TUESDAY, 09 JULY 2019

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PROCEEDINGS OF MINI PLENARY – COMMITTEE ROOM E249

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Members of the mini-plenary session met in Committee Room E249 at 16:30.

House Chairperson Mr C T Frolick took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayers or meditation.

APPROPRIATION BILL

Debate on Vote No 12 – Statistics SA:

The MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY: Hon House Chairperson, hon chairperson and members of the portfolio committee, hon Members of this House, the staff members of the South African Statistics Council, the Statistician-General, Mr Risenga Maluleke, who is part of the audience, our distinguished guests in the gallery which include my daughter, ladies and gentlemen, it is my honour to present the 2019-20 Budget of Statistics SA, an institution which is so critical in our pursuit of building the South Africa we want.

We deliver this budget just a few weeks after the people of South Africa entrusted us with the mandate to govern this beautiful country of ours for the next five years. We again want to express our sincere gratitude to South Africans for granting us another opportunity to continue in our pursuit of delivering a better life for all South Africans. We assure you that we will not rest until we have implemented all programmes set out in our elections manifesto.

The key priorities of this sixth administration were articulated by our President in his state of the nation address. During the Sona, His Excellency, President Cyril Ramaphosa, called upon all of us to prioritise the reduction of poverty, and the growth and transformation of our economy to serve all people of South Africa. The President also called upon us to prioritise consolidating the social wage through reliable and quality basic services focussed on education, skills and health, spatial integration, human settlements and local government as well as building a capable ethical and developmental state, amongst other priorities.

As it stands, our economy is not growing fast enough. In fact, Statistics SA informed us that the economy swung by 3,2% in quarter one of 2019, which shows that a lot more needs to happen in the economic space. Unemployment as the biggest driver of poverty has been stubbornly above the 25% mark over the last ten years, with the last quarter being 27,6%.

The picture painted by statistics is not always rosy; however, we do not want a rosy picture for its own sake. The data shows us where the problems are and it provides baseline information which is critical for shaping the improvements needed.

As we deliver this budget speech, we must keep in mind that we are striving to improve the human capital base of the economy. We are searching for ways to reduce inequalities in both per capita income and expenditure. We want to modernise the public service for it to be agile and capable of delivering to our people. We want to sufficiently industrialise and diversify as we improve the performance of our economy. Essentially, we want to build an entrepreneurial state which is responsive and also capable of delivering to our people.

Therefore, independent, good, quality official statistics are fundamental for building the capable developmental state we want. Such statistics provide knowledge and insight for us as policy makers and the general public. They illustrate what the state of our nation is and portray the reality of our people’s everyday life. They assist in the identification of needs, in the setting of goals and with monitoring progress. They give us the ability to make decisions informed by scientific evidence. The availability and reliability of scientific evidence also enhances transparency and accountability in our policy-making and implementation processes. It

also makes it easier for government and citizens alike to monitor performance in implementing priority areas.

As an institution for measurement, Statistics SA is responsible for the production and co-ordination of official and other statistics on changing dynamics in the economy, in society and also in the environment. It publishes more than 250 statistics releases each year and compiles statistical research that measures development against the NDP and government's Medium-Term Strategic Framework, in conjunction with global and continental agendas for sustainable development. The work of Statistics SA therefore serves as a reference point of where we are, how far we have traversed to reach our targets and what we still need to do.

Hon members, because of this crucial role played by this institution, we encourage Statistics SA to keep producing statistics independently and free from political and other interferences, as this gives credence to policy-making and implementation processes in our democratic dispensation.

Globally, official statistics are underpinned by the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and in Africa, by the African Charter on Statistics. Our own Statistics Act advances the production and use of official and other statistics in line with these international statistics principles and practices.

As a democratic state, we are very proud of the institution we have built over the past 25 years. Statistics SA is ranked amongst the best in the world when it comes to good statistical practice and transparency. They continue to participate in international statistical development initiatives and discourse to advance statistical practice in South Africa, Africa and the world.

The employees of Statistics SA, with whom I had the pleasure of interacting recently, are among the best-trained statisticians in the world and, in this regard, we have become a victim of our own successes. In recent years we have seen international institutions recruiting some of our most experienced statisticians. These institutions that have poached from us includes the likes of the United Nations, the World Bank and Statistics Australia. In my recent interaction with senior management at Statistics SA, as led by the Statistician-General, Mr Risenga Maluleke, I was informed that the institution experienced a budget cut to the tune of approximately R170 million in 2017-18. I was also informed that this has negatively affected the institution’s ability to cover compensation of employees, thereby leading to its inability to retain critical skills and fill critical vacancies. I have also been informed that the budget cuts have led to overspending on compensation of employees by R92 million in 2018-19 and is projected to overspend by R78 million in 2019-20.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the institution still receives an unqualified audit opinion.

As the executive, we will verify the history of what informs such alleged budget cuts, which has negatively affected the finances of Statistics SA as regards the compensation of employees. We are of the view that it is important to satisfy ourselves of the history and reasoning behind such alleged cuts, particularly as they relate to the institution's ability to compensate its employees.

We will all agree that the current financial situation of Statistics SA is unsustainable. We will therefore engage National Treasury on how best this untenable situation can be addressed to ensure that Statistics SA continues to meet our national demand for statistical information.

Furthermore, because government is not the only client Statistics SA serves, business and other organisation that make use of Statistics SA products in their planning, monitoring and evaluation activities, as well as decision making processes will also be approached with having them make a contribution in order for us to keep Statistics SA ranked among the best in the world.

We are also, through innovation and modernisation, exploring the use of digital platforms to ensure we maintain and improve our level of competitiveness with the Europeans on data. Notwithstanding these

challenges, Statistics SA has continued to deliver statistics on key indicators, such as the gross domestic product, unemployment rates, population estimates, consumer price index, poverty and service delivery indicators as well as fertility and mortality rates in our country.

A new Statistics Council, an independent body which has a responsibility to advise both the Minister and the Statistician-General, was appointed earlier this year. The council promotes and safeguards the integrity of our statistics system on behalf of Statistics SA. The council, under the leadership of Prof David Everatt, has advised me as the Minister responsible for statistics to approve the Work Programme of Statistics SA in line with section 13 of the Statistics Act. Over the medium term, Statistics SA pledges to continue focussing on modernising its operations, implementing statistical reform particularly in statistical co-ordination, and maintaining an adequate supply of statistical information in preparation for and after the national census in 2021-22.

