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Ministers promise service delivery to the people



The Taking Parliament to the People programme's public hearings yesterday also focused on social services. The ministers of the departments of Social Development, Health and Home Affairs were available to answer questions from the people on poor service delivery and to provide a way forward, writes Abel Mputing.

her condition. The uneven distribution of healthcare facilities and the roll-out of mobile clinics in the Ugu district was also an issue for many. People with disabilities said they are often forced to travel long distances to get to the nearest hospital. This costs them money that they can ill afford and puts their health in further danger.

Responding to complaints about the shortage of clinics, the Minister of Health, Dr Joe Phaahla, said his department is trying to ensure that clinics are situated strategically to give communities equitable access to healthcare services. He called on communities to protect 24-hour clinics and ambulances, as they are often targets for criminals.

People, some of them with disabilities, complained that they are often mistreated by health workers. One disabled person recounted how pregnant disabled people are often castigated for falling pregnant, as if she has no right to bear a child because of

People also asked questions about community healthcare workers who have volunteered for more than 10 years, but receive no compensation. The Minister promised that he will discuss this matter with the provincial health department, because according to policy these workers should get a stipend. What is more, the Department of Health would like these workers to receive the minimum wage and is meeting with the Department of Labour to discuss this.

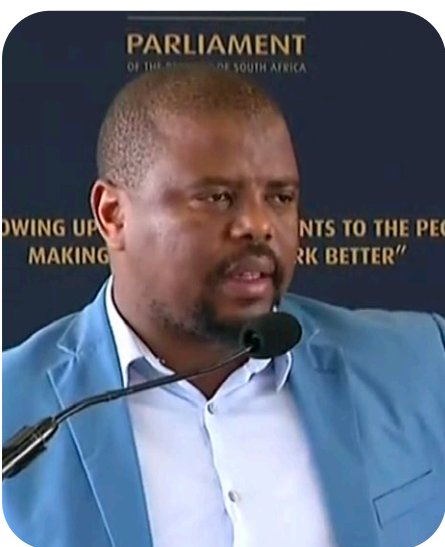
In other matters relating to a shortage of wheelchairs, the Minister of Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu, suggested that a national campaign to provide wheelchairs to those that need them is required. In addition, public officials need to be trained on how to relate to people with disabilities. "As a department, we will continue to advocate for their rights, because that is our constitutional responsibility as the department," added Ms Zulu.

Addressing many complaints about the closure of grants payments points, Ms Zulu said "According to our policy, we have to inform communities about that three months before we do so and inform them about alternative places." Explaining the rationale behind this, she said: "We often close them when most people in that areas access their grants through banks or shops, because it's expensive and unsafe to bring the grant dispenser to a far-flung area for few people."

April floods and July 2021 unrest came under spotlight during public hearings on transport and roads



The dilapidated state of roads, transport and other public infrastructure and the effect of both the devastating floods in April 2022 and the violent unrest in July 2021 came under the spotlight during the morning session of day two of the National Council of Province's (NCOP's) Taking Parliament to the People programme, which is taking place in KwaZulu-Natal's (KZN's) Ugu District Municipality, writes Abel Mputing.



One disabled person participating in the hearings, Ms Ncamisile Mbotho, said:

“Often we have to be carried over rickety bridges to access services and this puts our lives at risk. We would ask for pedestrian bridges to address this matter. Naturally, we would like to be independent, but due to this problem, we continue to be dependent to others and this does not augur well for us.”

Members of the NCOP heard that the main problem is that even when roads are built, they are often poorly constructed or their completion is delayed. Without access to proper roads, community members are unable to participate fully in the economy or access social services. In addition, when it rains pupils and teachers cannot get to schools. This affects the children's schooling

and even puts their lives at risk.

Some of the youth participating in the hearings also asked for parks, libraries, ICT and computer laboratories as part of a broader rural development infrastructure programme. This will ensure that the youth in rural areas are engaged with the world and can access jobs and other entrepreneurship opportunities.

The elderly people asked for multipurpose centres where they can access information and social, health, artistic and agricultural services. The centres they have are not fit for purpose, they said, and are without the necessary amenities and furnishings. To add insult to injury, with the elderly go to collect their grants, they have to sit on the floor because there are no seats at pay points.

KZN provincial government's MEC on Transport, Mr Sipho Hlomuka, agreed that some roads need to be fixed and R500 million has been set aside to construct some of them and upgrade others in the Ugu District Municipality. “But these roads will be done over several financial years, because we need to appoint consultants who will assist in designing, planning and actual erection of the road.”

Inaccessible bridges will be re-designed urgently to ensure that they are functional to enable children and teachers to get to school, he promised.

The Director-General of the Department of Transport, Adv James Mlawu, pointed out that the department has set aside well over R3.3 billion in this financial year to fund the Sihamba Sonke Programme to construct bulk national road infrastructure. KZN will benefit from this to fix and upgrade the road infrastructure affected by floods and the pre-existing backlog.



Minister of Home Affairs admits his department's poor service delivery track record

The people of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) complained about poor service at Home Affairs offices, particularly the short hours in rural areas, which makes it hard for them to access the services and costs them dearly. They asked for the roll-out of mobile offices to address this challenge, writes Abel Mputing.



One resident, Ms Makhosazana Ngcobo complained bitterly about the fact that she was declared dead years back. She went to Home Affairs to rectify that, but she has not yet received her identity document.

The Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, said he was not surprised by the complaints he heard. "For nine weeks, I have been visiting rural areas here in KwaZulu-Natal; I heard and experienced some of these complaints."

