

FEMINIST GOVERNANCE

Tracking Womxn-Centred Policy and Action

2. Department of Women, Youth and Persons With Disabilities

A (not so) merry-go-round for womxn

1. Overview

The department says all the right things yet its actual value for womxn is as clear as mud. The restructuring process to reincorporate youth and persons with disabilities will also have a big impact on the plans of this department. The department tabled a revised Annual Performance Plan (APP) after the previous APP targets, plans and budget was already approved by Parliament. The new APP, however, contains a host of new targets while others have been deleted. It remains to be seen what will happen with budget reallocations and the work already done on targets for the first quarter of the financial year. Neither the APP nor the Minister's Budget Vote Speech explain why the targets changed and address the implications thereof.

This analysis acknowledges that the logistical rearrangements in the department will take time as persons with disabilities (PWD) and youth are reincorporated into the department. This is the second reconfiguration after children and PWD were removed from the portfolio in the previous administration and there are still signs that this merry-go-round and political game of musical chairs with these three groups, had great impact on their lives. However, despite this consideration, the department does not inspire confidence that it will effectively advance a womxn's agenda.

In some programmes like the Social Transformation and Economic Empowerment programme, (which is arguably the department's core programme), the annual targets were increased from 7 to 8 with only two focus areas – gender-based violence (GBV) and the Sanitary Dignity Framework. It does not include persons with disabilities and youth despite these two groups now reintegrated into the department. This also raises another concern. Based on the planned targets set for the Sanitary Dignity Framework, the department appears to be dabbling in service delivery ventures which is problematic since the mission of the department as set out in the APP and Strategic Plan (2015-2020) is to provide 'strategic leadership, coordination and oversight to government departments and the country in mainstreaming empowerment programmes on women, youth and persons with disabilities'. It thus appears as if the department is confused with what exactly its mandate is and until this is clarified, there is a risk that resources will be spend on plans/programmes that are not the department's core business.

2. Do they recognise the structural discrimination against womxn and patriarchy?

Over 40 pages of the revised APPs 198 pages speak to the situational analysis where there is acknowledgement and appreciation for the structural and systemic discrimination womxn face. The APP defines equality as 'the equal enjoyment of rights and access to opportunities and outcomes, including resources, by women, men, girls, boys and people with disabilities', which require the identification and removal of underlying causes of discrimination. In the APP the department also acknowledges that realising gender equality lies in 'dismantling patriarchy and its effects and addressing and eliminating high levels of violence against women and girls – including the LGBTIQ+ sector.' The department says all the right things, but these sentiments are not coherently captured in its plans and targets. As an example – the APP acknowledges in the situational analysis that 'girls, boys, men and women with different disabilities, from different age groups, living in different geographical areas and socio-economic settings with different sexual orientations' have different needs that have to be protected. However, looking at the rest of the APP, plans on disability are not only thin, but also fail to reflect this intersectionality. Throughout the APP it is difficult to see how the department links womxn to disability and youth, as the needs of young womxn and disabled womxn differ from their male counterparts.

In the Budget Vote Speech, the minister talks about the economic emancipation of womxn and includes the LGBTQIA+ community when she draws a link between safety and economic participation. 'As we enter this new dawn of economic emancipation, our dream is of women, youth, persons with disabilities and the LGBTQIA+ community to walk freely in the streets of this country at any time, participating in the development of the country and creating wealth without any fear of violence towards them.' This may be a valid point however there are more structural challenges also inherent to capitalism that womxn face which may impede their economic participation.

3. Is Womxn and Gender integrated fully in all departmental plans?

The department in its APP attempts to embrace a broader definition of gender to also include gender non-conforming individuals of the LGBTQIA+ community. However, it uses the word 'women' often grouped as 'men, women, girls and boys', thus framing gender in the traditional sense. The APP creates the impression that LGBTQIA+ persons were merely words added-on or an afterthought as there are no real plans that show a substantive understanding and engagement of the needs and lived realities of individuals in the LGBTQIA+ community. In the APP the LGBTQIA+ community is confined to awareness campaigns and public outreach programmes. What this entails and how it speaks to the needs of this community, is not explained in the APP. The same is evident for youth and disability. They are included under programme 3 – Policy, Stakeholder Coordination and Knowledge Management with a target to have '10 public participation/outreach initiatives targeting women, youth and people with disabilities's socio-economic empowerment, including LGBTQIA+'. Simply because the terms 'youth, LGBTQIA+ and persons with disabilities' are added, does not show coherence throughout the department's plans.

In its situational analysis there is a generous appreciation of the lived experiences of different womxn in urban and rural areas and of different ages - although age is confined to 'women/young women' and the experiences and needs of older women/pensioners are made invisible. Womxn empowerment is an important part of this department's work. In order to 'empower' it presupposes a general understanding of not only what impedes empowerment and the reasons thereof, but also the different contexts. A commitment to empowerment will be demonstrated through the resources allocated towards it. In the APP, however, the budget for the Social Transformation and Economic Empowerment (of womxn) programme decreased from R28,8 million in the 2018/19 financial year to R24 million this financial year, which means government is not putting its money where its mouth is.