The department has a total budget of R10,7 billion over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework period, of which R7,5 billion is earmarked for operational expenditure and R3,2 billion for spending related to Census 2021. For the 2019-20 financial year, the department will be focussing on the following key priorities to fulfil its mandate: firstly, legislative reform; secondly, priority

roll out and integrated indicator framework; thirdly, maintaining the quality of core statistics; fourthly, integrating, innovating and modernising the statistical value chain; fifthly, preparing for Census 2021; and lastly, driving transformation and organisational reform.

On legislative reform, hon members, we have viewed our statistics legislation and compiled an amendment to the Statistics Act with the aim of driving statistical reform in the country with a particular emphasis on statistical co-ordination, statistical geography, the data revolution, a state-wide statistical service, and institutional arrangements. Based on the outcomes of stakeholder consultations, a draft Statistics Amendment Bill is expected to be tabled in Parliament this year.

An integrated indicator framework has been developed that aligns policy agenda at various levels, such as the sustainable development goals at global level, Agenda 2063 at continental level, the National Development Plan and the Medium-Term Strategic Framework at national levels, provincial growth and development plans at provincial level, and district growth and development plans and integrated development plans at district and local levels. All these form the basis of what needs to be measured by the national statistics system.

During 2019-20, the department will focus on rolling out the integrated indicator framework among organs of state in order to strengthen statistical co-ordination and production in the statistical system. The integrated framework will be used as a guide to inform prioritization of statistical series and operations.

For statistical co-ordination, including legislative reform, R85,7 million has been allocated over the medium term in the National Statistic System sub-programme in the Administration programme. This will assist in the development of a national statistics strategy, the provision of statistical support, and the co-ordination of surveys on behalf of organs of state.

On maintaining the quality of core statistics, Statistics SA delivers more than 250 statistical products annually. In order to sustain this investment and trust of users, and to raise the level of responsiveness to the growing demands, the department will reprioritise and rationalise its resources to ensure that the quality of core statistics is maintained and delivered. During 2019-20, the department will be engaging users on their needs and demands as well as on the rationalisation of statistical products and services.

On integrated innovating and modernizing the statistical value chain, hon members, technology and new statistical methodologies will be our strategic enablers to innovate the statistical value

chain for better efficiency. In 2019-20, the department will continue with the roll-out of the computer-assisted personal interview, CAPI, methodology in its household survey programme. Digitisation of our work methods in line with the expectation of digital services and efficiencies in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution will enable us to deliver faster, smarter and more cost effectively.

As we prepare for Census 2021, we know that conducting a population census is the biggest statistical survey any country and a national statistics agency can undertake.

The design and development of new and innovative collection methodologies with testing and preparatory work for developing the geospatial information frame is scheduled for 2019-20 and will be followed by a pilot census in 2020-21 with the actual census undertaken towards the end of 2021. The department has allocated R145,3 million in 2019-20, R855 million in 2021-22, and 2,2 billion in 2021-22 for this and other activities related to the census.

To conduct a continuous population survey, to measure poverty, the wealth gab and service delivery in South Africa, additional funding of R105,8 million is allocated in 2021-22 to this Poverty and Inequality sub-programme under the Population and Social Statistics programme.

Regarding transformation and organisational reform, members, the transformation and change agenda will drive organisational reform in core functions and operational areas in terms of systems, processes, structures and people. Key focus areas include the implementation of a structure review, reprioritisation and rationalisation of resources as well as developing a new strategic direction for statistical development in 2019-20.

In conclusion, hon members, as a country, we need a robust statistical system that will provide us with the evidential knowledge base to build a capable developmental state and to hold government accountable through evidence-based planning, monitoring and evaluation of impact.

As this is my first budget speech, I would like to thank my predecessors, former Minister, Jeff Radebe and the hon Dr Nkosazana-Dlamini Zuma for their sterling work in overseeing this institution. I take the baton from their capable hands to ensure that this organisation retains its status as one of the leading statistics organisations globally.

We would like to express our gratitude to the SA Statistics Council for their unrelenting support of statistical development in our country. We want to express our appreciation to the Statistician-General, Mr Risenga Maluleke, and to the entire Statistics SA staff for steering this ship and ensuring that it remains on course at all

times. We also want to sincerely express our gratitude to the dedicated members of the Portfolio Committee on Public Service and Administration, Planning Monitoring and Evaluation for engaging us on matters statistics.

We hereby request Parliament and all of you, hon members, to support and approve the budget allocation to Statistics SA for the year 2019-20. I thank you. [Applause.]

Mr T H JAMES: Hon House Chairperson, hon members of the executive, Members of Parliament, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, and fellow South Africans, indeed, it is a great honour for the ANC to continue with the mandate you have given us, and we thank you again for trusting us to deliver on a people’s plan for a better life for all.

The Portfolio Committee on Public Service and Administration as well as Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, having considered the directives of the National Assembly to consider and report on the strategic plans, annual performance plans and budget allocation of Statistics SA tabled by the Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in terms of the Public Finance Management Act ... Section 27 of the Act clearly stipulates that the Minister must table the annual budget for a financial year in the National Assembly before the start of the financial year.

In terms of section 10(1)(c) of the Money Bills Amendment Procedures and Related Matters Act, Act 9 of 2009, the relevant members of Cabinet must table updated strategic plans and annual performance plans for each department, public entity or institution, which must then be referred to the relevant committee for consideration.

In considering the annual performance plan, the committee ensured that the department's budget allocation will provide the country with accurate, quality and reliable statistics for all stakeholders.

The main responsibility of Statistics SA is to provide relevant and accurate statistics by corresponding with internationally approved practice to inform users of the dynamics of the economy and the society. Statistics SA is mandated through the Statistics Act to co-ordinate statistical production amongst organs of the state, the private sector and any other institutions to formulate proper planning, decision-making and monitoring and evaluation of policies and projects.

Statistics SA is guided by 10 fundamental principles of official statistics of the United Nations, as well as the six principles adopted by the African Union in carrying out its duties. The Work Programme of Statistics SA focuses on the envisaged changes to legislation aimed at improving co-ordination of official statistics, implementing and strengthening the community survey — which will provide official statistical information at municipal level — and

bringing the production of gross domestic product, GDP, under one roof.

The National Development Plan, NDP, highlights the need for South Africa to build a state that is capable of playing a developmental and transformative role. This requires the state to formulate and implement policies that support that role. The NDP and the Medium-Term Strategic Framework, MTSF, are informed by statistical information provided by Statistics SA, which publishes more than 200 statistical releases per annum.

