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2019/2020 crime stats show decrease in violent crimes, says Minister

All crimes in this category decreased, including burglary at residential premises, which declined by 6.7%. Robbery at residential properties also recorded a decrease.

The Minister of Police, Mr Bheki Cele, briefed the Portfolio Committee on Police on the 2019/20 national crime statistics, saying that the statistics provide a clear indication of how well the South African Police Service (SAPS) is delivering on its mandate to ensure that South Africans feel safe.

The statistics reveal a slowing of the increase in violent crimes. "Indeed, we

are not where we want to be. However, we are pleased with the improvements in the most stubborn crime categories," he added. The number of contact crimes, particularly murder, have halved over the past three years. In 2017/18, the case difference was 1 320, in 2018/19 the cases difference was 686 and in 2019/20 the SAPS recorded a case difference of 303.

Another important category recording a significant decrease, is property-related crimes. All crimes in this category decreased, including burglary at residential premises, which declined by 6.7%. Robbery at residential properties also recorded a decrease. However, carjacking and truck hijacking recorded an increase of 13.3% and 1.7% respectively. Operational interventions have been

deployed to address the growing increase, Minister Cele said.

On sexual offences, Mr Cele pointed out that this sort of crime often happens behind closed doors and are only publicised after the offence has been committed and the victims have passed on. Campaigns against gender-based violence and femicide must be intensified. Private sector and gender activists' organisations must work

together with government to defeat the scourge and expose perpetrators.

"It is of concern that educational institutions are becoming hotbeds for sexual violence."

380 cases of rape were reported at schools,

universities, colleges and day-care facilities," he reiterated.

As for the Covid-19, the pandemic has drastically redefined traditional policing. Social distancing is the new normal and making

an arrest or a deployment to a Community Service Centre suddenly demands a different standard operating procedure.

"In the call of duty during this pandemic, the SAPS has lost a 113 police

officers, whilst 12 138 have contracted the virus, with 254 hospitalised and 4 904 recoveries," he said.

On the proliferation of illegal firearms, this remains a major contributor to crime levels in the country. The

2019 firearms amnesty, which began on 1 December 2019 and was meant to run until the end of May 2020, was severely affected by the outbreak of Covid-19. This contributed to the SAPS's inability to fully and effectively reduce the

number of illegal firearms in circulation. In the previous amnesty period, 44 033 firearms and 246 060 rounds of ammunition were surrendered and over 19 000 applications to renew licenses were received. 🇿🇦



Minister Bheki Cele

The police have become the first and last line of defence in the fight against the spread of the coronavirus, hence the National Treasury has adjusted the police budget upward by R3.7 billion to enable them to enforce the lockdown regulations. That was what the Minister of Police, Mr Bheki Cele, told Members of the National Assembly (NA) in a virtual mini-plenary sitting when he presented the Budget Vote for the Department of Police, **writes Abel Mputing.**

Presenting the adjusted budget of the department, Mr Cele urged South Africans to hold hands in the fight against the pandemic and not betray this cause. He dedicated the adjusted budget to gender-based violence (GBV) and to the police's selfless commitment in the fight against the spread of the virus. "We find ourselves in a quagmire of an invisible enemy that attacks everyone, including police officers," declared the Minister.

"Covid-19 has redefined conventional policing," he claimed, "the current regulations demand different operating procedures. The police had to adjust to the 360% turn while not losing their focus on serving and protecting the nation."

He commended the relentless efforts of the police who died from contracting the virus and the sacrifices they continue to make against all

Police have become the first and last line of defence in the fight against the coronavirus

"The rate of GBV in South Africa is five times higher than the global average. There's one death too many that is related to GBV in our country."

odds. He added: "When the world closes, policing continues. When businesses close, policing continues. When there is lockdown, policing continues."

Even when more than 95 police lost their lives, policing continues. He said despite all these challenges, police management worked hard to ensure that the well-being and morale of the police remain at an all-time high.

Well over R3.7 billion has been prioritised to respond to Covid-19.

Some of the adjusted budget will cater for a Covid-19 public education and awareness campaign to facilitate the involvement of community safety forums.

Regarding GBV, he pointed out that "we should all concur that those who abuse women and children, abuse our nation".

The Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Police, Ms Tina Joemat-Pettersson, said the largest threat to future economic growth is crime. She commended the Minister for ensuring that during Covid-19, the police are in a position to support the state "in enforcing the national disaster regulations with the necessary care and empathy that South Africans deserve".

She admitted though that Covid-19 has put an extra burden on the limited resources of the Department of Police. As such, she welcomed the suspension of the sale of alcohol. In her view, this "will go a long way in reducing violent crime against women and children and lessen the burden of care in the country's hospitals".

She said the committee welcomed the additional R3.7 billion to the police budget. In her view, this will place the police to be in a better position

to address the safety of "women, children and members of the LGBT community".

She decried the economic conditions of women in the country. "The introduction of a sustainable social security system would assist our country to eradicate all forms of GBV. The question to ask is: do people have confidence in our police service, if yes, to what extent?" she asked.

"In this regard, we need a strong Independent Police Investigative Directorate (Ipid) to investigate any kind of criminality. And it should have full jurisdiction in all sectors of policing, including metro and traffic officers."

Rev Kenneth Meshoe said that since October last year, 103 000 cases have been withdrawn because of poor police investigative capabilities, nine times more than last year. Of the sexual violence-related cases, Rev Meshoe stated that over 65% of them were withdrawn before they were heard in court. "It is hardly surprising that according to Afro-Barometer, the South African Police Service (SAPS) is the least trusted institution in South Africa."

He further proclaimed that according to Corruption Watch, the SAPS is the most corrupt institution in SA. He said: "It is alleged that the police erect random stops for extortion than upholding the law."

Ms Zukisa Faku decried the increase in the number of GBV cases. "The rate of GBV in South Africa is five times higher than the global average. There's one death too many that is related to GBV in our country."

She called upon Minister Cele to see to it that GBV cases are prioritised and given the resources they demand so that the state can treat victims with respect and the police be in a better position to arrest the perpetrators of this crime. 🇿🇦

Public finances are dangerously overstretched

There is an agreement that economic growth is urgent. One of the key projects that the National Treasury will be driving is to work closely with the rest of government to drive a package of reforms to improve productivity, lower costs and reduce demands of state-owned companies on the public purse.



Minister Tito Mboweni

In presenting the National Treasury Budget Vote during a virtual National Assembly mini-plenary sitting, the Minister of Finance, Mr Tito Mboweni said section 216 of the Constitution of the Republic and the Public Finance Management Act clearly spell out the role of the National Treasury, **reports Mava Lukani.**

Accordingly, the National Treasury prepares an Annual Budget, delivered in February, and a Medium Term Budget Policy Statement, traditionally delivered in October. This year, he said, the circumstances have also required the National Treasury to prepare a Supplementary Budget which he delivered during a hybrid sitting of the National Assembly in June.

Mr Mboweni said the Supplementary Budget Vote was in support of the constitutional and legal responsibilities, underpinned by the strategic objective to “improve living standards”. He said: “I cannot overstate the urgency of this task in the context of the current global pandemic, and the economic devastation it has brought with it.”

He said the country needs

a strong National Treasury, staffed with the best the country and the world have to offer. The National Treasury has set itself a three-pronged strategy, and one of those strategies is to achieve sustainable public finances. “The National Treasury is on a mission to restore fiscal strength. This is a minimum condition required to prepare South Africa for the next pandemic or economic shock,” he said.

The second prong is to strengthen the sound financial controls and management of public finances across the public sector. “Our historic response to this pandemic would not have been possible had it not been for the cooperation across all arms of the state, facilitated by good financial control, including the provincial MECs for Finance, whose support I highly value. In this regard, effective intergovernmental relations are critical in ensuring that all arms of government work closely together to deliver on improved living standards for all.”

The final prong is to advocate for sound economic policy in line with the President’s direction. “We intend to strengthen our macroeconomic policy framework, facilitate

regional and international cooperation, and continue the roll-out of our improvements to the system of financial regulation.”