He conceded that the 412 national offices are insufficient, particularly in light of the fact that social development, health and police services will not be rendered if Home Affairs operates sub-optimally. "We have resolved to add more Home Affairs mobile

clinics to address this national predicament. "We currently have 100 mobile offices, 14 of which are in KwaZulu-Natal. Next week we will procure 20 and in the next financial year we will procure 120. I won't rest until we get 1 000 mobile offices."

About the identity fraud, he claimed that his department seeks to ensure that new-born babies are registered and issued with identity certificates in the first 30 days after their birth. This is but one measure to prevent identity theft. In the near future, facial recognition and other biometrics will be used for identification purposes.

Part of Home Affairs strategy is to improve service delivery is to enhance capacity. However, load shedding continues to contribute to system failure. As for corruption, those implicated are being prosecuted successfully and the department has set up a directorate to uproot it. He narrated a story about an official in Limpopo who was living lavishly beyond their means on the proceeds of selling identity documents as an example of their resolve in this regard.

Southport police station does not have enough staff to police gender-based violence

The rise of gender based-violence (GBV) in the Southport area calls for urgent intervention, but the alarming disparity in the ratio of residents to police officers means that the police's ability to curtail this trend is severely limited. A delegation of National Council of Provinces (NCOP) permanent delegates and members of provincial legislatures visited the police station as part of the Taking Parliament to the People programme underway in KwaZulu-Natal, writes Malatswa Molepo.



The delegation heard that the station has 51 funded positions, including administrative staff, for a population of 24 565. This means that a shift is policed by only four officers, which makes operations and visible policing difficult.

Nonetheless, the delegation noted that it these figures are a general trend across the country, with one police officer – excluding administrative staff – for every 408 people, according to South African Police Service statistics. The ratio is based on Statistics South Africa's mid-year population estimates (60,14 million in 2021) and the number of non-administrative police (147,357) given in the SAPS' 2020/21 annual report.

Southport Station Commander Captain Nanthahal Singh explained that, according to the SAPS organogram, a station with a commander on a Captain rank can have no more than 51 staff members. "There was

an increase of 213 in rape and gender-based violence cases in the area and this ratio of police officers to citizens affected their ability to deal with the matter constructively. Nonetheless, we are implementing other measures to counteract the difference. We implement about five awareness programmes per month to make people aware of this problem and how to deal with it,' Captain Singh remarked.

SAPS management also highlighted the challenge of access to the N2 when they do their patrols. "We have to drive to another policing district to access the N2 to do patrols on the highway. This makes access difficult, especially when there are accidents on the highway," Captain Singh emphasised.

Another challenge is the poor service the Southport SAPS receives from the Department of Public Works. The station underscored that it is unreachable during load-shedding, as there is no cellphone network and their radios require electricity to function. A generator at the station has been broken for a number of years and the Public Works department has delayed fixing

it, despite efforts to get them to come.

The delegation urged the police station to enhance their engagement with the municipality to find solutions to the load-shedding matter to ensure that the station is reachable and is able to respond timeously to cases.

Despite these challenges, the delegation noted that the station is doing reasonably well and that crime rates are generally low. This has resulted in the station achieving runner-up status in the province in an assessment of best-run station standards.

"We are encouraged that you are doing good work in this area, despite the numerous challenges you are facing. We will in our report highlight those challenges to enable the SAPS leadership at national level to find workable solutions to your challenges, which are mostly similar across the country," said Mr China Dodovu, the leader of the delegation.





Sustainability is key for community cooperatives' survival



Small, medium and micro enterprises and business cooperatives that receive financial support from government must work hard to become self-sustaining instead of expecting more funding from the government, writes Sakhile Mokoena.

This was the advice given by a National Council of Provinces (NCOP) delegation during a site visit to Siyakhona Broiler

project in Gcilinga village in the Ray Nkonyeni Local Municipality. As part of the ongoing Taking Parliament to the People Programme, the NCOP is conducting oversight visits to various projects in the area. It is also holding public hearings to gain a better understanding of the state of service delivery and to identify possible interventions by the relevant state institutions.

Siyakhona is a community-run project started by a group of elderly women who were growing and selling chickens from their backyards before the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development gave them funding of R1,75 million, which saw the women get their own land and infrastructure for their business.

Project Chairperson Ms Sanelisiwe Dlomo, who is a granddaughter to one of the late founding members, told the NCOP delegation that they were grateful for the help from the government. However, challenges still remain, such as the lack of transport to deliver produce to their clients, the high price of chicken feed and

expanding their markets into other villages.

The project is in talks with the Department of Small Business Development and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) for possible enrolment in skills development programmes and branding for their business.

The delegation was impressed to see that the project is doing proper bookkeeping and budgeting and also gave experiential training to graduates. "We would like to encourage this project and other initiatives of a similar nature to work hard to survive without relying on handouts. Government cannot be recapitalising the same projects. We want them to be self-sustainable; sustainability is key," said Mr Mlindi Nhanha.

Delegation Leader and Chairperson of the Select Committee on Appropriations, Ms Dikeledi Mahlangu, asked Siyakhona Project to approach government institutions, such as hospitals and the Department of Education, to support the business through the School Nutrition Programme.

"What impressed us is that the young people have taken over from the elderly who started the project. We also encourage them to have a vision of seeing themselves going forward expanding the business. We are also happy that there are young graduates who are doing experiential training here in broiler farming," said Ms Mahlangu.