Therefore, it is important to remember, as we debate, that budget serves as a vital tool to operationalise government activities towards the achievement of its intended policies as aligned with the Medium-Term Strategic Framework. The budget highlights the constraints and trade-offs in policy choices.

Because of time, I will walk you through key observations and recommendations from the committee. The portfolio committee observed the following matters in relation to Budget Vote 12 of Statistics SA. The committee considered and welcomed Statistics SA Annual Performance Plan for the 2019-20 financial year. The committee was concerned, though, about the high staff turnover at Statistics SA. The budgetary constraints realised in the compensation of employees makes it impossible for the department to retain staff through counteroffers and promotions. Approximately 180 staff members have

left the department for better job offers. Statistics SA has a Retention Policy which is reviewed annually. However, the policy itself cannot retain employees without any monetary value. The high staff turnover impacted negatively on Statistics SA's ability to conduct its surveys.

Budgetary constraints in the compensation of employees impede the institution in the filling of vacancies. The last time Statistics SA filled positions was in October 2016. Statistics SA has 608 vacancies in the 2019-20 financial year, which increased the vacancy rate above the acceptable 10% rate as prescribed by the Public Services Regulations of 2016.

The committee notes that Statistics SA has several senior managers appointed in acting capacities, who, in turn, experience an overload of work due to the institution's inability to fill vacant positions. Senior managers are overworked in some instances, performing dual responsibilities.

The committee supports Statistics SA's gradual move away from manual data collection to more advanced electronic data collection that is affordable, quicker and faster without compromising the quality aspects of the statistics. During the transition period of manual data collection to computer-assisted personal interview, Statistics SA was encouraged to invest in reskilling and retraining enumerators on the electronic data collection.

The committee welcomes the declaration by the Statistician-General of Statistics SA on the readiness to embark on the process of collecting data for Census 2021. Statistics SA ran the test last year. In 2019, Statistics SA will pilot and in 2020 rehearsal will be conducted as part of preparations for Census 2021. Statistics SA will be going out to seek additional suggestions on critical areas citizens would like covered in the census scope. However, Statistics SA highlights some of the challenges encountered, which include the inaccessibility of gated communities impacting on the efficiency of the department's execution of its mandate.

The committee notes that Statistics SA has discontinued certain projects due to budgetary constraints experienced across the public service. Statistics SA was encouraged to devise a strategy to continue implementing its set projects with the allocated budget. The committee urged Statistics SA to highlight funded and unfunded projects in the future as an impact in the country.

In terms of legislative reforms, the committee notes the progress made thus far with regard to the amendment to the Statistics Act of 1999 that intends to drive statistical reform in the country, with a particular emphasis on statistical co-ordination, statistical geography, data revolution, a state-wide statistical service and institutional arrangements.

The amendments will further ensure co-ordination between organs of state for the purpose of enhancing efficiency in the statistical system. The committee was pleased that most government institutions use statistics as the evidence base in policy-making. Evidence-based policy-making is promoted across government, particularly in planning. The committee further encouraged Statistics SA to continue providing government with sound and reliable data to inform evidence-based policy decisions and choices. The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation has to ensure statistical data is utilised in policy decision-making when developing the Medium-Term Strategic Framework for 2020-24 and other government programmes.

The committee was pleased by the Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation giving assurances to maintain and protect the independence of Statistics SA in discharging its mandate as per the Statistics Act. Statistics SA was urged to consider the Auditor-General’s findings to improve areas highlighted for corrective action. The committee therefore recommends as follows: Statistics SA, through the Minister of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation must ensure that it expeditiously finalises the amendment of the Statistics Act of 1999 in order to drive statistical reform in the country. The amendments to the Act should firmly respond to the evolving environment, with particular emphasis on statistical co-ordination, the data revolution, a state-wide statistical service and institutional

arrangements. Statistics SA should continue to enhance and enrich the space of the policy-making decisions and outcomes across a wide range of sectors by producing reliable and timeous statistics. Statistics SA should always strive to be an institution that statistically guides public policy when there is an open debate on matters of national importance, such as proposed amendments to section 25 of the Constitution.

Statistics SA should strive to find amicable solutions to the manner in which the Auditor-General audits the institution in order to develop mutual understanding. The Auditor-General should take into cognisance the nature and complexity of Statistics SA's work when auditing the institution. Audits must not impact on the independence of Statistics SA.

Statistics SA should invest in retraining and reskilling its employees as the department gradually migrates from manual data collection to electronic data collection for the purpose of delivering a successful census. Statistics SA should provide the committee with a comprehensive report on its readiness to conduct Census 2021 before March 2020.

The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation and National Treasury should find a lasting funding solution to Statistics SA's budgetary constraints as these impede the institution's ability to fill vacancies and retain highly competent staff. The budgetary

constraints impact negatively on Statistics SA’s efficiency in implementing its mandate. This critical policy area should be given urgent attention.

In conclusion, Statistics SA remains a key strategic player in the transformative agenda by producing evidence-based, quality and accurate official statistics for the country. Therefore, the committee urges the House to approve and adopt Budget Vote 12. Thank you very much. [Applause.]

Mr G K Y CACHALIA: Hon Chairperson, make no mistake, Statistics SA provides a service in the production of a public good that is of immeasurable importance.

Let’s preface this with reference to the 80:20 principle. This rule, otherwise known as the Pareto Principle, was first observed by an Italian engineer-turned-economist. He observed in his country that 80% of the land was owned by 20% of the population. He also noticed that 20% of the plants in his garden yielded 80% of the produce.

Thus was born the 80:20 rule, one which states in its generalised form that 20% of the input generates 80% of the output. It still has multiple applications over 100 years after its discovery. For instance, consultants will tell you that 80% of the insights are yielded by 20% of the analysis. This is clearly a very important principle, which many still need to understand. Therefore, when

evaluating the potential impact of Statistics SA in the provision and analysis of data that allows for a cogent evaluation of where we should be playing, and how we should be winning, with what, and to what effect, I believe we should err on the side of budgetary generosity, not on budgetary cuts.

These are statisticians, and with proper monitoring of line expenses such as administration and procurement, they should be given the wherewithal to provide reliable and high quality data and information — the provision of which is increasingly important to our economy and our society. These are not like some typical tenderpreneurs, and rent-seekers that have embedded themselves into the DNA of the ANC. They provide a crucial service.