There is an agreement that economic growth is urgent. One of the key projects that the National Treasury will be driving is to work closely with the rest of government to drive a package of reforms to improve productivity, lower costs and reduce demands of state-owned companies on the public purse. These measures, he said, include finalising electricity determinations, unbundling Eskom and taking other steps to open up energy markets, modernising ports and rail infrastructure, and licensing spectrum.

On fiscal outlook, he said there is a team in the National Treasury which is working tirelessly to deal with the ballooning public debt. “The public finances are dangerously overstretched. Without urgent action in the 2021 budget process, a debt crisis will follow. Failure to contain debt, the budget deficit and debt service costs will damage the country’s long-term economic prospects.”

He reminded Members of Parliament that the supplementary budget projected that tax revenue would be R304.1 billion less in the current year, compared with the 2020 budget estimate. He said revenue shortfalls include tax relief measures amounting to R26 billion in foregone revenue implemented as part of the Covid-19 relief package.

“More significantly, the shortfall reflects the expectation that the tax base will temporarily shrink as businesses close and people lose their jobs.” As set out in the supplementary budget, the gross borrowing requirement has increased to R776.9 billion. Gross national government debt is projected to increase to R3.97 trillion (or 81.8% of GDP) in the current year. “This increase in debt means that we now budget for a direct charge of R236 billion for debt service costs, which is R7 billion more than we budgeted in February. Debt is expensive.”

Furthermore, “We have continued with our efforts to mobilise funding from multilateral institutions, to date the New Development Bank has approved US\$1 billion (R16.6 billion) from its Emergency Assistance Program and the African Development Bank has also approved a loan of approximately US\$288 million (R4.8 billion).”

The government has also applied for US\$4.2 billion (R69.7 billion) from the International Monetary Fund under the Rapid Financing Instrument that will be used to provide for direct budget financing and, he said, negotiations with the World Bank are still underway and more details will be provided once transactions are concluded. “We expect to raise a total of approximately US\$7 billion (R116.2 billion) as indicated in the supplementary budget.”



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NCOP passes Division of Revenue Amendment Bill

There is also an urgent need to ensure that allocated resources are spent appropriately to avert fruitless and wasteful expenditures. She urged Parliament to utilise its oversight mechanisms to monitor these interventions.



When the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) debated the Division of Revenue Amendment Bill recently in a virtual sitting, its Chairperson, Mr Amos Masondo, conveyed heartfelt condolences to the family, comrades, friends and family of the late Mr Andrew Mlangeni, who before his death was the last surviving member of the Rivonia trialists, **writes Abel Mputing.**

“Andrew Mlangeni was an unwavering democrat, a revolutionary par excellence, an architect of the South African democratic transition, a cadre committed to fight against racial injustices to the very end for a humane and just world,” the Chairperson said.

Presenting the report of the Select Committee on Appropriations on the Bill, the committee’s Chairperson, Ms Dikeledi Mahlangu, commended the National Treasury’s intervention to repurpose the national budget towards addressing challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

She explained how the committee had consulted widely on the Bill, having spoken to the Congress of the South African Trade Unions, the South African Association of Local Government and the

Financial Fiscal Commission, as well as the Parliamentary Budget Office, among others, to weigh the efficacy of the Treasury’s adjustments in relation to government’s response to the pandemic.

In addition, the committee published advertisements in all the major newspapers soliciting comments and views, as part of its public participation process that forms part of the committee’s deliberations before such a Bill is presented before the NCOP.

She said while the committee was processing the Bill, it observed through the Auditor-General’s report the deteriorating state of governance in various municipalities. “The government must improve the financial management systems at local government. There is a need for a resilient audit committee, the monitoring and the evaluation of these systems.”

There is also an urgent need to ensure that allocated resources are spent appropriately to avert fruitless and wasteful expenditures. She urged Parliament to utilise its oversight mechanisms to monitor these interventions. She also appealed that the funds meant for health interventions should be spent

accordingly, and in accordance with principles and priorities espoused in the adjusted budget.

The provinces should determine how to appropriate and prioritise their share of the R20 billion budget allocated to municipalities. “That should be done without disadvantaging the poor areas of their jurisdictions,” Ms Mahlangu declared.

She maintained the need to strengthen the political will and administrative capacity of local government to improved their “accountability to ensure there’s good governance and the citizens of South Africa get value for money”. In relation to capacity in local government,” she claimed that “causes of underspending should be assessed before resources are taken away from municipalities, because

this often affects the poor communities who are entitled to these services”.

Their capacitation will ensure that they dispense their service delivery obligations. As such, “the National Treasury and other financially related state entities have an obligation to assist or intervene in those municipalities that are struggling with financial management capacity, to enable them to spend their funds accordingly”.

Ms Mahlangu recognised the fact that the National Treasury has to balance the various economic consequences of Covid-19, to ensure that “the social transformation goals and development directives aimed at bringing about fiscal adjustments and new economic structural adjustments are not

compromised”. In supporting the Bill, some provincial representatives called upon the National Treasury to review the formula it uses in determining provinces’ equitable share, particularly the so-called category three provinces. This matter has been brought to the attention of the National Treasury. In the Free State, for example, the province won’t be able to provide water and sanitation to some of its rural areas due to budget constraints.

The 2020 Division of Revenue Amendment Bill addresses changes in the equitable division of nationally raised revenue among the three spheres of government; changes to provincial conditional grant allocations; and changes to the local government equitable share and conditional grant allocations. 🌟



PARLIAMENT
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**THE HOUSE PASSED THE BILL,
WHICH WAS TABLED ON 24 JUNE
IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

BY THE MINISTER OF FINANCE, **MR TITO MBOWENI**

Mkhize - Communities must play their part in the fight to curb the spread of COVID-19

Giving a report-back on the current model of projection of peaks and possible flattening of the curve, he said to date fewer people have been infected than previously predicted. “We are going ahead with our integrated strategies in anticipation of the peak around August.”



Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize

The Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize, presented to a National Assembly plenary his department’s response to Covid-19 since the announcement of the national lockdown and various other interventions to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, **writes Abel Mputing.**

From the onset, he warned of the worrying spike in infections in Gauteng. “We expect Gauteng will soon be the epicentre of this pandemic in the country.

This has been detected due to the department’s classification of districts as a measure to prevent, mitigate infections and promote recovery while

strengthening mechanisms for detection.”

This classification measure is one strategy embraced by the department and there is now a big emphasis on community engagement as one of the most effective interventions in arresting the spread of the virus. “There is a need for community cooperation and vigilance regarding the wearing of masks and the change of behaviour.” He argued that there is now a realisation that that is where the battle against the pandemic will be won or lost.

In the long term, beating the disease will rely on devising a vaccine or some other drug

to mitigate the spread of the virus. This will happen through coordinated research and ongoing emulation of best practices from other countries.

Meanwhile, his department has assisted the provincial healthcare system most affected to get access to critical resources. Dr Mkhize commended the bravery of the medical frontline staff who risk their lives to save the lives of others. “These are our heroes. We appreciate their dedication and commitment to caring,” he said. To avert any political interference that may hamper his department’s efforts, it now works hand in hand with trade unions to address concerns about the

exposure of their members to infection.

Giving a report-back on the current model of projection of peaks and possible flattening of the curve, he said to date fewer people have been infected than previously predicted. “We are going ahead with our integrated strategies in anticipation of the peak around August.”

He lamented the fact that the

pandemic will cause many problems. It will create untold job losses, and impact on businesses and every part of our lives. He told the Members of the National Assembly that the wave of infections that South Africans were warned about is now upon us and it knows no race, gender or class. “Government can’t fight the pandemic alone; we need our social partners to curb its spread.” 🇿🇦



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

“GOVERNMENT CAN’T FIGHT THE PANDEMIC ALONE; WE NEED OUR SOCIAL PARTNERS TO CURB ITS SPREAD.”

