

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

**Input of the House Chairperson
to the Committees Strategic
Planning Session
3 March 2020
Hon. A.J. Nyambi**



**6th
DEMOCRATIC
PARLIAMENT**



Committees; the epicentre of Parliamentary work

(Clarifying the role of Committees in getting Parliament to achieve its mandate)

Deputy Chairperson of the NCOP; Hon. Sylvia Lucas,
Chief Whip; Hon. Seiso Mohai
Chairpersons of Committees,
Hon Members, Acting Secretary to Parliament, Ms P Tyawa and all officials present here today.

We are meeting at a time when all nations of the world are on tenterhooks as the outbreak of Corona Virus threatens to wreak havoc with our lives and, indeed, our economies. We have also noted the contingency measures, which the executive is putting in place as a bulwark against any possible outbreak and yet we still have to ask ourselves if these are enough. One Bill Gates holds a dim view of our preparedness as a continent to put up any massive defence should Corona Virus heads to our shores, full steam. He reckons that if there's one epidemic, which is capable of wiping the whole continent, Corona Virus would be it. We cannot afford to be dismissive of this alarmist view. Instead, we should tighten our resolve to fight as a continental as well as a regional block.

We need to formulate a response as the AU and SADC; and this we should do without any waste of time. Just last week, the Presidency announced the imminent repatriation of some odd 132 South Africans who are holed up in China and this will test our preparedness to deal with any eventuality. We are, however, heartened by the fact that there are currently no reported infections and we would wish to plead with all South Africans to practice caution in their overzealousness to offer some comment on the outbreak as these may be misleading and defeatist. In our meeting last week in Gauteng, we were unanimous in our agreement to create space for professionals to direct the discussions around Corona Virus instead of using it as a political tool. We also noted that this is



highly possible in the face of trade wars, which have divided the world into the East and the West. With China being the dominant eastern force in World Trade, the outbreak of Corona Virus in that country can be used by the West to claw back some ground in the trade wars.

Hon. Deputy Chairperson I want to believe that our meeting today is opportune in that it affords us the space to rethink our strategies in the face of what I have already alluded to. I can imagine that Select Committees overseeing the work of Departments such as Home Affairs, Health and Safety & Security would be rubbing their hands in glee, contemplating new strategies to ensure that South Africans are not only safe but feel safe in the face of this virus, which is hanging around our collective neck like an albatross.

Deputy Chairperson, I don't really feel like I am repeating myself each time I have to talk about Committees as the lifeblood of our Parliamentary work. For me, it's like the daily exercise of having breakfast ahead of a busy day. One cannot be accused of being repetitive as breakfast offers the necessary fuel for every one of us to make it through a tough working day.

It is also similar to refueling one's vehicle before a long journey ahead. One cannot be accused of being repetitive.

We are meeting here today to review the effectiveness of the strategies, which we employed in the last six months in pursuit of our objectives as a branch of Parliament and in broader terms as Parliament. We are cognizant of the reality that the effectiveness or lack thereof of said strategies can only be recognizable in the activities of Committees in respect of their form and substance. This exercise is more inward looking as it affords Committees, in their clusters, to self-evaluate and self-correct. My input and those of the other colleagues should, therefore, be seen as just tools to centre Committees within their rightful positions of being the epicentre of Parliamentary work. Once we are able to entrench that realism, we will not struggle to determine the kind of actions that should pertain in all our Committee rooms and beyond.

As the National Council of Provinces, we are constitutionally mandated to ensure that provincial interests are taken into account in the national sphere of government. Whereas we have flagship programmes such Taking Parliament to the People, Provincial Week



and Committee week, I contend that the qualitative quantum of these programmes does not even begin to scratch the surface in comparison to what Committees do on a daily basis to contribute towards the fulfilment of our constitutional mandate.

In fact, Committees give form and content to our work as well as set the tone for our plenaries, which are tools to hold the executive accountable.

Hon. Deputy Chairperson there are, therefore, certain behaviours and actions that are expected from everyone who is involved with Committees. One such set of actions is the ability to plan with some form of precision in an ever-changing environment. There is a lot of public interest in our work and most of our people and civic organizations travel long distances to attend Committee meetings where matters, which are of interest to them are discussed or where they need to make submissions. Imagine what would happen if items in Committee meetings are chopped and changed at a drop of a hat. This would open Parliament to all sorts of litigious actions. This has not occurred and it says to us that our Committees understand their roles and functions perfectly well.

We have further sought to afford Committees all the time they need to assert their centrality by reducing plenaries and increasing Committee times. We have also taken heed of Committees' please to allow them to incrementally work themselves into the Innovative Planning model and, going forward, we will insist that the uptake on the available time be substantially increased. We want Committees to start work early in the morning and finish in the last Parliamentary working hour with increased outputs that can only help in the fight against poverty, inequality and unemployment.

Deputy Chairperson, dare I say that the matter of support to Committees is not lost to us. We have continuously engaged with the Committee section to evaluate what is on offer for Committees and, often times, we find that some Committees are unable to utilize their budgets.



Let me pause for a moment here and reflect on a matter, which others may find contentious. There is a tendency for some Committees to want to engage in trips that really do not support their mandates just so they are able to use their budgets or tap into the consolidated fund.

We are against fiscal dumping in its various manifestations and my office will continue to give guidance should it determine that certain trips are not worth our while as an institution. That said, we also do not support a situation where budgets remain unused when there is so much that needs to be done.

Committees should go anywhere they need to go if it can be determined that such a trip is in the interest of the fulfilment of their mandates and that there is no information at the disposal of the Committee internally. However, we need to guard against nullifying knowledge that had been harvested in previous terms. Maybe this talks to how we store knowledge and, perhaps, one will have to liaise with the Committee Section and the Legislative Support Sector to determine the extent to which we are able to store knowledge for future use. We may not be getting our basics right if we have to travel to Mexico, Venezuela and Paraguay every year under the guise that we do so in order to better understand how to execute our mandates. Is it not possible for us to tap into our archives to draw out those good practices? Well, this is a question that Committees should respond to and present a compelling case should it be necessary for them reinvent the wheel.

We are, however, heartened by the deep realization that most of our Committees have internalized their centrality in the work of Parliament and, as such, continue to diligently deliver on their specific mandates. My office has had sight of annual plans of Committees and I can say with certainty that we are a Parliament at work. At this stage I would not wish to single out some Committees as top performers but I commit to continuously support those that are slow in coming off the starting blocks to be on par with the others.



In conclusion, I wish to thank everyone- from Committee assistants to Secretaries to Researchers- who is involved with Committees for their sterling work and further implore them to double their efforts. Without effective committee work, there can never be any credible Parliamentary work. Even as you draft your programmes for the next term, be on the lookout for the guidance that we offer you through the programme framework, which sets the tone for how we envisage to run the NCOP.

Thank You