That said, the world is awash with data. There is a growing confusion between official statistics and less reliable data which may give more weight to opinions and impressions. Official statistics therefore need to stand out as a trustworthy source of information.

Big Data presents a challenge. Every day, 2,5 quintillion bytes of data are created — so much that 90% of the data in the world today have been created in the last two years. Proper exploitation and correct analysis of the data is the key success factor in being able to make better decisions. Demand for statistics is rapidly growing. An increasingly globalised and interconnected world creates new

needs for accurate information about economies and societies. But, users' needs are becoming more complex and individualised, and more detailed information is needed, for instance, on small population groups and geographic localities.

There are opportunities presented by these developments which, if they are wise, official statisticians would take in order to build on previous successes. But there are also threats. Failure to recognise these or to react to them with complacency could have the most serious consequences. At worst, official statistics could find itself partly largely replaced by other information and data providers.

So, let's exploit the comparative advantage of official statistics. Let's improve the value of statistics by putting users of statistics truly at the centre by understanding users and non-users who are potential users and their information needs. Let's design statistics for everyday life, and let's innovate.

Let's find the right strategic partners by establishing private-public partnerships on data that are demand driven and required by both the public sector and the private sector to produce data to drive the economy.

For example, Deutsche Bahn, the German railway company, publishes for general consumption data sets on everything concerning their

industry — how high, how wide, etc. Think of how the Passenger Rail Agency of SA, Prasa, could have benefitted from such information. What this data allows individuals to do is to create apps to improve services that create and drive business and improve lives.

So, we need to share and learn and stay abreast of best practices across the statistical community. The threats and opportunities facing official statistics are constantly changing. However successful we have been in the past, the future can be assured only by actively responding to these changing circumstances.

Data are the lifeblood of decision-making and the raw material for accountability. Without high-quality data providing the right information on the right things at the right time, designing, monitoring and evaluating effective policies becomes almost impossible. So, too, does the ability of businesses and people to make well-founded decisions. As the volumes of available data increase, quality should become the decisive factor when choosing a data source.

Armed with data provided in this manner we can be data-driven and not ideology driven. We have collectively accrued masses of data and facts to the extent that we now refer to our present period as the Age of Information. Surely this large body of facts plays a central role in our decision-making about the world. Am I right?

Well, unfortunately not. In fact, we often eschew facts for ideology.

It is clear that we can dismiss facts out of hand in preference of ideology. Even more troubling is the fact that we can also eschew ideology or its content to follow our social and political identities. Unfortunately, being drawn to ideology over facts is an all-to-present feature of human psychology, whether one is on the political left or the political right. The way to deal with it is a hunger for facts, evidence and data. That is how we in the DA hold the executive to account. I thank you.

Ms M O MOKAUSE: Chair, the Economic Freedom Fighters would like to thank the Statistician-General, Mr Maluleke and his team, for the presentation at the EFF parliamentary and legislature induction, which was held late last month. We invited Statistics SA because, as the EFF, we acknowledge that Statistics SA is one of the most important institutions in an era in which the advancement of humanity through digital technology and artificial intelligence is at the forefront of solutions to our societal ills.

We appreciate that Statistics SA has provided dependable information, in terms of population growth and demographics. However, the agency is unable to provide dependable information on poverty. Many of our people fall into poverty and the level of poverty has intensified. We don’t have enough information to respond

swiftly. The collection of information on poverty must be one of the areas of funding. It must be a permanently non-negotiable pillar of a responsible government, instead of keeping this bloated Cabinet and unnecessary Ministers whose names some of us cannot even remember. But, they are here. The salaries that are paid to them should be redirected towards funding agencies such as Statistics SA. We don't need a Minister in The Presidency. We don't need the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. We all know that the only purpose of this department is to create jobs and reward those who defended President Cyril Ramaphosa, during the questionable 2019 campaign.

During the Fifth Parliament the EFF supported the Statistics SA Budget Vote every year and further made a consistent submission to call on Parliament to increase Statistics SA's budget. The former Statistician-General, Dr Pali Lehohla and the current Statistician-General, Mr Maluleke, have both complained about poor funding. Statistics SA recruits people and trains them, only to lose them to the private sector because it can't offer them competitive salaries.

As if this was not enough, despite consensus about high vacancy rates and despite lambasting Statistics SA for its poor talent retention strategy and despite the EFF's cry for resources to be allocated to Statistics SA, the ruling party was happy to sit on the sidelines and watch while Treasury cut Statistics SA's salary budget by over R140 million in the previous financial year. This, while the

President increased the number of useless Deputy Ministers. [Interjections.]

This, in part, explains why vacancy rates increased from 9,5% in 2014 when we arrived here in Parliament, to just under 14% today. The Statistician-General told us that a report on femicide and the circumstances of women in South Africa had to be withdrawn because of a lack of capacity. We are not surprised by the systematic and deliberate sabotage and collapse of such an important institution. The ruling party has no intention or interest in using statistical data to inform, enrich and change policy decisions to improve the lives of ordinary South Africans. Everything is about them.

Nevertheless, we would like to call on Statistics SA to work with the available resources to expand its reach. Households must have access to real-time information, so as to make informed family, financial and employment plans. This means expanding Statistics SA's footprint, to make it easy and possible for people in far-flung and remote places to access information. This means people in Msinga and Insingayethu in the Eastern Cape, uMkhanyakude in KwaZulu-Natal and Matule in Limpopo must have access to Statistics SA's services.

Churches, non-profit organisations and stokvels must know of an office which they can visit to find credible information in presentations that are easy to read and understand. Students and learners at institutions of higher learning and schools must have

access to the work of Statistics SA so as to enrich their learning experience, stimulate interest in solution-based learning and encourage participation in a digital economy.

We must capacitate Statistics SA to ensure that each municipality has a statistics office to inform their IDPs, their annual plans and their broader engagement with communities.

However, all of this will not be possible if we don't do something about the price of data. To deny people access to affordable data is to deny them access to information, and that's a criminal offence. One of the immediate solutions to the challenges facing Statistics SA is to increase Statistics SA's budget by an additional R55 million with an annual increase over the medium term.

Statistics SA must draw up a proposal on how it is going to expand its footprints to ensure accessibility, and table it in Parliament within six months. Statistics SA must table a proposal on how it will work with institutions of higher learning to train more mathematics students, in line with the future human resource needs of the organisation. Statistics SA must also develop technological capacity to protect the credibility of information.