— THE MINISTER OF HEALTH, **DR ZWELI MKHIZE**

NA MPS critically respond to Dr Mkhize's Covid-19 plan

People make a mistake focussing on the government, rather than their community. "Our health system reflects the severe limitations of the state. Now we pay the price of the deficiency of competency and trust,"



The Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize, was in the National Assembly to present his department's plan to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. MPs then responded to his statement. **Abel Mputing reports.**

Ms Siviwe Gwarube of the Democratic Alliance said coronavirus is the most destructive and fatal pandemic in history. The deaths cannot be regarded merely as fatalities, as in each case it is someone's friend, brother, sister or colleague. She thanked frontline workers who are working under impossible conditions to save lives. Ms Gwarube also emphasised that the government's response should include concrete plans and resources need to be distributed to provinces so that they can cope with the number of infections.

She criticised the R20 billion pledged by the government towards fighting the effects of the pandemic. She said this amount is not a stimulus package, but rather a reprioritisation of existing budget. In her view, it forces

the provinces to use their conditional grants, which in turn affects their service delivery and their potential to respond to the pandemic.

Mr Siphosethu Ngcobo of the Inkatha Freedom Party said upon the announcement of lockdown, opposition political parties supported it, but the surge of infections, now in Gauteng, is a concern. "In the wake of this surge, we called for a return to level five in Gauteng," he said. He criticised the opening of schools amid the rise in infections.

"We demand alternative measures for the wellbeing of pupils and teachers." Mr Philippus van Staden said the Freedom Front Plus believes government has failed to use the opportunity granted by lockdown to prepare for rising infections. "Now we see health workers on strike, we see shortages of beds, oxygen, and a shortage of doctors and nurses."

The pandemic has laid bare pre-existing weaknesses in the health system and brought it to its knees, Mr

Van Staden said. If we dare to return to lockdown level five, "there would be public demonstration and people won't approve of that. And we will reach a stage where people will not die of Covid-19, but of poverty."

Ms Elizabeth Sukers of the African Christian Democratic Party said those who succumbed to the virus are mostly those that attend to the sick and dying, who have paid the highest price while in the line of duty. "We owe all healthcare workers our greatest gratitude."

People make a mistake focussing on the government, rather than their community. "Our health

system reflects the severe limitations of the state. Now we pay the price of the deficiency of competency and trust," she proclaimed. Mr Nqabayonzi Nkwankwa of the United Democratic Movement said:

"Our concern is that we missed a golden opportunity to implement proper testing, screening and contact tracing strategies during level 4 and 5 of lockdown."

He also lamented the provision of statistics without any critical reflection of their correlation to the department's strategic interventions.

The Congress of the People's Mr William Madisha said it's unfortunate that the government is using the pandemic as a political tool. "As political parties, we agree that stern measures had to be taken to curb the spread of this pandemic, but it has since been used to achieve political ends. In addition, the Covid-19 fund is now at risk from fraud and corruption," he said.

Also speaking during the National Assembly plenary, the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Health, Mr Sibongiseni Dlomo, noted that the committee is unhappy about conditions in the Eastern Cape, after the committee visited the province to conduct oversight. Progress in readying health centres to deal with the pandemic is slow and shortages in personal protective equipment and personnel is an ongoing problem, he said.

However, he commended the health department's response to the pandemic, which has also been praised by the World Health Organisation. As a result, "South Africa has been invited to present how it managed the virus during its outbreak. That is a sterling achievement; it cannot be simply overlooked."

In his concluding remarks, Dr Mkhize made an appeal that the fight against the virus should not "divide us, but unite us". "No one possesses a monopoly on wisdom of how to curb the spread of the virus. We are open-minded about any suggestions that could show us our blind spot and we will work on them." 🙏



Committees On Health not happy with the Eastern Cape's covid-19 interventions



PARLIAMENT
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THE TIME FOR PLANNING IS OVER. IT IS NOW TIME FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND SAVING PEOPLE'S LIVES.

- THE SELECT COMMITTEES ON HEALTH

“We are not happy with certain things that are happening, but we commend the work that is being done by the PMU,” he said.

The portfolio and the select committees on health received a briefing on the state of provincial health services from the Eastern Cape's project management unit (PMU) in a virtual joint meeting. Opening the joint meeting, the Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize said that although the Eastern Cape has many challenges, they are not beyond the capacity of the provincial Department of Health or the PMU, **writes Mava Lukani.**

The committees were also briefed by the MEC for Health, Ms Sindiswa Gomba, and members of the PMU, under the leadership of Dr Sibongile Zungu. PMU is a support team of experts appointed by Dr Mkhize to assist the province with its Covid-19 interventions. Dr Zungu briefed the committees on epidemiological projections, surgical capacity, human resource management, supply of oxygen, data collection tools and ambulances. She painted a picture of lack of capacity in the provincial public healthcare in each and every area of the provincial healthcare system.

During the discussions, members of the committees asked Dr Mkhize when the national Department of

Health will apply section 100 of the Constitution, as the Eastern Cape Department of Health is unable to deal with the pandemic. Dr Mkhize responded by saying that there is no need for that intervention at the moment referring to the Constitution to outline when such an intervention is mandated.

Members of the committees told Ms Gomba and Dr Zungu that the time for planning is over. It is now time for implementation and saving people's lives. They also demanded timeframes from MEC Gomba and Dr Zungu.

One committee member, Ms Sive Gwarube, said the province has no clear response to Covid-19 and that the PMU's presentation lacks timelines. In addition, referring rural patients to metros made no sense, as metro facilities are already overwhelmed. Members also wanted more explanation about Nelson Mandela Metro's Dora Nginza and Livingston hospitals, which have been in the news for all the wrong reasons.

Ms Gomba was asked to explain the problem of scooters bought by the Eastern Cape Department of Health to transport patients from rural

communities to hospitals. In response Ms Gomba said the procurement of scooters had already been explained by Premier Oscar Mabuyane.

On the problem of the lack of oxygen at hospitals, Dr Mkhize told the committees that the Department of Health is negotiating with manufacturers to ensure that provincial hospitals have sufficient supply. The issues raised by the committees on staffing, ambulances, corruption, shortages in oxygen supply, and other infrastructure challenges are matters that the Department of Health is well versed in and are being attended to by the province.

The Chairperson for the Portfolio Committee on Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, said even though the PMU's report lacked detail, it is reassuring to receive reports on the work being done in the province. After the committee's oversight in the Eastern Cape in June this year, the Chairperson has noted significant progress. “We are not happy with certain things that are happening, but we commend the work that is being done by the PMU,” he said. 🙏





Minister Lindiwe Zulu

When Minister Lindiwe Zulu presented the Budget Vote of the Department of Social Development to the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), she said she presented it in the eye of a turbulent storm unlike any faced before, **writes Mava Lukani.**

The Department of Social Development is counted among those in the frontlines, she said. "It is in this regard," she continued, "that we urgently assumed a stance by which we are strengthening the capabilities of our programmes relative to the challenges that accompany the Covid-19 pandemic."

According to her, the challenges demand the department formulates and implements responsive, impactful and qualitatively life-improving solutions. "Within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic our programmatic responses are guided by the mandate to work hard and smart towards improving what is good for

our society, and bettering the quality of life of every South African. Our focus is on those who are most vulnerable," she added.

This budget vote calls upon all South Africans to muster the requisite courage to innovate extraordinary policy, programmatic and service delivery initiatives, and society-wide partnerships that are intentionally targeted at flattening the curves of inequalities, poverty, hunger, gender-based violence and femicide, youth economic exclusion and substance abuse.

Ms Zulu told the NCOP that the measures outlined in her department's adjusted budget are directed at responding not only to the pandemic, but also to enable "our people to rebound to productive lives faster, thereby ensuring that they actively define and build our collective future: the South Africa we want and the citizen that we want to inhabit it".

