



REPORT 4 OF 2014

REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, PETITIONS AND MEMBERS' LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL OF THE 5TH MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE SENIOR CITIZENS PARLIAMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa empowers the Legislative arm of the state, particularly the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature with responsibilities inclusive of Law-making and Executive Oversight. Section 118 indicates that the legislature in executing its responsibilities must involve the public. As part of the mechanism, noting that public involvement in the Legislative process must find expression in all committees and activities of the Legislature, the Legislature has established a Select Committee on Public Participation, Petitions and Members' Legislative Proposals, hereinafter referred to as the Committee to intensify public involvement in the Legislative Activities.

The Committee, in line with its delegated function, presides over sectorial parliaments. One of the Sectorial Parliaments which the Committee presided over is the Senior Citizens Parliament. The Legislature has therefore delegated the Committee to conduct Senior Citizens Parliament.

1.1 THEME OF THE SENIOR CITIZENS PARLIAMENT

The Theme of the Senior Citizens Parliament was: "Working together with our Senior Citizens to improve their lives"

1.2 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Senior Citizens Parliament were outlined as follows:

- (i) To do oversight on the sector.
- (ii) To celebrate 20 years of democracy
- (iii) To engage senior citizens on matters directly affecting them as a means to oversight.
- (iv) To educate and share information with the senior citizens of the Mpumalanga Province on issues affecting them.

2. METHOD OF WORK

The project team conducted three districts workshops in preparation of the Senior Citizens Parliament. The Committee met on 15 October 2014 to discuss the state of readiness to host the Senior Citizens Parliament; subsequently, the Committee hosted the Senior Citizens Parliament on the 24 October 2014 at the Legislature Chamber in Nelspruit. The event focused on drawing the Senior Citizens from three districts in the Province (Ehlanzeni, Nkangala and Gert Sibande). Each district was represented in all the debates, deliberations and commissions of the Parliament.

3. INPUTS BY THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER

The Honourable Speaker made her inputs by wishing senior citizens to live longer. She further appreciated their wisdom and urged them to continue imparting their valuable knowledge to society. She indicated that there was a research report that was produced in that the life expectancy of older persons will grow by 1.4 million in 2030.

She also mentioned that the young generation is not growing because of HIV and AIDS related diseases. She further indicated that there is no discrimination by government providing pension to senior citizens. There are eye care facilities established by government to assist older persons to do their eye check-ups, which should be used for improving the lives of the elderly.

The Speaker made an appeal to all Councillors, Community Development Workers and Ward Committees in all Local Municipalities in the province of Mpumalanga to visit every house to identify older people that are qualified for pensions.

The Honourable Speaker indicated that government respects and protects while advancing the rights of the senior citizens. She further raised a concern that the government is not happy about how young people treat our treasures, the senior citizens, through various means such as harassment and stealing of their pension that is aimed at eradicating poverty amongst senior citizens. The senior citizens are best educators, providers, good carers and best comforters in our society hence the need to jealously take good care of them so that they can live longer.

The Honourable Speaker raised a concern about the conduct of some other families who lock senior citizens inside the houses and never let them enjoy life like they should. She further condemned the behaviour of some families who neglect and undermine our senior citizens. Older people should be encouraged to always go to their nearest clinics for check-ups and join sporting codes so that they can excise.

The Honourable Speaker committed to the Senior Citizens' Parliament that its resolutions will be tabled in the Legislature for adoption so that they can be implemented in order to improve the legislature oversight function. She further passed her condolences to the families of the deceased in the tragic collapse of a church building in Lagos, Nigeria.

She thanked the older people for their active participation during commissions and in their parliament and encouraged young people to learn to be patient, from the older generation.

In conclusion, the Speaker re-affirmed the legislature's commitment to playing an oversight role over the department on areas that emerge from the Senior Citizen's Parliament.

4. INPUTS FROM THE COMMISSIONS

During the Senior Citizens Parliament the commissions gave reports on issues discussed the senior citizens. These issues included the following:

4.1 The Older Persons Act No 13 of 2006 and the impact of government Services on older persons

The commission noted with appreciation the progress made on improving the lives of the elderly in our society. The Commission acknowledged that the democratic government opened all the doors which were closed by the apartheid regime. One of the most important developments is the enactment of the Older Persons Act No 13 of 2006 which amongst others seeks to maintain, increase and promote status, well-being, safety and security of older persons; maintain and protect the rights of older persons and combat abuse on them.

