

FEMINIST GOVERNANCE

Tracking Womxn-Centred Policy and Action

1. Department of Social Development

Value for womxn? It's implied, silly.

I. Overview

Based on the latest available Annual Performance Plan (APP) for 2019/20 and budget vote speech tabled and delivered in Parliament in July 2019, the planned direction for this Department does include some value for womxn. There are, however, glaring gaps in the feminist value of many of the departmental programmes and plans mentioned in the documents. The Department of Social Development's plans seem less concerned with development and more focused on assistance which does not necessarily advance the idea of womxn as empowered individuals. The department will have to get that balance right. Overall it is difficult to gauge what and how plans will impact or benefit womxn specifically since womxn are mostly lumped into other vulnerable groupings and it is left to the reader to infer what and when they mean 'womxn' and the value departmental plans hold for them. In a department that can make a big difference in the lives of womxn, and if these documents (APPs and budget votes speeches) are how plans are communicated to the public, this cannot be good enough.

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

Overall the planned direction of this Department is weak as it does not follow through on its recognition of the systematic and structural discrimination of womxn, patriarchy, sexism and male dominance. In her budget speech, Zulu does show appreciation for the structural and systemic discrimination against womxn. A lot of it centres around womxn as victims though and not enough on empowerment despite the Minister's statements and the Department's mandate to 'provide social protection services AND (to) lead government efforts to forge partnerships through which vulnerable individuals, groups and communities become capable and self-reliant participants in their own development'. There may be a commitment to the development of and empowering communities – although womxn are not mentioned specifically – BUT it seems this commitment lacks follow-through. The National Development Agency (NDA) as the departmental entity which is supposed to 'link social assistance with economic livelihoods and building sustainable communities' – are given the smallest budget in the department which makes this commitment to empowerment seem hollow. Patriarchy is never explicitly named in the budget speech or the department's APP.

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

In her budget speech the minister introduces the concept of gender and cites it 6 times. It is however, mainly in the context of gender-based violence – thus again a 'victim narrative' of womxn in need of protection and not enough empowerment. It frames programmatic interventions narrowly as assistance and support, which is welcomed but not enough.

Gender does not feature in the department's APP very often and when it does, it is predominantly framed in binary male and female terms, thus excluding others who may identify as womxn outside of the biological construct of female. In the budget vote speech, the minister commits to working towards the realisation of the full range of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. In the speech the Minister does commit to pay attention to 'marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ people, rural, urban poor as well as young people'. Despite this singular verbal commitment made in Parliament during her speech however, no mention of LGBTQIA+ persons are made in the APP.

It is also important to note that in many plans, targets and programmes listed in the APP womxn are implied and it is left to the reader to infer that womxn are beneficiaries of certain programmes. In the APP the budget allocation for Social Assistance increases from R162.8 billion in 2018/19 to R175.1 billion in 2019/2020. It states: "The focus is on providing income support to socially vulnerable groups such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, and caregivers of children." Womxn are often the primary caregivers of children so it is baffling why it would not be stated as such. This may help in measuring the real impact of social assistance on womxn specifically and not just fuelling the existing 'invisibility of womxn's work'.

4. Are the departmental programmes intersectional?

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 disproportionate impact of poverty on womxn and the link between poverty and food insecurity. The minister in her Budget Vote Speech also acknowledge that 45% of social grant recipients are womxn younger than 35. Nowhere in the APP is there a reference to 'young womxn' though, just youth, or young people as a collective and it is left to the reader to infer where young womxn is most relevant. The minister notes the need to 'create sustainable livelihoods to cut intergenerational poverty'. She then commits to using government's procurement and investment in the social assistance programme to stimulate local economic development initiatives. However, from the APP and the Portfolio Committee on Social Development's Budget Review and Recommendations Report (BRRR) it shows that the Social Security Agency (SASSA) has 'not had any success in meeting its objective of linking social grant beneficiaries, particularly of Child Support Grants to economic livelihoods'. Reference is made to community projects to produce school uniforms that however have not had the intended impact, thus recipients are still stuck in 'social assistance'.

There have been many reports on the experiences of womxn in rural areas having trouble accessing grants. The minister in her budget vote speech committed that the department will improve social grants beneficiaries' experience by diversifying the channels of accessing grants, but this sentiment is not replicated in the APP, as far as the conditions at and remoteness of paypoints are concerned. In both the budget vote speech and the APP, however, there are plans to deal with fraudulent payouts. The department will in this financial year finalise the operationalisation of an inspectorate tasked with maintaining the integrity of the social assistance framework and systems through fraud detection and investigations. The budget for the inspectorate is on average R38 million per year over the next three years.