One of the ways this department intends to address the empowerment issue, is through reintroducing the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill that lapsed in the fourth Parliament. The minister announced this in her Budget Vote speech as a Bill that was considered a 'trailblazer in dealing with patriarchy and redressing the imbalances of the past'. The Bill that was introduced to Parliament in 2013, was fraught with challenges and faced significant backlash from gender activists and civil society organisations that saw it as a duplication of issues already provided for in other legislation that should just be harmonised and better implemented. The APP does not elaborate much on the Bill and it is unclear whether this version will be a total overhaul of the previous version or how it will address gaps already identified in the previous public participation phase. It is also not clear where the resources will come from, especially since this department has been complaining of their budget being too small to effectively deliver on its mandate.

4. Are the departmental programmes intersectional?

In the situational analysis of the Revised APP it states: "Womxn, youth and persons with disabilities have lived experiences and realities that differ from one another according to race, geography, economic status and educational levels as they do not comprise homogenous groups." The minister in her Budget Vote Speech also refers to this. This is a textbook-style capturing of the intersectional dynamics of gender, youth and disability which is unfortunately not replicated in the actual programmes found in the APP and begs the question – if you know better, why not do better?

In both the Budget Vote speech and the APP, there is some appreciation for the ways womxn in different contexts are affected but the response is not always aligned or adequate.

a) Poverty

The APP acknowledges the feminisation of poverty and the disproportionate impact it has on young black and rural women. The minister in her Budget Vote Speech states: "To ensure that we eradicate hunger in the country, we are going to start a process of developing a national strategy on poverty eradication in partnership with all government departments and civil society organisations that are working at household level to ensure that no South African will go hungry." The idea to frame it as a multi-sectoral approach to poverty eradication is welcomed. This is however not integrated in the APP or the performance plans.

b) Education

The APP acknowledges in its situational analysis the need of young womxn and men to have the same educational opportunities in order to equally compete for jobs and receive equal pay for equal work. Nowhere in the APP is this followed up with clear plans and targets. Although, there are targets to have quarterly 'community mobilisation initiatives on socio-economic factors affecting women, youth and PWD' no additional detail is provided on what exactly these entail.

c) Age/ Older women

The department draws the distinction between girls, younger women and women but does not note older women as a standalone group with its own distinct needs.

d) LGBTQIA+

Despite the minister's single reference to the LGBTQIA+ community in her budget vote speech, there is nothing in the APP that shows any real commitment through specific plans geared towards this group. The department does include the LGBTQIA+ community in some targets, but it does not feature substantively throughout the APP. It creates the impression that LGBTQIA+ along with other 'catch phrases' like Fourth Industrial Revolution is just a flavour-of-the-month add-on or afterthought that was not thought through properly.

e) Disability

The APP states the key priorities for accelerating progress for womxn, youth and person with disabilities include a focus through laws and policies. In this regard the APP does mention the White Paper on Disability. It is however not clear from the document how and when this White Paper will become legislation. The APP does not disaggregate disabled women and men but only refers to persons living with disability in general.

5. Womxn and the Economy

The department's answer to unemployment is framed as 'capacitating women, youth and persons with disability in the Sanitary Dignity Value Chain programme'. The target set for this financial year is to capacitate 400 persons from these groups. It is not clear how many will be womxn. The minister in her Budget Speech said: "...for us as a nation to restore human dignity and social cohesion, we must create, jobs and provide conducive environments for women, youth and persons with disabilities to start businesses and create employment for all. One of the low hanging fruits is that they must actively participate and benefit from the manufacturing component of the Sanitary Dignity Framework." To this effect, the department set a target to produce four progress reports on the national roll-out of the revised sanitary dignity implementation framework in quintiles 1 to 3 schools. Interestingly other targets to produce 4 reports on the Implementation of the Women's Financial Inclusion framework and reports on interventions and economic opportunities for womxn as stated in the previous APP for 2019/20, were scrapped. It is not clear from the revised APP what will happen to the work already done or the money allocated to this in the budget that was approved in July based on the previous APP. Womxn's financial inclusion is now confined to targets for the Sanitary Dignity Framework, and however well intended, these plans border on service delivery, which can potentially confuse the mandate of this department.

The minister in her Budget Vote Speech also committed to implement the Gender Responsive Budgeting Framework and undertook to enforce that 30% of procurement in departments are dedicated to womxn, youth and people with disabilities. The plan is for the Auditor-General (AG) to ultimately also audit all departments on gender equality and economic empowerment of women, youth and persons with disabilities.

