

POST-SONA 2019 STATEMENT: EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND BASIC SERVICES IN SCHOOLS

8 February 2019

On 7 February 2019, President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered the 2019 State of the Nation Address (SONA). During his speech, the President mentioned the establishment of a firm foundation for a comprehensive ECD programme that is central to the education system. The Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM) welcomes the migration of responsibility for ECD centres from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and the process of two years for compulsory ECD for all children before grade 1. The movement of ECD from DSD to DBE is important, especially, because ECD prepares children for school and is, therefore, important for the learning and development of children. It is imperative that age-appropriate, child-centred learning spaces be prioritised, when the ECD is moved to the basic education, in particular, because children at the age of 0-4 do not learn in the same way as older children do.

While the President noted over 700,000 children accessed early childhood education in the last financial year, in his speech for the 2018 SONA, he mentioned that there is “nearly a million children in early childhood development facilities”. However, it is important to note that both figures are below the actual numbers. The delivery of ECD services requires an understanding of the number and distribution of young children. Therefore, there should be improved reporting on the exact number of children accessing ECD services, and those still lacking access. It is also critical to understand the conditions that children live in to provide needs-based services.

The most recent reports available from the DSD reported that the maintenance budget of the ECD grant was underutilized. For example, through the maintenance budget, the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development (ECSD) targeted 96 ECD centres to upgrade, of which none benefited. In contrast to this, the Free State managed to upgrade all the 79 targeted ECD centres. Similar to the Free State, Gauteng upgraded all the 16 ECD centres that were targeted. Also, five provinces, namely KwaZulu-Natal (117), Limpopo (96), Mpumalanga (62), Northern Cape (65), and Western Cape (13) upgraded all ECD centres that were targeted. North West only managed to upgrade 10 of the 46 ECD centres that were targeted. It appears that only Eastern Cape and North West failed to meet their set targets, due to late appointments in the recruitment process.

A key question is therefore whether these challenges will be addressed with the movement of ECD services from social development to basic education, especially, given the history of poor performance in the infrastructure grant of the DBE.

The President also mentioned that the safety of learners in schools is significant – relating this to the cases of Michael Komape and Lumka Mkethwa who died as a result of drowning in pit latrines. The PSAM welcomes the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) initiative for schools, launched on 14 August 2018. Reporting on this initiative, the President noted that 699 schools have been provided with safe and appropriate sanitation facilities since the launch of the initiative. While we welcome this achievement, we call for a speedy delivery to ensure that all the approximately 4,000 schools (mentioned by the President) still without appropriate sanitation facilities are addressed. There is a need for the improvement of performance by the DBE in providing proper sanitation facilities in schools. DBE is not only underperforming on the provision of sanitation to schools, but also through the provision of water where only 43 schools were provided with water from the target of 344 in the 2017/18 financial year. This

underperformance was also visible in the first quarter of the 2018/19 financial year, where the department provided water to 64 schools from the target of 325.

Therefore, while the President mentioned the migration of the responsibility for ECD centres from social development to basic education, and reporting on progress in the eradication of unsafe and inappropriate sanitation facilities, PSAM makes the following recommendations:

- When the Minister of Finance, Mr Tito Mboweni, delivers the 2019 Budget Speech, he should provide plans for the National Treasury to regularly review the ECD grant when moved to the DBE. He should also indicate where the money for the ECD grant will come from.
- Provinces should assess all the ECD centres to determine the budget required for maintenance.
- More clarity should be provided on how the ECD grant will be structured when moved to basic education.
- There should be improved support and monitoring at rural provinces to ensure that the ECD grant is used effectively when moved to the DBE. In other words, the National Treasury, Department of Basic Education and the relevant provincial treasuries should provide comprehensive support and assistance to provinces to address the ECD grant implementation challenges.
- National Treasury should provide assistance to provinces that underspent and underperformed in the first two years of the ECD grant. In other words, financial management support should be provided to the basic education to ensure an improved spending and performance of the ECD grant.
- More research needs to be undertaken to ascertain the number of children accessing ECD services in the country.

The PSAM, therefore, urges for adequately resourced implementation plans for the maintenance of ECD centres and eradication of unsafe and inappropriate sanitation facilities.

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