The department's budget was reduced from R197.7 billion

Social development department will focus on those who are most vulnerable

THE DEPARTMENT'S BUDGET WAS REDUCED FROM R197.7 BILLION TO R182.24 BILLION. HOWEVER, WHEN THE NATIONAL TREASURY PRESENTED THE SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET, THAT IS GOVERNMENT'S FUNDING RESPONSE TO COVID-19, THE DEPARTMENT RECEIVED AN ADDITIONAL R25.5 BILLION.

to R182.24 billion. However, when the National Treasury presented the supplementary budget, that is government's funding response to Covid-19, the department received an additional R25.5 billion. This amount, according to Ms Zulu, was supplemented by a R15.48 billion reduction from the baseline, and thereby bringing the total budget allocation for the Covid-19 response to R40 955 billion.

The department's annual budget was readjusted upwards to R223.2 billion for the current financial year (2020/21). This is a significant budget increase of 8.13% when the inflation rate is at 4.6%. The increase was caused by budget reallocations to three budget items, namely: social assistance grants – R15.4 million; early childhood development (ECD) conditional grants – R64.5 million, and operational funding – R56 million.

South African Social Security Agency (Sassa's) administrative costs remain unchanged at R7.7 million,

as no additional funding was received for this function in the current financial year. As such, Ms Zulu said, these costs will be funded from re-prioritised budget.

Ms Delmaine Christians who represents the Northern Cape Province in the NCOP for the Democratic Alliance (DA), said the people are in despair because of the ruling party's broken promises. The DA salutes the healthcare workers who are at the forefront in the struggle against Covid-19, she said.

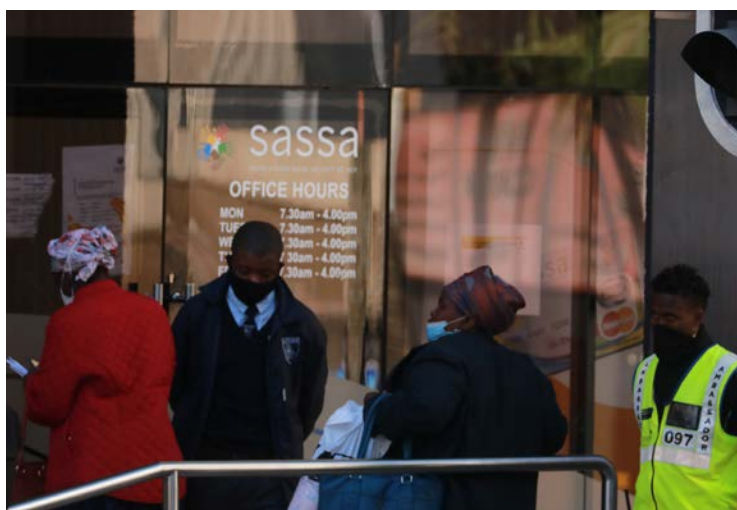
The government's increase in social grants and the R350 offered to the needy as strategies to mitigate the effects of Covid-19 have failed because of poor and corrupt administration in the Social Development department. Too many people became victims of poverty, notwithstanding those plans of mitigation. She called on the minister to cut all the red tape.

The MECs for the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Mpumalanga



who participated in the budget debate supported the department's budget. The MECs also highlighted the achievements of their departments in their provinces.

Mr Andrew Arnolds of the Economic Freedom Fighters who represents the Western Cape Province in the NCOP said the EFF objects to the department's budget. The EFF lost all hope in the department when it politicised the distribution of food parcels. 🇿🇦



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

"THE MANDATE IS BETTERING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF EVERY SOUTH AFRICAN."

— THE MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, **LINDIWE ZULU**

Basic Education department reprioritises budget and plans due to Covid-19 - NCOP



“The longer our children are deprived of education, the poorer our nation will become,” Ms Christians said.

Minister Angie Motshekga

Delegates to the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) expressed concerns during a virtual budget debate on Basic Education regarding a decrease in provincial conditional grants due to the redirection of funds to Covid-19-related expenditure, **writes Rajaa Azzakani.**

Delivering her Budget Vote speech in the NCOP recently, the Minister of the Department of Basic Education, Ms Angie Motshekga, told NCOP delegates that her department had to reprioritise its plans due to budget cuts. The department’s baseline budget was reduced by R2.1 billion, while those of the provincial departments combined were reduced by R1.5 billion. This is an overall decrease in the baseline for the basic education sector of R3.6 billion. These cuts contributed towards the R500 billion stimulus package announced

by President Cyril Ramaphosa. Minister Motshekga informed the NCOP that the raging debate on whether schools should be closed because of Covid-19 involve all stakeholders, including parents. The department presented all these views to the Covid-19 National Command Team for the Cabinet to take a decision on the matter.

The Chairperson of Select Committee on Education and Technology, Sports, Arts and Culture, Mr Mamagase Elleck Nchabaleng, said the infrastructure backlog would be further affected, as funds now have to be diverted to Covid-19-related expenses. “This may result in the suspension or termination of some planned infrastructure projects.”

Participating in the debate, the Gauteng MEC for Education, Mr Panyaza Lesufi, also expressed

concerns about the budget cuts. “The reduction of the infrastructure budget across all provinces is cause for concern. Furthermore, the reduction of the conditional grant is also concerning as this grant is also used to support programmes like maths and science.”

Mr Lesufi said the advice on the schooling sector relating to Covid-19 has always been expert driven and expert guided. “Our advice has always been expert driven. We depend on expert advice. Our advice should remain expert driven and not economic driven.”

Ms Delmaine Christians of the Democratic Alliance (DA) said it is for the benefit of the country’s children that schools remain open and are adequately provided for. The DA believes the benefits of opening the schools exceed the negatives, and that closing schools will be disastrous for

poor communities without resources such as the internet. “The longer our children are deprived of education, the poorer our nation will become,” Ms Christians said. Although this view was shared by some political parties, others felt it is not to the benefit of learners to continue with schooling during what they described as the “peak” of the pandemic in August and September.

Ms Seneanye Lehihi of the Economic Freedom Fighters said: “We demand that all schools remain closed. When we had 100 confirmed cases of Covid-19 infections, we closed schools. Now we have more than 10 000 daily infection cases and we want to open schools. This is murderous.” The EFF rejected the adjusted budget.

Mr Simo Mfayela of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) said his party has, from the

start, warned against the opening of the schools as schools, particularly in rural areas, are not prepared for Covid-19. The IFP also had questions about the reprioritisation of the conditional grants supporting mathematics, science and technology programmes. “We need to ensure that no child is left behind as we deal with the pandemic,” he added. 🇿🇦



Basic Education must blacklist unscrupulous PPE suppliers - Committee on Appropriations

“hijacking of contracts” and called on the department to involve the police. This practice, which is common in rural areas, is when contractors who had lost the bid or at times didn’t even apply, disrupt the project and demand a 30% stake from the winning bidder.

Unscrupulous suppliers who deliver substandard personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitisers to schools must be exposed and blacklisted, members of the Standing Committee on Appropriations told the Department of Basic Education (DBE) recently during a virtual meeting where the impact of the recent budget adjustment on the department’s ability to carry out its mandate was discussed, **writes Sakhile Mokoena.**

Members of the committee said the government cannot work with people who want to maximise profit at the expense of the lives of the learners and teachers. Such suppliers should be blacklisted and even charged with murder. Their concern follows reports that some companies contracted by the department were providing PPE and sanitisers that didn’t meet

the health standards for the prevention of coronavirus.

Some of the sanitisers supplied are just water, far below the 70% alcohol requirement. It was alleged that the fake sanitisers are common in the Eastern Cape’s Alfred Nzo District.

The committee also condemned the “hijacking of contracts” and called on the department to involve the police. This practice, which is common in rural areas, is when contractors who had lost the bid or at times didn’t even apply, disrupt the project and demand a 30% stake from the winning bidder. Members of Parliament called this a sabotage of service delivery and proposed that the police should be involved to deal with such incidents.

Responding to a question about why the department

was importing stationery from China and why items as small as pencils and rubbers can’t be procured in South Africa, Basic Education Minister Ms Angie Motshekga said there were only three stationery companies supplying South Africa and they do not have adequate capacity to serve the needs of the whole country.