6. Womxn and land

In the Budget Vote Speech, the minister acknowledges how critical womxn's access to land is. She said: "Honourable Chairperson, we cannot talk about women's economic empowerment and not talk about women's access to land. This must be addressed urgently as women want to continue with food production in a large scale and to become property developers. This will eradicate hunger as they will feed their families and their neighbourhood." However, despite the minister's statements, this is not reflected anywhere in the departmental plans.

7. Womxn and GBV

The minister in her Budget Vote Speech states: "...no matter how much we do, gender-based violence will not stop if we do not invest our time as a nation in prevention programmes." There is nothing in the APP on actual prevention programmes or the monitoring thereof. The minister also said the fight against GBV will be resourced by ensuring that all budgets 'that are sitting in different departments including the private sector to address GBVF, are put in the GBV Council'. It is not clear in the APP how this will be achieved given that budgets for GBV in various departments are not necessarily ring fenced and are thus difficult to identify. It also seems the plans and targets for GBV in this department is framed around the Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) Council and the National Strategic Plan (NSP) on GBVF that must be established by September 2019. The department is seemingly taking a lead role in this, but it remains to be seen how this will be reflected practically in departmental plans.

8. Other issues

Premised on the fact that the APPs and budget vote speeches are official documents in which departments communicate plans publicly, the quality of this department's reporting is very concerning. The framing of information in these documents are not only confusing but wholly incomplete to get a proper understanding of the department's plans and how it will affect womxn. Some information in the APP appears as if it was a cut and paste job which makes some targets incoherent and making it seem like a deliberate attempt to obfuscate. This can have serious implications for accountability.

9. Political Leadership

How Feminist is your minister?

The Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, served in various portfolios like that of Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform between 2018 to 2019. This is her first stint as Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. However, it is as Minister of International Relations between 2014 to 2018 that she had the most legroom in terms of time to effect policy change in the department. More recently she was caught in the crossfire over former Zimbabwean First Lady, Grace Mugabe, who could return to Zimbabwe despite assault charges against her in South Africa. Nkoana-Mashabane reportedly also refused to account to Parliament on why she decided to grant Mugabe diplomatic immunity.

In the same term, however, the country did show leadership internationally when South Africa became the only African country to vote in favour of a resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity at the United Nations Human Rights Council. So, on occasion from public records available, there have been some advances made for the womxn and the LGBTQIA+ community with her in the driver's seat. This, however, does not make her a feminist leader that consistently drives government policy to the benefit of womxn.

Public participation and holding the department accountable

The Constitution of South Africa states that South Africa is a 'democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people' and that the 'the National Assembly is elected to represent the people and to ensure government by the people under the Constitution'.

Our Parliament must represent the people in South Africa and Members of Parliament must listen to and be accountable to the public. For elected representatives to represent the public, it is important to try to let them know what your opinions are, and to tell them what you want them to do on your behalf.

Track the Portfolio Committee on Social Development here:

<https://pmg.org.za/committee/19/>

*access to this website may require subscription

Contact details for Minister Zulu here:

<https://www.pa.org.za/person/l-d-zulu/>

The Parliamentary Monitoring Group is a civil society organisation that tries to help people access the legislatures and elected representatives. Its website has a tool to help people find and contact their representatives. Go to www.pa.org.za to locate the elected representative for your area.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Womxn and Democracy Initiative is based at the Dullah Omar Institute at UWC. We identify as feminist, taking an intersectional approach to our work on realising social justice through active political participation of the public in the context of a participatory and deliberative democracy. It is in this context that we use womxn with an X to be more inclusive and cognisant of gender as being non-binary.

This project on tracking feminist governance aims to increase a political focus on realising womxn's and gender rights through infusing systematic feminist analysis and strategy into questions of governance and leadership. The project aims to increase public pressure on political office bearers and departments to be more responsive to a feminist agenda for political leadership that embodies the values of the Constitution towards realising womxn's civil, political and socio-economic rights and gender justice.

This brief provides a feminist analysis of the track records of the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities and its minister, Lindiwe Zulu, who was appointed after the 2019 South African national elections. The minister's track record is based on publicly available records and the department is assessed based on the 2019/20 Annual Performance Plan and the 2019 Budget Vote Speech.

This analysis forms part of an ongoing project on feminist governance and is envisaged to provide information against which to hold Ministers and departments accountable and to advocate for feminist governance that speaks to the lived realities of womxn.

The team: Alicestine October; Motlatsi Komote; Vivienne Mentor-Lalu; Sam Waterhouse; Saamiya Alli

*In addition, we relied on previous research conducted for this project by Zukiswa White.

Disclosure of funding: The research was supported by funding from the Open Society Foundation – South Africa, the Ford Foundation and the Heinrich Boell Foundation – the views and opinions expressed are those of the Womxn and Democracy Initiative authors and do not reflect the positions of our funders.