b) Education

The budget vote speech notes and celebrates that through the Department's investments in social assistance and child protection programmes, 'we have enabled vulnerable children to remain and complete school'. Neither the speech nor the APP, however, notes the additional barriers of girls in schools and their access to education given that they are often stuck with added family and household responsibilities, childcare and menstruation that can affect schooling differently to boys.

c) Age/ Older womxn

The experiences and needs of older womxn differ from younger womxn and from older men and are addressed in part. Older persons as a collective is acknowledged along with children as a vulnerable group although there is no real distinction between male and female older people. Poverty and other social ills often relegate older womxn to a primary caregiver role in raising grandchildren. This is not acknowledged and reflected in plans. The minister in her budget speech however noted: "In this regard, we will expand programmes that improve the quality of life and dignity of older persons, focusing on community-based care and support services. This includes active ageing programmes, prevention of elder abuse and income support." The APP is thin on detail regarding plans and targets set to translate the minister's statement into action. Apart from the Older Persons Grant, the other reference to older persons (as a collective) is focussed on the Golden Games to promote active ageing through physical activity.

d) LGBTQIA

Despite the minister's single reference to the LGBTQIA+ community, there is nothing in the APP that shows any real commitment through specific plans geared towards this group.

e) Disability:

There is mention of the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that is already being implemented and social assistance in the form of the disability grant, but it is difficult to gauge the actual impact departmental programmes have on the lives of womxn living with disability.

5. Womxn and the Economy

a) Unemployment of womxn

Unemployment is recognised in terms of youth in general, mostly. The APP does acknowledge barriers to economic participation of womxn AND youth. In this regard the response is to leverage the 30% procurement policy of government contracts for small, medium and micro sized enterprises (SMMEs) but again for womxn AND youth.

The minister in her budget speech celebrated gains made with cooperatives to empower womxn. However, in the APP this is only referred to twice and the Minister noted 187 cooperatives will be trained and 860 supported in this financial year, as part of a framework for linking cooperatives to economic opportunities and for women empowerment in the social sector. No further details are provided, so it is difficult to see the impact of this on womxn and their position in the economy.

In the APP the Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme is noted as one of the programmes initiated to deal with the impact of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Recognising that job creation is not this department's mandate, we argue that more can still be done with this programme as a vehicle for job creation, especially given the fact that the ECD sector is one that is predominantly female. The department seems to rather approach ECD as a response to the consequences of poverty and unemployment. The Social Service Practitioners Bill is also mentioned in the APP. This Bill does provide for ECD workers and other emerging social service occupations like child and youth care workers along with social workers BUT more from the perspective of regulating them better and not as a tool for job creation.

b) Recognition and response to wage gap

The department does not acknowledge the wage gap but rather focuses on the low wages of working 'parents' so again it is left to the reader to infer that it refers to womxn because of the high number of womxn-headed households in the country. Also, there is no acknowledgment of the impact of the minimum wage on the care work sector that is predominantly female and dependent on departmental grants.

c) Recognition of womxn in the informal economy?

In the APP there is no explicit recognition of womxn in the informal economy and the sex work industry specifically. The informal economy is only mentioned in reference to policy proposals that are being developed to address the needs of those in the informal sector employment to contribute on a voluntary basis for their social security coverage.

6. Womxn and Gender-Based Violence

The department acknowledges in the APP and the budget vote speech the high levels of gender-based violence. In her budget vote speech, the Minister said the department provides support to survivors through the Gender-Based Violence Command Centre and psycho-social support services. The minister and the APP refer to the Victim Support Services Bill as a key policy response to GBV. As part of implementing the National Strategic Plan on GBV and Femicide, the department will spend 3 years to develop and implement one policy on counselling for survivors. Three years to develop and implement one policy given the extent of GBV in the country, demonstrate a lack of urgency. One would also expect that a department like social development will have a more comprehensive approach to GBV.

7. Political Leadership

How Feminist is your minister?

Minister of Social Development, Lindiwe Zulu, is no stranger to womxn's issues. She was head of the PAN African Women's organisation in Angola in 1988 and headed up communications of the ANC Women's League in 1991 where she had to articulate the ANC's position on issues affecting womxn. Prior to her appointment as Minister of Social Development she joined Parliament in 2009 and served as Minister of Small Business Development.

Zulu made a name for herself as a supporter of former President Jacob Zuma and was among the ministers who were outraged when a group of young womxn disrupted Zuma's speech at the IEC results centre in August 2016. She also imitated former Minister of Home Affairs Malusi Gigaba wagging his pinky finger at another MP that was interpreted as an insult about penis size. This was publicly criticised as feeding into the discourse of toxic masculinity – something Gigaba later apologised for but Zulu did not. Zulu is hardly a consistent and principled defender and promoter of women's rights and issues where it matters so we may have to temper our expectations of her as minister in a portfolio that can play a significant role in advancing womxn's interests.

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 make contact with 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 Social Development and Minister of Social Development, 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.

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

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