“The department must also help in the process of igniting local manufacturing. Every time we import, that contributes negatively to the economy, let’s buy RSA products,” said committee Chairperson Mr Sfiso Buthelezi.

The department was also questioned about recent reports that the Eastern Cape Provincial Department of Education was planning to spend R400 million to lease tablets for learners. MPs (Members of Parliament)

wanted to know why the department was leasing the equipment instead of buying the equipment.

Minister Motshekga said the national department could not take responsibility for that decision by the province. “We are not able to take responsibility. I am equally shocked and disgusted about the tablets reports. The Premier and MEC have instituted an investigation into the procurement of ICT equipment in the Eastern Cape Province,” the Minister told the committee.

The department’s Director-General, Mr Mathanzima Mveli, told members of the committee that the department was buying masks locally and no longer in China, as was the case at the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak. “We have now stimulated manufacturing

activities that had closed down or were going to close. We are now buying our masks locally,” said Mr Mveli. He also told the committee that the cuts resulting from the budget adjustment were going to impact negatively on infrastructure, and a number of projects that were supposed to be rolled out this year will be put on hold. 🇷🇷

The 2020 academic programme will be completed, Minister Nzimande assures NCOP

The net suspension amounts to R1.734 billion for normal voted funds. The adjustments budget also provides for the reduced collection of skills levies of R8.122 billion.

In his policy debate speech on the Department of Higher Education and Training to the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), Minister Dr Blade Nzimande, took the opportunity to share his department's achievements and challenges as they battle with the Covid-19 pandemic and its effect on the poor, **reports Mava Lukani.**

"We now know that Covid-19 has turned the global economy upside down and brought about the broadest collapse in per capita incomes since 1870," Dr Nzimande began. "Throughout the world, tens of millions of workers have lost their jobs and in South Africa unemployment increased by one percentage point, reaching 30.1% in the first three months of this year."

The South African economy is now expected to contract by 7.2% in 2020, and this is the largest contraction in nearly 90 years. Inflation will likely register 3% in 2020. "In response to these challenges in our sector," he continued, "we have sought to work together with other government departments, our entities, our universities and colleges, student leadership, with close collaboration with the private sector and labour to ensure that we stand united in the fight against coronavirus and its impact on the sector."

The final special adjustments budget cut for the Department for 2020/21 is R9.857 billion. The total suspension of funds amounts to R6.734 billion,

of which R4.999 billion is reallocated for reprioritising expenditure towards Covid-19 activities.

The net suspension amounts to R1.734 billion for normal voted funds. The adjustments budget also provides for the reduced collection of skills levies of R8.122 billion. "The department's original allocation for 2020/21 was reduced from R116.857 billion to R107.000 billion. That represents a reduction of 8%."

The biggest single reduction is on the declined estimates for the skills levy collections, from R19.413 billion to R11.291 billion, a reduction of R8.122 billion (42%). Dr Nzimande noted that the purpose of the re-allocation of funds is to cater for reprioritised expenditure towards addressing Covid-19-related activities, including student support.

The budget provides for the shifting of R1.510 million within the department's operational expenditure for Covid-19 expenditure. The cuts are mainly on items such as travel, accommodation, venues and related services. The department is in the process of amending the 2020/21 annual performance plan, as well as the strategic plan for 2020-2025 to accommodate the impact of the adjustments.

All universities have submitted multi-modal teaching, learning and assessment plans to enable them to complete the 2020 academic year, taking

into account the additional costs due to Covid-19. Funds were reprioritised by institutions from their block grants and earmarked grants to develop teaching and learning platforms to accommodate remote teaching and learning. Universities will suspend some current approved projects due to the reprioritisation and cuts to the value of about R3.851 billion.

As for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), adjustments outlined by Dr Nzimande, include the suspension and reallocation of R2.5 billion earmarked for student devices. However, the department has objected to this and the matter is currently with the National Treasury.

Dr Nzimande said NSFAS expects a decrease in the collection of recoveries, due to the impact of Covid-19 on the economy. All key performance indicators are currently being reviewed for Covid-19 impact and details will be provided when available.

Although permanent delegates to the NCOP supported the department's budget, Ms S'lindile Luthuli, representing KwaZulu-Natal in the NCOP for the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), rejected the budget. The EFF believes the budget perpetuates historical inequalities and deepens the suffering of black people. The grant that was meant for meals is now used to buy laptops, in the EFF's view. 🇿🇦



Minister Blade Nzimande



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

WE STAND UNITED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORONAVIRUS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SECTOR."

MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY - **BLADE NZIMANDE**

Cooperative Governance Budget Vote – the Good, the Bad and the Ugly



Ms Faith Muthambi

“Yes, while we were dealing with the good and the bad of local government, the ugly of the Covid-19 pandemic emerged.”

Participating in the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs’ (Cogta) Budget Vote debate, the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Ms Faith Muthambi, mentioned that when conducting oversight over municipalities the committee sees “first-hand the conquered frontiers and progress, on the one hand, as well as the unmet challenges and utter stagnation, on the other hand”, **writes Mava Lukani.**

The committee sees excellence in those municipalities that have achieved clean audits for several years, but mediocrity somewhere else, where a state entity has failed to address the water problems in a ward for more than a year. It is in this context of the good, the bad and the ugly that the committee approaches this budget vote debate, Ms Muthambi explained. “Yes, while we were dealing with the good and the bad of local government, the ugly of the Covid-19 pandemic

emerged. However, unlike the guns and dynamite of the once popular movie *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, we need to apply resolve, hard work, innovation, common sense and team work to overcome the dismal realities we are confronted with.”

The committee welcomed the department’s special adjustment budget, in particular the proposed upward adjustment, from R96.2 billion to R107.1 billion in the Department of Cooperative Governance’s budget.

This department is at the heart of the national Covid-19 response in two ways. First, Ms Muthambi explained, it is responsible for the implementation of disaster management regulations, which are guiding the country through the various stages of the national lockdown. The regulations give effect to President Cyril Ramaphosa’s declaration of a national state of disaster in South Africa on 15 March 2020, following the declaration of the global

Covid-19 pandemic by the World Health Organisation.

The committee is determined to ensure accountability in municipal spending of Covid-19 funds, particularly as some municipalities have been in the spotlight for abusing these funds. “We have already called some of these municipalities to come to Parliament to account. We also came out and demanded accountability when we heard the heart-breaking stories of councillors who looted food parcels meant for poor households,” she said.

Ms Muthambi urged the National Treasury and the Department of Cooperative Governance to intensify the monitoring municipalities’

Covid-19-related expenditure to ensure that there is no spending on salaries or other non-Covid-related expenditure.

The committee has agreed on an oversight plan and a programme to address challenges, including ensuring that the entities responsible for supporting local government are fulfilling their commitments. For example, the South African Local Government Association must intensify the demand for accountability from member municipalities.

“The Office of the Auditor-General is also starting to implement the provisions of the amended Public Audit Act, which empowers it to refer material irregularities

to appropriate authorities for investigation. It also provides the office with remedial powers, including the recovery of money lost because of the irregularities.”

Although the majority of members supported the adjustment budget, the Economic Freedom Fighters and the African Christian Democratic Party rejected the adjusted budget. They highlighted corruption in municipalities and the recent negative audit outcomes report for the 2018/19 financial year, released by the Auditor-General, as grounds for the rejection. Worst of all, they argued, there are no consequences for corruption. 🇿🇦



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

“I URGE THE NATIONAL TREASURY AND THE DEPARTMENT OF COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE TO INTENSIFY THE MONITORING MUNICIPALITIES”

– THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION, **MS MUTHAMBI**

We will resist the unlawful occupation of land in the same way that we have resisted the eviction of people – Minister Sisulu



Minister Lindiwe Sisulu

The advent of Covid-19 changed everything, including plans of the Department of Human Settlements that were presented previously to a mini-plenary budget debate vote of the National Assembly (NA) – and the pandemic has changed even the way people live. That was what the Minister of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation, Ms. Lindiwe Sisulu, told Members of the NA, **writes Mava Lukani.**

Presenting her budget debate speech for the Department of Human Settlements, Ms. Sisulu said Covid-19 has agitated for solutions here and now. “It incidentally thrust innovation in our face. It created a certain urgency around making sure that people are protected from the elements and consequently most of the plans we laid out had to be delayed,” she said.

