

Budget Vote 14: Statistics South Africa

Speech by Joe McGluwa MP, DA Shadow Deputy Minister in the Presidency

House Chairperson, ignorance of statistical information results into policy and planning failures.

Be that as it may, statistics has many customs.

In this particular case, it advances Government not only to make good decisions for its citizens but also to deal with issues of uncertainty.

Statistics has become an integral part of almost all spheres of modern life.

No modern government can conduct its normal functions and deliver its services and implement its development agenda without relying on good and credible statistics.

Program 3 is allocated a budget of R291.1 million for the 2023/24 financial year and provide us with Statistics on where people live, their conditions, what jobs they do, domestic tourism, transport, education, gender.

Statistics further exposes and helps explain the facts that characterise our population, society, economy, health, education, environment, and nation as a whole.

Statistics give us a benchmark of the real state of the South Africa.

Our state of the nation is characterised by poor planning, poor decision making and a government who fail to prioritise statistics according to importance.

Statistics SA can be seen as a command and as one of the major information tools, but sometimes seems overlooked when it comes to budgeting.

The living standards of South Africans have worsened by the day, through a high unemployment rate, poor service delivery, unsafe cities, high cases of gender-based violence, poverty, inequality, corruption and more than 120 days of load shedding in 2023 alone.

House Chairperson, signs of load-shedding appeared as early as 2004 under former President Mbeki.

This was worsened by the ignoring of statistics regarding the planning around the increase in population growth, urbanisation and maintenance of aging infrastructure on energy power plants. This all landed on deaf ears.

We also see Minister Gordhan now appealing against the recent High Court judgment on load shedding, but Minister Gordhan should be reminded that he was part of the governing party when all these statistics were ignored.

Currently, indicators show that Statistics South Africa, which is a well performing department, has over the years experienced budget shortfalls regarding compensation of employees. If these signs of budget shortfalls are ignored, Stats SA will start to collapse, just as we have seen with Eskom, whereby it will be unable to produce quality, credible and reliable statistics for the country and international communities.

There is a high turnover rate in the institution due to the department being unable to retain specialised scarce skills employees which are difficult to get such as statisticians and mathematicians. As much as we do understand the concept of limited resources and other challenges, our government should not allow Stats SA to be destroyed through inadequate budget allocations.

The overall budget in 2023/24 financial year is R2,69 billion, which is a decrease of approximately 11.14 percent as compared to R2,99 billion allocated in 2022/23 financial year.

This mean that poor STATS SA must do more with less.

According to the Cabinet decision pronouncements of 20 October 2022, the then Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation has made announcement that “Cabinet approved the submission to Parliament of the Statistics Amendment Bill of 2022 for further processing. The Bill proposes the amendment to the Statistics Act, 1999 (Act 6 of 1999). The amendments provide for the development and implementation of the National Statistics System that supports evidence-based decisions”. The question remains to the Honourable Minister in the Presidency Ms Ntshavheni, where the Statistics Amendment Bill is as per the decision taken by the Cabinet on 20th October 2022?

This Bill is long overdue and I am aware that the department commenced with this process of the Bill in the fifth administration. There is no urgency from this government in processing the amendments to the existing outdated legislation to adapt to the current challenges.

The Democratic Alliance are now considering tabling its own Private Members Stats Bill before the end of this sixth term, should this Government not wake up.

We welcome the Transition from paper to digital business process.

A new way of conducting business in most developed countries.

This transition will reduce unwanted office accommodation in the provinces and districts offices since the technology allows hybrid working models.

Reduction of office accommodation due to hybrid models should also consider reduction of redundant staff whom might not be needed in the new business model as a way of managing the wage bill.

To avoid retrenchments redundant staff members should be redeployed to those departments in need of capacity.

Savings through office accommodation should be use towards the funding of critical position of Stats South Africa witch currently has a 19.7 percent Vacancy rate as at 31 December 2022.