On other platforms, the EFF will continue the call for data to fall. This is to ensure that our people get information freely. Access to

statistical information is a human right. Thank you, Chair.

[Applause.]

Mr M HLENGWA: Hon Chairperson, I think at the outset we must all acknowledge the fact that the budget cut to Statistics SA is a travesty of justice and a travesty for planning. This budget cut makes it fundamentally difficult for Statistics SA to actually fulfil its mandate in a manner which is necessary for a futuristic outlook. This is something which needs the attention of Parliament because, while there is a lot of money for stealing, money for corruption, and money for looting, there is no money for what is essential for national planning and national progress. The work of Statistics SA is incredibly important as it is the custodian of all raw data and analysis which inform the very work we do as Members of Parliament and the work of government.

Our whole representative democracy is based on the work of Statistics SA. It ensures that each community gets the right number of representatives in government because representation is based on population and therefore, an up-to-date tally is crucial. Accuracy is of the utmost importance in this regard for effective governance.

It also helps with the equitable distribution of public funds for educational programmes, healthcare, law enforcement and highways. It is, therefore, particularly important that the department makes considerable efforts to ensure that they improve in accurately

capturing and producing population and social statistics in rural and underdeveloped areas, so as to inform the relevant departments of the depth and breadth of poverty-stricken people in order to facilitate better service delivery.

Evidence-based policy-making remains key to this country’s success. However, what is also key is the statistics consulted. One can find statistics to support almost any argument. Key would be to know which ones to consult and formulate government policy around it, as we do now live in the age and era of fake news and therefore, by extension, fake statistics.

The last census conducted in 2011 was a great success and we trust that the department and the relevant bodies are busy with their forward planning for the next census in 2021-22. We look forward to hearing from the Minister in this regard as we fast move towards 2021. He did touch on this but, of course, more information will be required.

Furthermore, we must also incorporate the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution into government departments. Statistics SA should be first in this regard if we are to be better able to capture information across our country without leaving anyone behind.

Statistics SA requires the full support of government and Parliament. It needs to be independent too so as to ensure that it can advise government on interventions and risks.

I must firstly react to two very important things which were raised by the chairperson of the committee because I think we are on thin ice when we now, midstream, want to change the manner in which the Auditor-General does his work. If we are to respect the independence of the Statistics SA, we must equally respect the independence of the Auditor-General. It is when we start to venture down the avenue of wanting to strike compromises that we render the audit process in itself compromised.

Secondly, the issue was raised about the amendments to the Statistics Act. I think it will be a dereliction of duty for Parliament to wait on the executive or to outsource that responsibility. In this very Parliament, members can now introduce Private Members Bills thanks to the IFP going to the Constitutional Court. Therefore, we cannot wait for the executive. We are not just law passers; rather, we are lawmakers. If we recognise that there are shortcomings in the Act and in the legislation, we must act on that because otherwise we'll become the rubber-stamping institution of the executive that just processes what has been given to us.

I am calling for the committee to take its rightful place in the strategic position of lawmaking and to be proactive because

otherwise, we don’t know ... the Minister may only arrive in two to three years’ time. We don’t know what his schedule is like but we can determine here that we take that independence forward.

Finally, it is important that we emphasise that duplication in the collation of information and data remains a fundamental problem within the state’s machinery because it enables government departments to select and cherry pick what it is they use and what they don’t use.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M C Dikgale): Thank you, hon member. Hon Kwankwa?

Mr M HLENGWA: Nginemizuzu eyishumi nesithupha Sihlalo. Imizuzu isekhona. Miningi lemizuzu. [I have 16 minutes, Chair. That’s a lot of minutes.]

It is important, therefore, that we ensure that Statistics SA holds the strategic centre of all data and information so that we can have a credible benchmark and a sounding board ... [Inaudible.] In this regard, we support the Budget Vote and congratulate Statistics SA on a job well done moving forward. I thank you. [Time expired.]

Mr N L S KWANKWA: Chairperson and hon members, the UDM supports Budget Vote 12.

Firstly, Minister Mthembu, congratulations on your appointment as Minister. We hope that, going forward, you will indeed monitor implementation and evaluate it in order to ensure that things are done properly in government.

The reports Statistics SA produces help facilitate the oversight work of Parliament over the work of government in particular in institutions apart from the important role they play in ensuring that the information is produced for public consumption.

This is because the work that Statistics SA produces facilitates - as already indicated earlier - proper planning decision-making and monitoring and evaluation of policies and projects which government implements on a daily basis. This is a very critical point. From our perspective, we see a lot of money being invested in planning, monitoring and evaluation, but no monitoring actually takes place when it comes to projects that government implements on a daily basis. That is why, when you go to the various departments, you will find that most projects miss their deadlines.

The other point concerns monies that are channelled for service delivery, but which are actually used by or channelled into the pockets of politicians instead of being used properly.

What is important is that when we talk about this Fourth Industrial Revolution we must not get lost in the process by discussing it in a

very elitist sense, because whatever information you produce you need to make sure that it is still accessible and consumable by the ordinary members of the public. When we try to align ourselves to the fourth phase of industrial revolution we think that we must only consider the elite or have an elitist argument or approach to it, which would problematic, because you will be calling for a revolution!

It is the same Statistics SA that produces information for the government around unemployment figures, levels of poverty, and levels of inequality. However, not much in terms of policy development has been done to try to address those issues. So, it's one thing to produce information, but it's another to be able to use it properly, as we implement the strategy going forward. Meaning, in other words, this department had a very critical role to play in trying to ensure that there is proper implementation and proper monitoring of the performance across the various departments.

We want to state, for instance, that in the past there were discussions. I think it was in the fourth democratic Parliament that there were discussions between Statistics SA ... Some officials from Statistics SA were going to develop a programme that parliamentarians could use to access information about what is happening in our constituencies so that, even from our perspective, there could be proper monitoring and evaluation of the things that are happening in our constituencies. I don't know what happened to

that programme. It could have helped us MPs to improve our constituency work. I think, Minister Mthembu, it is one of the issues that you need to revisit because we need practical steps rather than abstract theoretical debates around these issues in order for us to have an impact, otherwise...

... siza kumana sibhuda nje abantu bakuthi babe belamba simana sikhupha iinkcukacha-manani babe abantu bethu bengaboni mohluko. Siyabulela. [Ixesha liphelile.] Ubungenakuze ungandingxameli. Ndiyabulela. *(Translation of isiXhosa paragraph follows.)*

[...we will be beating around the bush while our people are starving and we will keep on providing statistics while our people do not see any change at all. We thank you. I am not surprised that you stopped me. I thank you. [Time expired.]]