Ms. Sisulu said the plans have been replaced by an even greater drive to deliver

more, deliver differently, deliver faster. “Driven by the pandemic, what we have been able to achieve in the past five months has been nothing but outstanding. It may not have been part of our original plans, but it showed our ability to respond to any situation as it unfolded,” she added.

She said at the back of this pandemic they have gained greater impetus, provided society with greater insight into the urgency and need for shelter and showed the department for what it is – “a caring department, ready to reach out and find solutions to most of the problems we encountered, including, unfortunately evictions and invasions”.

Ms. Sisulu highlighted her department’s successes in her speech, including the innovative ways they have housed people, notably the

1 500 approved beneficiaries from Khuthong informal settlements are being relocated into their homes

community of Wilgeheuwel in Roodepoort. She said in less than three weeks the department was able to provide 70 families with decent shelter, water and sanitation.

In the Eastern Cape, the department is building 1 000 temporary housing units (TRUs) in Buffalo City at Duncan Village. These will fast-track the implementation of the Duncan Village housing project, which has been delayed for a while through court processes.

In Gauteng, TRUs are being rolled out to provide space for social distancing. Among others, Zandspruit will yield 1 402 units, Tanganani Ext 7 will yield 1 108, and Rabbie Ridge will yield 1 200 units. In the immediate term, she said, the Housing Development Agency (HDA) will assist the government to build 6 371 TRUs across the country – with other provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, and Eastern Cape building more with the private sector.

She told members of the National Assembly that Human Settlements is well-placed to provide economic stimulus after the pandemic. “We have shown the private sector, we have shown the donor community and we have shown our people that we are a dependable team. We would like them to invest in us, support us and join us in our work to achieve a more equitable social order. Mass housing delivery will provide

us with what the Marshall Plan provided Western Europe [after the Second World War],” she said.

As part of the response to Covid-19, the department fast-tracked the launch of Elijah Barayi Mega Project in Gauteng, where 1 500 approved beneficiaries from Khuthong informal settlements are being relocated into their homes.

Hostels have also been identified as overcrowded spaces that endanger people’s lives. Mamelodi Hostel, for example, is one of the most overcrowded hostels in the country. As part of a de-densification programme there, the department is constructing more than 1 000 temporary residential units for the hostel’s residents.

Ms. Sisulu said, together with the provinces, her department is working with communities and municipalities to incrementally upgrade more than 300 informal settlements to improve living conditions in households. R2.4 billion and R2.2 billion have been allocated to provinces and metros respectively in the current budget, towards the upgrading of informal settlements.

“The need to improve living conditions in informal settlements became even more pressing. The upgrading plans that were already agreed with communities and municipalities needed to be implemented instantly,” she

added. On title deeds, Ms. Sisulu said: “We maintain our focus to eradicate backlogs in registering title deeds. As we stated before, a title deed empowers a household to be certain of the ownership of the house they live in and frees them to participate in the property market.”

In that regard, she said the priority is to complete all the outstanding township proclamations required to register title deeds. The funding for title deeds will henceforth form part of the Human Settlements Development Grant, and so forms part of the mainstream programmes.

On land grabs and evictions: “We will resist the unlawful occupation of land in the same way that we have resisted the eviction of people,” Ms. Sisulu stated. “The Constitution is very clear on these and the processes to be followed. Lawlessness does not reflect progressive ideals.” 🇿🇦

There are no easy answers as we face a ‘perfect storm’ – Minister Patel



“To improve the capacity of the state, the department will review the performance of the 17 public entities falling under his department...,” Mr Ebrahim Patel said

Minister Abraham Patel

The Minister of Trade and Industry, Mr Ebrahim Patel, acknowledged the tough times we are living in and extended his sincere condolences to the thousands of families who have lost loved ones to Covid-19. Mr Patel was introducing the Department on Trade and Industry’s budget vote in a hybrid plenary of the National Assembly, **reports Mava Lukani.**

The budget vote focused on three areas: the accomplishments and challenges of the past year, the department’s response to the impact of Covid-19; and finally, the department’s action plan for the future. “We are guided by the principle of building resilience in everything we do,” he said.

Before the pandemic, his department made solid progress in each of these areas, despite significant economic headwinds. “First, we undertook to support improved industrial performance, dynamism and competitiveness of local companies, through a

series of sectoral masterplans designed to build resilience in the domestic economy,” he said.

He told Members of the NA that together with the leaders of business and labour, they have forged consensus on the masterplans to grow jobs and production in four sectors: Auto production, clothing and textiles, poultry, and sugar. His department committed last year to expand markets for South African products and facilitate entry to those markets through trade measures that will build “our resilience in relation to global economic shocks”.

To illustrate progress, the department concluded an agreement with the United Kingdom to maintain access for South African-made goods in their market following Brexit. In addition, a new record of almost 390 000 locally-made cars were exported to the rest of the world. “Thousands of jobs were sustained in the making of those cars in factories in Uitenhage, Nelson

Mandela Bay, eThekweni, Buffalo City and Pretoria.” Mr Patel told the NA MPs that the department’s budget has been cut quite substantially by R1.8 billion to reprioritise state resources. “There are no easy answers and we are faced by what some call a ‘perfect storm’. Yet it is precisely in this most difficult moment that we as South Africans will need to find our resilient core,” he said.

To repair the damage of Covid-19 and reconstruct the economy to create more jobs, bring more young people into entrepreneurship and increase economic inclusion, the government needs to think boldly and implement smartly.

The situation requires better coordination, fresh thinking and a different way of working, which is why “I have engaged talented persons inside and outside the public sector to enrich our thinking.

One team is looking at ideas on the just-transition to a greener economy and proposals to leverage local

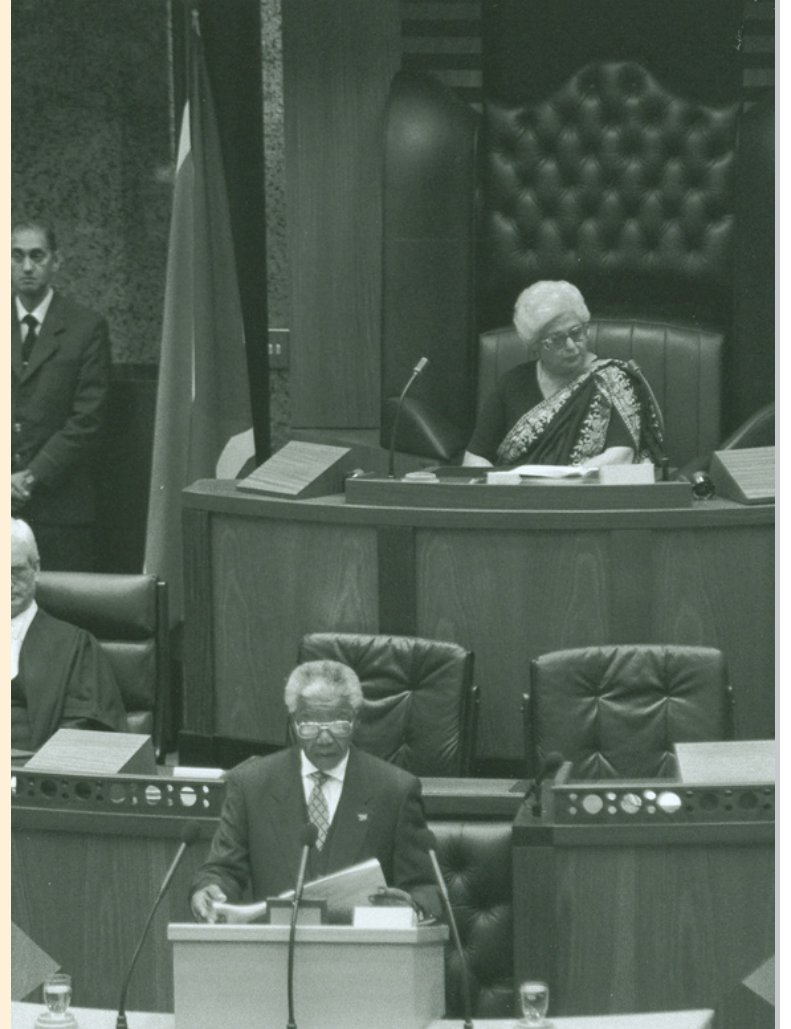
procurement and advance regional integration. Another is looking at enhancing worker empowerment at company level.”

