting and facilitating the implementation of the National Development Plan, coordinating planning programmes across government, and monitoring and evaluation to support the implementation of those programmes. Specifically, this is meant to take shape through sector-specific medium-term plans and delivery agreements with national departments, as well as with provincial and local governments.

Key to the achievement of this mandate is having a capable state with the skills and political will to align and drive forward momentum to these ends and overcome the hurdles and sandpits that stand in the way of realising the developmental challenges facing our country. However, we all know that a capable state has never been a more elusive possibility than now, and it is astounding that this ANC government continues to harbour such a lofty fantasy for itself.

While the Department's plan speaks to the importance of localisation of interventions, regrettably it falls short of endorsing true and meaningful decentralisation in governance and service delivery matters, which is one of the real and radical reforms needed to enhance performance.

The DA has long advocated for the principle of decentralisation, whereby local and provincial governments that are proven to be competent should be enabled to take the lead role of planning and implementation in areas of concurrent competence, with the necessary management authority and resources from the national fiscus, in order to better meet the needs of local communities.

The need for such a 180-degree shift in the business of government is no more glaring, for example, than when it comes to addressing the scourge of violent crime because we know and it is well-demonstrated that international best practice is to have policing devolved or localised to the lowest level possible, so that it can be customised closest, and optimally responsive, to the dynamics and context of communities on the ground that law enforcement serves.

The simple fact, Chairperson, is that having only a single point of planning and implementation when it comes to governance and service delivery also means having a single point of failure, however well-intentioned and "developmental" things are on paper. If the National Development Plan is indeed taken seriously by this government, then it must be given ample opportunity to be pursued in multiple and adaptive ways through a decentralised model.

While the Department seeks to support the government's strategic priorities, it has also admitted to the Portfolio Committee that its monitoring and evaluation findings and recommendations on departments are not implemented. This is not surprising at all given that good governance and compliant management practice run counter to the ANC modus operandi of cronyism and cadre deployment.

This systemic sclerosis makes it all the more urgent for the government to get out of the way of progress and much-needed economic development and job creation through a second required wholesale reform of deregulation, so that business and civic stakeholders can play a more active role in harnessing our country's resources and unleashing the massive potential out there to create value that expands opportunities and improves livelihoods.

If the government cannot quickly and effectively fix Eskom, then deregulate power generation to allow new players to come in, and for local and provincial governments to innovate through partnerships that can solve the loadshedding crisis. If the government is unable to address unemployment, then deregulate the labour regime to remove the barriers and disincentives to labour-intensive industry and other economic activity that can absorb the massive pool of unskilled, and especially inexperienced, surplus labour.

As long as the efforts and outputs of this Department, whether in relation to producing evaluation reports or supporting both Operation: Phakisa and Operation: Vulindlela, are not premised on shifting the government's gears in the direction of more decentralisation and deregulation, then South Africa will, at best, continue being stuck in stagnation, and at worst, continue on the path of decline.