Ms M T KIBI: Hon Chair of the House, Ministers and Deputy Ministers, hon chairperson and members of the portfolio committee, the deputy chairperson of the Statistics Council, Mr Assam, our distinguished guests in the gallery, ladies and gentlemen, today as we debate Budget Votes, we are reminded of the work and planning that goes into these budgets, much of which is made easier thanks to Statistics SA’s statistical releases which contain important information ranging from economic to functional data that is integral to the delivery of services by national government. The trust and confidence of South Africans, the continent, international

agencies and potential investors, amongst other stakeholders, remains solid. Therefore, in highlighting Statistics SA's transparency, crucial in strengthening governance in public institutions, we as the ANC will continue to ensure that it thrives and fulfils its mandate uninterrupted.

According to the Statistics Act, the purpose of official statistics is to assist organs of state, businesses, other organisations and the public in the planning, decision-making and monitoring or assessment of policies. With that said, I have no doubt that today's debate will centre around the four core red flags which were presented by Statistics SA to the portfolio committee.

The first is the increasing demand for statistical information on a national, continental and global scale.

The second concerns the budget cuts will greatly impact on administration and salaries. If the Income and Expenditure Survey and the Living Conditions Survey are not fully funded, the impact on poverty estimates, the consumer price index basket and national accounts will be great.

The third is in regard to skills levels, and we are witnessing a declining skills base. We cannot fill critical vacancies, and a vacancy rate at 17,2% means that the current staff is overstretched.

The fourth red flag is an indicator that the supply for fundamental statistics will be at risk, translating to declining quality over time, meaning discontinuing integrative statistical products and environmental accounts products.

The report consequently makes it mandatory for us to be proactive in dealing with the red flags and all warning signs so that Statistics SA's responsibility for the production and co-ordination of official and other statistics, on changing dynamics in the economy, society and the environment as the country focusses on the National Development Plan's vision of a state that plays a developmental and transformative role in the lives of its people.

True, the budget for the 2019-20 financial year has increased but perhaps not significantly enough. Statistics SA is preparing for Census 2021, and the process of conducting the census is expected to increase in spending given Statistics SA's focus on going paperless and fully digital in embracing the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The estimated cost has doubled from R2,3 billion in 2018-19 to R4,9 billion in 2021-22 — a significant increase.

What might seem very negative is for the ANC a sign that Statistics SA produces staff of a high level of quality, with many getting attractive offers from all over the world. This does, however, impact negatively on staff recruitment, training and development, as well as retention. This paradox will continue as long as the budget

fails to address the compensation of employees through lessons learnt from meeting international remuneration standards for critical skills and experience. Therefore, an adequate budget for the compensation of employees has to be prioritised in order to retain critical skills. It is worth noting that, of the seven programmes, Administration received the highest budget allocation of R682,1 million. This means that better use and management would be a boost for other programmes that may experience a deficit.

While others claim to use Statistics SA to combat inequality, make communities safer, skill youth, attract investment and create jobs, combat illegal immigration, confront apartheid spatial planning and improve the health services of government, the ANC-led government has and continues to do that. Furthermore, the ANC-led government has demonstrated that it comprehends and respects the Statistics Act, Act 6 of 1999, which ensures independence from political interference in the production and dissemination of official statistics. We caution opposition parties not to act contrary to the Act.

Still on the Act, Statistics SA embarked on reviewing the Act in the past years. Included in the review of the Statistics Act is a provision to allow Statistics SA to conduct a census every 10 years instead of every five years. The review of the Act would provide Statistics SA with powers to ensure all statistics published by any

organ of state undergoes quality assurance by the department to avoid having conflicting statistics in the country.

The ANC is encouraged to hear the Statistician-General declaring the department’s state of readiness to embark on the process of collecting data for Census 2021. Statistics SA ran a test last year, while this year it will pilot and rehearsals will be conducted in 2020 as part of the preparations for Census 2021. In the process, Statistics SA will be going out seeking additional suggestions about critical areas that citizens would like covered in the census scope.

However, Statistics SA also highlighted challenges encountered, such as the inaccessibility of gated communities impacting on the efficiency of the department in the execution of its mandate. We would therefore like to urge our citizens to co-operate with Statistics SA’s foot workers, which the portfolio committee will closely monitor with interest, as well as the budget allocation thereof.

South Africans and all interested parties will benefit from Statistics SA’s migration from manual data collection to more advanced electronic data collection as this would make the collection of statistics more affordable, quicker and faster, without compromising the quality of the statistical data. With that, the ANC supports Budget Vote 12. [Applause.]

Mr C H M SIBISI: Hon Chairperson, hon Minister and hon members of the House, I greet you all. The NFP welcomes the budget report on Statistics SA tabled here today.

Statistics SA remains an important entity in providing evidence-based, quality and accurate official statistics for the country. As we embrace the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the accumulation of data can be assisted by easy-to-use applications in the hands of ordinary South Africans. This approach can assist in building an inclusive policy-making process. Through this approach we can improve quality and strive for accurate official statistics.

The need to reskill current employees to migrate from manual data collection to electronic data collection gives the department the opportunity to recruit many young graduates into the sector. The inclusion of more young graduates will fast-track the digitalisation process. This can open the field for innovative ways of collecting data.

The report recommends that Statistics SA be a guiding institution in matters of national importance. We cannot allow budgetary constraints to interfere with the need to fill vacancies. The institution requires highly competent staff that embody the intellectual capabilities needed to lead the scientific work of statistics, political competence to understand the political environment without being political or politicised, logistical

competence for the deployment of logistics of large-scale field operations, and strategic choices regarding operational efficiency and cost effectiveness.

The independence of Statistics SA must be protected. Through this independence we can be confident that they will continue to practise best practices in the collection of official statistics. Thank you.

Mr M S MALATSI: Chairperson, there is no doubt that Statistics SA plays a crucial role in shaping government policy interventions by producing reliable statistical information. Its information reports are the product of immeasurable hours of data analysis and interpretation.

For those South Africans who are not fully aware of the work of Statistics SA, it is easily identifiable through two things: The Office of the Statistician-General — and thankfully it was because of the bright suits — and the census population report. In addition, this institution releases periodic reports about the real state of the nation, most of which often goes unnoticed by different sectors of the country.