To improve the capacity of the state, the department will review the performance of the 17 public entities falling under his department, identify opportunities to consolidate and merge some entities and address underperformance and in the case of the NLC promote greater transparency and improved governance.

“History suggests that from the greatest human crises, the greatest human advances can be made. So, in the darkest hour, we must prepare for a brighter future – at the heart of which must lie a new economy – fit for future purpose, fair and just, sustainable and resilient so that future shocks can be absorbed,” concluded Mr Patel. 🇿🇦



A more radical strategy is needed to free Palestine



You must use your own experience of reconciliation to give substance to Mandela's saying that South Africa cannot be free as long as Palestinians are being oppressed."

Parliament needs to adopt a more radical strategy to secure peace and an independent state for the people of Palestine. This position was supported by both the Deputy Secretary to Parliament, Mr Lechesa Tsenoli, and the deputy chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Ms Sylvia Lucas, **writes Brent Simons**

Addressing the virtual Nelson Mandela Lecture themed "Each one, Teach One - the Power to Transform the World: Mandela in Conversation with Palestine", Mr Tsenoli and Ms Lucas agreed that South African needs a more aggressive agenda to deal with and hopefully resolve the issue of a free Palestine.

The Nelson Mandela lecture was addressed by Associate Professor Ran Greenstein

from the University of the Witwatersrand's Department of Sociology, and Mr Na'eem Jeenah, the Executive Director of the Afro-Middle East Centre.

Prof Greenstein likened the current situation in Palestine to that of ethnic cleansing. He said the rise of apartheid in Israel and South Africa had its roots in 1948 when Israel was forcefully created and apartheid formalised in South Africa.

He called for the adoption of a strategy of solidarity to unite all those opposed to Israel. This strategy must focus on people within Israel sympathetic to the cause of establishing an independent Palestinian state. This could be achieved, Prof Greenstein believes, by transforming existing South African policy and attitudes towards Israel. "Parliament"

he said, "must consider a ban of all products coming from settlements in occupied Palestine" while working with the United Nations and all other structures to end "all security cooperation, training and arms purchases" as these only benefitted the "oppressive Israeli regime".

Mr Jeenah added that it was important that South Africa spearheaded an international campaign to isolate Israel and free Palestine.

Prof Greenstein, Mr Jeenah and other participants called on South Africa to formally cut diplomatic ties with Israel. Mr Jeenah added that South Africa should use its membership of the United Nations (UN) Security Council and its position as chairperson of the African Union "to give concreteness to the struggle to free Palestine".

"It is critical that parliament sign the UN Convention on apartheid" and drive a campaign to put the apartheid practices of Israel back on the UN agenda, he said.

Prof Greenstein further called on government and Parliament "to act positively to enhance its capacity to work with all groups to resolve the current crisis in the Middle East. You must use your own experience of reconciliation to give substance to Mandela's saying that South Africa cannot be free as long as Palestinians are being oppressed."

Member of Parliament and former ambassador Mr Mohammed Dangor cautioned that any strategy would first have to "bring about maximum unity amongst Palestinians" themselves. He agreed that the two-state option was no longer

the solution.

Participants agreed that South Africa had to do a thorough assessment of all Israeli products being sold in South Africa. They called on the Department of Trade and Industry to properly scan products coming from Israel and to ban those produced and packaged by Israelis on occupied territory.

Participants also agreed that the current international silence on plans by Israel to annex more Palestinian territory had to be broken and called on South Africa to take the lead in this campaign. The starting point must be robust interaction with both the Israelis and Palestinians. 🌍



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA SHOULD USE ITS MEMBERSHIP OF THE UNITED NATIONS (UN) SECURITY COUNCIL AND ITS POSITION AS CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION "TO GIVE CONCRETENESS TO THE STRUGGLE TO FREE PALESTINE"

— THE DIRECTOR OF THE AFRO-MIDDLE EAST CENTRE, **MR NAEEM JEENAH**



Minister Thoko Didiza

In presenting the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development's budget vote in a virtual mini plenary of the National Assembly recently, Ms Thoko Didiza said no one could have predicted the blow Covid-19 would inflict when the President tabled the State of the Nation Address and presented the government's plans for the year in February, **reports Mava Lukani.**

The closure of some sectors of the economy has meant the loss of agricultural markets and has threatened the job security of farm workers. "Covid-19 became an added blow given the challenges that we were already facing in respect of drought, animal and plant disease outbreaks," said Ms Didiza.

In the previous months "we have seen the impact of Covid-19 to food security in our own country, in the continent and globally. In our own country it has shown the fault lines that still exist in our agriculture and food system."

The government has intervened to cushion smallholder and commercial farmers from the disruptions caused by the pandemic. Small holding and subsistence farmers have been assisted through production inputs, animal feed, agricultural remedies and livestock stock

remedies through the voucher system.

Government has had to adjust budget allocations for competing needs. The initial allocation for the department in the February budget vote was R16.8 billion. This was re-adjusted to R14.4 billion during the supplementary budget vote on 24 June 2020, a reduction of just under R2.4 billion. "We are appreciative that these cuts did not affect critical Medium-Term allocations for biosecurity and supporting exports amounting to R495.1 million and R500 million to finalise land claims."

The cuts were not extended to the Agricultural Research Council, which was already experiencing cash flow challenges. The department's R14.4 billion allocation for the 2020/2021 budget also includes transfers to provincial departments of agriculture, as part of the division of revenue. These allocations relate to: Ilima/Letsema Conditional Grants – R428 million; CASP Infrastructure Grant – R965 million; CASP Upgrade of Colleges – R25 million; and CASP Extension Services – R214 million.

Other transfers are to agricultural entities, such as the Agricultural Research Council, which received a grant of R1.271 billion. The National Agriculture Marketing Council received an amount R47.4

Covid-19 Budget cuts A Blow To Agricultural Sector Still Reeling From Drought, Says Minister Didiza

"We reiterate our call to farmers, farmworkers and traditional leaders to work together to expand food production and ensure food security."

million and the Ingonyama Trust received an amount of R22 million.

The impact of cuts in the budget has meant that the department has had to make difficult trade-offs in an effort to impact a little as possible on the delivery of services within the sector. The greatest portion of the cuts of R1.89 billion within the department are in the programmes that deliver on food security, land redistribution and restitution.

These programmes are central to achieving food security and economic transformation through redress and equitable access to producer support. Food security had cuts of R939 million, land redistribution and tenure reform R544 million and land restitution R403 million.

Ms Didiza told Members of the NA that the rural development budget had a cut of R199.7 million, which will negatively affect rural social infrastructure and schemes to improve irrigation. The department's budget allocation has been cut from R 16.8 billion to R14.4 billion.

Participating in the budget debate, the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Inkosi Mandla Mandela said: "We are encouraged by the confidence that the government has in the

agricultural sector to transform the ownership patterns of our economy."

He said the support and the inclusion of small and emerging black farmers into the mainstream agricultural economy is an essential ingredient towards radical economic transformation of the sector. It is important to ensure increased investment into rural infrastructure support programmes that will support farmer production units located in the 44 districts of South Africa. "Equally we need investment in social infrastructure such as rural roads and this will contribute to the effective realisation of

urban-rural market linkages, and thus yield positive economic spin-offs for our rural agricultural communities."

Budget cuts have impacted on one of the most important departmental programmes of the department, namely food security. "We reiterate our call to farmers, farmworkers and traditional leaders to work together to expand food production and ensure food security." 🌾



Inkosi Zwelivelile Mandela

Deputy Minister says job creation remains her department's chief mandate

The department aims to support 6 000 small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Deputy Minister of the Department of Labour and Employment, Ms Boitumelo Moloi, told National Council of Provinces (NCOP) permanent delegates how the Department of Labour and Employment will utilise its adjusted budget to respond to challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic, **reports Abel Mputing.**

Appearing before a recent virtual plenary of the NCOP for the department's Budget Vote debate, Ms Moloi said job creation still remains the department's chief mandate. The R3.6 billion in the adjusted budget will be prioritised to secure employment and to initiate programmes to give employees easy access to the department's Covid-19 relief services.

"Currently, we have 24 mobile units in all the provinces, aimed at taking our services to the people. This is done to reduce the cost of services, of reaching our labour centres and as a means of maintaining the principles of social distancing through our online registration facilities," Ms Moloi said.

One example of this is the revamp of Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) centres to improve their efficiency. Currently, its services have improved from a 48% to a 97% efficiency rate.

Well over 10% of the adjusted budget will be used to activate and retain job opportunities. "The department has set aside

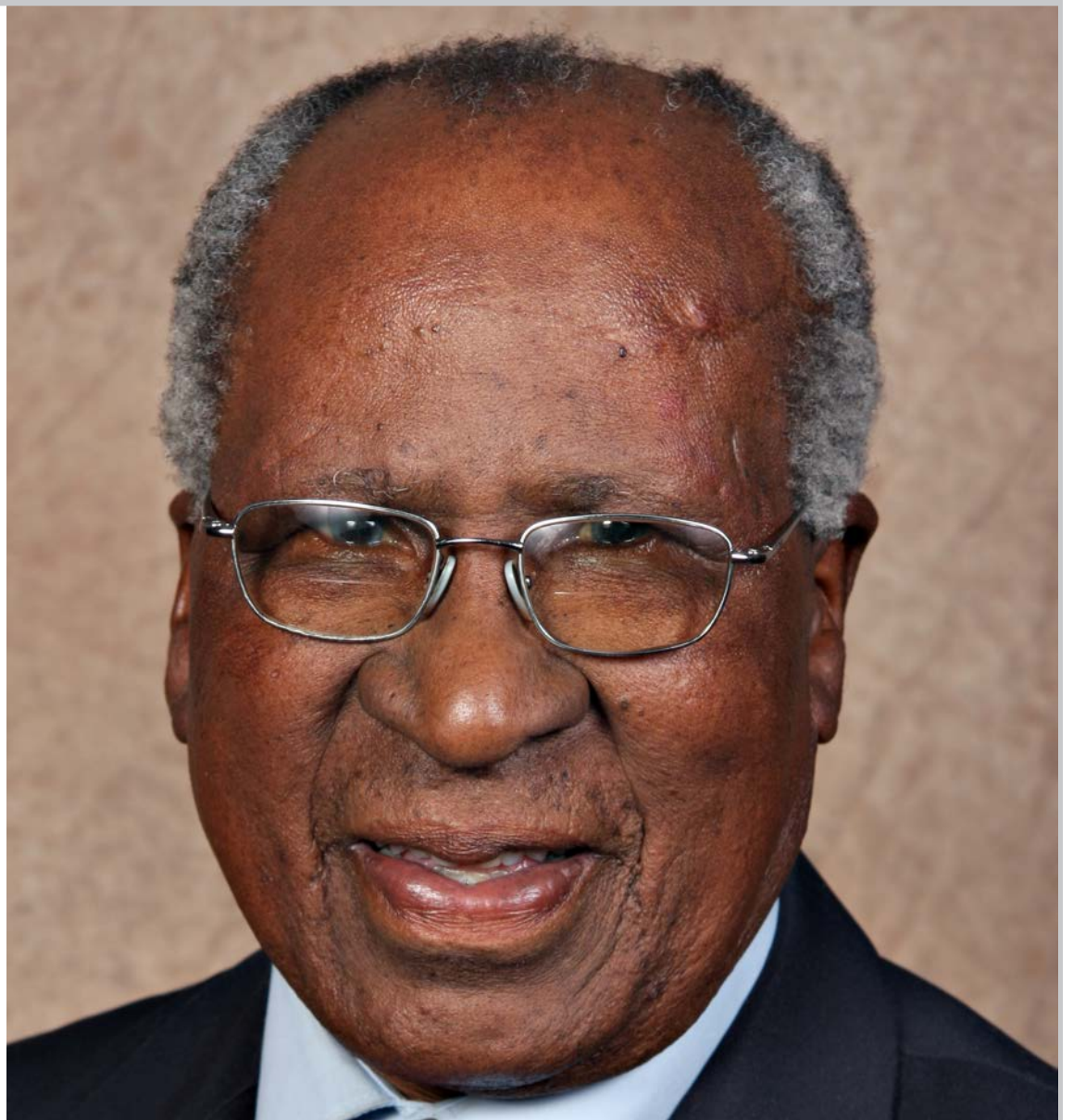
well over R343 million from the UIF to create jobs and training opportunities for the youth and women. And R5.9 million has been set aside for the Centre for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) to preserve jobs.

In addition, the department aims to support 6 000 small and medium-sized enterprises. Given the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown regulations, the department requires a "consummate response in line with government's social solidarity. To date, R34 billion has been distributed to employers and employees to provide income support".

In addition, the Compensation Fund has ensured that workers "get compensated for contracting the virus while at work, including the temporary disbursement of medicine, covering of their medical expenses, and of survivors' benefits and funerals in cases of death".

Ms Moloi also commended the National Economic Development and Labour Council for providing leadership and directives in various sectors of the economy.

As the pandemic moves from a health crisis into an economic crisis, the department's priority is job creation and job protection. "Hence we have asked for more funds for the CCMA to avert large-scale retrenchments." 🌟



End of a special generation as the last Rivonia trialist passes on

Ms Thandi Modise and National Council of Provinces Chairperson Mr Amos Masondo, sent condolences on behalf of Parliament to the Mlangeni family; the African National Congress and friends of Dr Mlangeni.

Dr Andrew Mlangeni, who passed away in July, was a founding Member of South Africa's democratic Parliament. He served in many parliamentary committees as a paragon of selflessness, integrity and dedication.

After hearing about Dr Mlangeni's passing, the Presiding Officers of Parliament, led by National Assembly Speaker Ms Thandi Modise and National Council of Provinces Chairperson Mr Amos Masondo, sent condolences on behalf of Parliament to the Mlangeni family, the African National Congress and friends of Dr Mlangeni. The Presiding Officers describes Dr Mlangeni

as an unassuming and humble leader, "a remarkable patriot and the moral conscience of our nation until the end. South Africa has lost a father, a warrior, a long-standing servant and the glue that bound our nation".

Dr Mlangeni was the sole surviving Rivonia trialist. He was released after 27 long years in prison in 1989 together with Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrda, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoaledi and Oscar Mpetha.

At his funeral, speakers one after another said he was the last freedom fighter of a generation of freedom

fighters who were driven by a commitment to the freedom of all South Africans. Former president Thabo Mbeki described Dr Mlangeni, as an outstanding leader and a revolutionary. Theirs' was a generation prepared to pay the heavy price of laying down their lives to attain that freedom.

Dr Mlangeni was born on 6 June 1925 in Matoding (later renamed Maynhartfontein farm) outside Bethlehem in the Free State. He was the ninth of 12 children of Ntate Matia and Mama Aletta Mlangeni, and was one of the couple's three sets of twins. His parents were farm labour tenants. 🌟