In light of this, one would expect government to be more serious about pursuing evidence-based solutions in formulating policies for the problems our country faces. One would further expect the government to be in favour of well-researched policy interventions

rather than the pursuit of populist posturing, as is often the case — such as with the ANC's flirtation with the expropriation of land without compensation, and the nationalisation of mines.

It is therefore disheartening that government has failed to invest properly in the capacity of Statistics SA in a way that would enable it to fulfil its obligation to produce accurate statistical information consistently. The fact that the ANC-led government has not done enough to ensure that Statistics SA has all the resources it needs to succeed is totally unacceptable, given the numerous, repeated pleas for more funding from this institution.

Through the state's rampant corruption and wasteful expenditure, operationally sound institutions like Statistics SA always become the easy sacrificial lambs when it comes to budget cuts under the guise of austerity measures. The legacy of these budget cuts continues to hurt the institution's prospects of retaining the talent it needs in order to execute its mandate. Several members have referred to the fact that the institution is increasingly losing its personnel.

Its current state is deeply worrying. It is now understaffed, underfunded and overstretched. Nothing illustrates this better than the fact that it hasn't been able to fill critical posts since 2016. Five of its nine deputy director-general posts are currently vacant in terms of its annual performance plan, APP. Twelve chief director

posts remain unoccupied. In total, there are currently over 608 vacancies in the institution.

Added to this is the fact that the institution's budget has been reduced by over R200 million over the last two years. It is almost impossible for any institution to function optimally with such a high number of staff shortages, nor is it possible to consistently produce impeccable statistical research with such little funding.

As the hon member indicated, the entity has confessed to having had to dump some of its key projects because there is no money to fund them.

It remains a miracle how Statistics SA has managed to function over the last few years and finalise over 250 research publications annually in the midst of all these operational limitations.

The impact of these difficulties, though, poses a major risk, not only to the quality of the work that Statistics SA produces, but to its future. In their APP, the institution is already sending early warning signs to the government that the long-term consequences of these budget cuts and unfilled vacancies will be, and I quote, "the declining quality of work over time."

To hon Minister Mthembu we say it would be foolish to ignore these signs. We have previously seen how the ANC's destruction of solid

and independent entities which help government to deliver its mandate, takes shape. It always starts with the unreasonable budget cuts. It always targets the entities that are well functioning but unnoticed because they are away from scrutiny and controversy. This leaves such entities unable to attract the best talent due to the fact that other organisations offer far more competitive packages for their rare skills.

Eventually the quality of their work suffers as their remaining personnel is overstretched, often fulfilling multiple roles and scrambling to achieve their basic targets. When this trend continues repeatedly, the credibility of the institution evaporates. Therefore, the under-resourcing of Statistics SA can be seen in this light.

With another census scheduled for 2021, it is now more important than ever before that Statistics SA has enough funding so that it can deliver on its key mandate. We need a Statistics SA that is able to produce quality work by keeping up with developing international trends through the use of modern technological advances.

Regardless of how pressing the need for austerity measures is, the critical work that operationally sound institutions like this do should never be put at risk under the pretence of saving money because we need a Statistics SA that is fully funded to help

government implement the interventions that these various sources of information indicate.

The information is already there, from the Quarterly Labour Force Surveys to the annual Work Programme that Statistics SA produces. The information is there to guide government in terms of where interventions are needed in society, how to tackle inequality in society and how it should be creating the enabling environment that will attract job creation so that we can push back this reality in which over half of the country's young people are unemployed.

Our country needs a fully staffed Statistics SA to continue to produce periodic volumes of data that will inform these policy positions.

Hon Minister Jackson Mthembu, as a new Minister in the Presidency and one of the President's well-known, trusted allies, you have an opportunity to do the right thing by securing the future of this organisation. If this administration is truly serious about utilising evidence-based knowledge to guide its policy interventions, you can't continue to let it suffer like this. You have an opportunity to do the right thing now, by persuading your colleagues in Treasury, in The Presidency and across other government departments to stop this rampant wastage of the Budget on ministerial luxuries and unimportant issues and, instead, secure funding for important institutions that are run well and are doing

important work to enable us to do our work. I thank you. [Time expired.] [Applause.]

Mr B M MANELI: Chairperson, Minister and Deputy Minister present here today, hon Members of the House, hon chairperson and members of the portfolio committee, Statistics Council representatives present here, Statistician-General, Mr Risenga Maluleke, Commissioners from the NPC, our distinguished guests in the gallery, ladies and gentlemen, I greet you.

Of course, I want to start from a point that we understand this discussion not to be an abstract discussion because the Fourth Industrial Revolution is upon us. And, because it is upon us, we need to understand that a revolution is indeed about change and that change is fundamental in that it changes a particular order into a new order.

For that reason, those who want to stay in the orthodox would remain challenged and not understand that it is time to adapt or die.

Allow me to just remind us that this is also accepted internationally. I quote from Professor Klaus Schwab, the Executive Chairman of World Economic Forum who said of the Fourth Industrial Revolution that "[it] is characterised by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres". This is an indication that this is not an

abstract discussion; we are dealing with a reality to which we need to adapt.

Of course, I must raise the point that, when you look at the rural spaces of which the hon member spoke and then left, it reminded me of sessions where people would say "I told them and I left without getting the answer."

Allow me to indicate that we are, in fact, in the Fourth Industrial Revolution ... [Interjections.] ... because even the phones that you use begin to measure other things that you do which you thought could not be done. [Interjections.]

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M C Dikgale): Order! Order, hon members!

Mr B M MANELI: Of course, Statistics SA has helped us to understand that we cannot do planning without looking at statistics and this has helped us to improve our planning, monitoring and decision-making processes and this has been proven to be ground-breaking in the way we look at development going forward.

I must say that, in South Africa already, we do see that there is actually adoption in society itself other than what we seem to discuss as an abstract and we need to ensure that that happens.

Allow me to go back to this point ... [Laughter.] ... that, indeed, the statistics have been used to change the way things look.

Hon Cachalia, I know it is very easy to forget once you leave the House that you were once on this side and that you understood what I mean. On that score ... [Laughter.] No, history will judge that you're a product of the people of the struggle. Therefore, at least you should understand it better that, in a fight to change the legacy of apartheid which affects spatial planning and everything else, it is on the basis that you need to use the statistics which were used before to undermine the other population in the country and exclude it from what happens. But, we are using it to ensure that we have spatial integration and this is coming from Statistics SA.

Therefore, it will never be a fallacy for us to promote the expropriation of land without compensation because you must understand that it is because you will not plan or change the spatial planning without having that in your hands. So, I just thought it's important that you are reminded, now that you have crossed to the other side, that these imbalances of the past have to be addressed. It is not only ideological, as you here claimed to make it. We now have a constitutional obligation to address the imbalances of the past.

Of course, I must say that we must congratulate and support the resilience of the staff that we have in Statistics SA. Irrespective of the budget cuts, which are understood even from a statistics point of view ... that the economy is affected and will not leave other spaces unaffected and those spaces are affected, including them. But, they have been resilient. They have been able to produce statistics that we can rely on and those statistics are showing in the review of the 25 years of democracy that there has been progress made especially on social infrastructure. But, it also points us to what needs to be done in the current phase and that is why we are growing the economy of South Africa and growing South Africa together. [Applause.]

So, on that score, I am not surprised that you will confuse what Statistics SA does with tenders because, in any way, there is evidence on the table that you now have coalition governments and those coalition governments, as the Auditor-General would also have shown, in some of them where you run, that you are actually caught up in that problem. And, this is the reason you would meet Tshwane and us here at the state ... [Inaudible.] So, on that score, it is just not about the DNA of the ANC on corruption but, in reality the state needs to be looked at into totality. That’s why this department will be able to ... [Interjections.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Order, hon members! [Interjections.]

Mr B M MANELI: Of course, let me also put this point ... let me put this point that ... [Interjections.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Order, hon members! Order!

Mr B M MANELI: ... that, whilst you have a low opinion of Ministers and Deputy Ministers that have been put in office, I can assure you that, from the input that has already been made by the Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, there is commitment to do things better and that they are addressing the problem. [Interjections.]

However, populists will stand in podiums and lament the problems, continue to analyse the problems, but they will not change the situation and this is what we are doing now. It is to change the situation.

Allow me to indicate therefore that indeed we support this budget because we understand the budget to be a financial expression of our policies and programmes. And, if you do not budget accordingly, you'll have problems and this why we have admitted that there are problems.

So, on that score, we still see Statistics SA as independent and, of course, the Statistics Council presents to us other checks and

balances and that we must respect the statistics that are produced and not begin to politicise what is not politicised as statistics.

Because, if people that are poor are from a particular racial group, the statistics will not lie; they will tell us the truth and we should be able to address that.

So, having supported the budget, I must say that, with the amendment of the legislation ... [Interjections] ... we are clear that with the amendment of the law, we have no confusion that it is our responsibility to amend the Act. But, what is important is what the purpose is. It is to ensure that we have official statistics from Statistics SA and cut the duplication. For those who have listened, surely they would have not raised the point again. It will only mean that we didn’t listen to the report of the Statistics SA.

With that Chair, of course I must thank you. That’s the submission of the ANC. We support the vote. [Applause.]

Ms H O MKHALIPHI: Chairperson, I rise on a point of order. Was the honourable Mr Abstract sweeping? Give us something, man, Minister ... [Interjections.] ... that is not how you sweep!

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): No, that is not a point of order. Continue, hon Minister.

The MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY: Chairperson, I would have thought that all of us agree on one thing and that thing is that we need to keep the independence and especially the functionality of Statistics SA. We all agreed on that.

We also agree with hon Hlengwa that we should not try and think that the Auditor-General is less independent; the Auditor-General is equally independent. We must support the independence of the Auditor-General as well. No impression should be created here that the Auditor-General should do his job differently when auditing an independent institution, as opposed to a government department. So that independence of the Auditor-General must be retained.

We also agree that Statistics SA has had financial constraints. We said in our budget speech that we must rise to the occasion return the finances of Statistics SA back to normal. We did not hide the fact that budget cuts were — to use somebody else's language — indeed a travesty of justice when it comes to Statistics SA.

In fact, we even said in our statement, when we make budget cuts at Treasury, we do not cut anything that is related to the compensation of employees, because if you do so, you run the risk of employees taking you to court and you end up losing in court as well.

We then said that we don't understand how the budget of Statistics SA was cut, particularly on the compensation of employees. We don't

understand that. It is something that we have said in our statement, hon Malatsi, that we want investigated. How did this happen? How did we as government cut the compensation of employees in Statistics SA, thereby creating this untenable situation in which Statistics SA now finds itself? In fact, they can't fill any positions, as you correctly said. As a consequence of these cuts to the compensation of employees, they can't even improve the monetary benefits to their own staff. That's why many of its very senior critical staff have left Statistics SA for greener pastures.

We are saying, yes, we are prepared to work with you, Members of Parliament, to unravel this anomaly. How did it happen that there were cuts effected on the compensation of employees at Statistics SA? If you want to work with us in that area, rest assured we will come back to you and say what our investigations found out in relation to this matter.

All of us — as Parliament, as the executive — cannot allow this institution that gives us evidence-based knowledge to collapse under our watch. It just cannot happen. [Interjections.] No, no, it will not happen! This is an assurance that we are giving here, that this institution that is so critical to the work that we do ... not only work that we do in government, but also work that you do here in Parliament ... Work that private business people do who are also clients of Statistics SA ... We can therefore not allow the work of this important institution to collapse.

In this regard, we will come back to you to say how we are dealing with the challenges that you have mentioned. Without trying to be political ... I have avoided being political on this matter. I have tried to be as genuine as all of us should be. There are problems. We can all assist one another to deal with these problems. As Parliament, you have the responsibility to hold government accountable. We have said to you that we will account to you in this regard.

Ntate Malatsi, as you talked about flirtations with the expropriation of land without compensation... You know, if you have never seen your people being forcefully removed from their land — not only being forcefully removed, literally being kicked off their land — you will not understand what it is that we want to achieve with the expropriation of land without compensation. You will never! It is these many African people in our country who have been removed from their land who are saying, do something about this injustice that was visited upon us. And rest assured, irrespective of what you say, we will do something about it. [Applause.] [Interjections.]

Mr J R B LORIMER: You have been doing nothing for the last quarter of a century. You have done nothing! It’s your fault that you didn’t deliver.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Order, hon member!

The MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY: We have said on the important matter of Statistics SA that, when we come back to this hallowed House, indeed, we will be able to report to you what steps we have taken to remove the difficulties and challenges facing Statistics SA. Thank you very much, House Chair. [Applause.]

Debate concluded.

The mini-plenary session rose at 18.13.