The commission further noted that:

- Historically, African older persons in particular were discriminated against and in most cases accused of witchcraft.
- Older persons were never treated with the kind of respect and dignity they deserve, but appreciated the treatment received in this Parliament
- Older women had to travel long distances to fetch water and wood, but note the progress made in bringing water closer to the people and the electrification of most households.
- Apartheid police harassed older persons who had small businesses, but democracy has partly combated this practice.
- African older persons were not paid equal old age grants as compared to their white counterparts until the dawn of democracy which has guaranteed equality of all the people, irrespective of their race, gender, age or creed.
- Government is paying attention to older persons' interests and values.
- Older persons are being treated with the respect and dignity they deserve though a lot of work still needs to be done to restore the dignity of the elders in our society.
- The number of people who receive social grants has increased from 4 million before 1994 to more than 11 million in the first 20 years of democracy.
- Government is continuously raising awareness on the rights of older persons and appreciated the President and all the Premiers for establishing desks for the older citizens of our nation.
- Since the dawn of the democracy, old age grant is paid monthly and is increasing annually during the Budget Speeches or the Division of Revenue.
- Government continues to provide housing to the older persons and acknowledges the work of the Legislature in ensuring that a more than 100 years old woman in Elandshoek, Mbombela is housed with dignity in a proper house with decent furniture.
- The Department of Social Development continues to increase its funding to home-based care facilities which are helpful to the older persons and are funded by government
- Government is closer to the people than ever before.
- Older persons have a valuable contribution to make towards nation-building
- Government strides to ensuring older persons are treated with respect and dignity continue to yield some remarkable encouraging results.

- Remarkable has been done in order to improve lives of the older persons, but more still needs to be done.

4.2 PROMOTING THE RIGHTS AND CARING FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

This commission noted the following:

- The Legislature is making a good effort in creating platforms for engagement on issues that affect senior citizens and the society in general, considering that senior citizens are not a sector or a society in isolation.
- Many sports fields in the localities do not have markings to be used by senior citizens for jogging and health walks.
- The roads and streets have no foot paths, thus making it dangerous for health walks by the elderly who could easily fall victims of car accidents.
- There are no sites allocated for senior citizens activities, instead they are housed in churches and community halls. This makes it difficult for senior citizens to acquire or request for recreational facilities in these makeshift arrangements.
- Matters of senior citizens are not well addressed since there are no older persons' desks in Municipalities.
- Apart from sports and recreational exercises, older person can age actively working in their gardens
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- Some older persons are abused and labelled as witches when their psychiatric state deteriorates and memory wanes.
- Some older persons are reluctant to go and consult at the clinics due to the long queues they are exposed to.
- Clinics personnel are not treating older persons with the respect and dignity deserved; instead they end up being abusive.
- There is a clinic that is not functioning well at Thandukukhanya Township in the Mkhondo Local Municipality, thus forcing senior citizens to travel long distances in order to access health services.
- In numerous instances where elderly persons are abused, raped and ill-treated, the perpetrators are found to be family members, especially their grand-children.
- Poor medical waste management from frail-care centres ends up exposing senior citizens to a risk of diseases.
- There are long queues in many pension pay-points, forcing senior citizens to rely on their grand-children and relatives who in turn steal their old age grant money from them.
- Some pension pay-points are in open fields thus exposing senior citizens to cold, rain and hot sun, resulting in various diseases on the elderly citizens of our nation.
- There are no victim-support centres in our police stations, particularly to assist old aged persons in cases of rape and abuse.

5. FINDINGS

The Committee after considerations of the deliberations in the various commissions of the Senior Citizens Parliament made the following findings:

- (i) That the impact of HIV and AIDS places an enormous burden on elderly women.
- (ii) There are still older persons who do not have houses, access to clean water and electricity.
- (iii) Senior citizens continue to be victims of ill-treatment, abuse, rape, crime and perpetrators never face the might of the law.
- (iv) Senior citizens struggle to access South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) offices because they are far from rural areas where most senior citizens are residing.
- (v) Senior citizens struggle to go to SASSA offices from time to time to validate their existence for SASSA processes of verification of beneficiaries.
- (vi) Senior citizens experience deductions in their old age grants for airtime which they do not use or have not ordered.
- (vii) That Senior citizen indicated that there is a leaking sewer at Esikhulile Centre which is partly a health hazard for the persons working and visiting the centre.
- (viii) Senior citizens complained about officials and nurses who take long breaks and lunch time period, resulting in senior citizens having to spend more time at Siyahtuthuka Clinic in Emalahleni.
- (ix) There are long queues in almost all the pension pay-points and there are no proper shelters in those points, exposing senior citizens to heat, rainy and cold weathers.
- (x) There are no proper sports facilities for older people to jog and take health-walks
- (xi) Older people travel long distances to get to the clinic eThandukukhanya in Mkhondo Local Municipality.
- (xii) There are no victims support centres in the police stations, thus becoming difficult for victims to come forward to report sensitive crimes.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommended that the House resolves as follows:

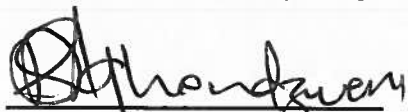
- (i) The Department of Social Development must conduct a comprehensive study on the burden older citizens carry as a result of relatives infected with HIV, with an aim to easing the pressure from the senior citizens.
- (ii) The Department of Human Settlements must come up with strategies to deal specifically with housing backlogs of elderly persons.
- (iii) The department responsible for safety and security and the department responsible for social development must develop systems and plans to detect and prevent the abuse and ill-treatment on senior citizens.
- (iv) The Department of Social Development must profile each SASSA office in the province with the aim of determining its accessibility to senior citizens.
- (v) The Department of Social Development must interact with SASSA with an aim to ensuring that validation of beneficiaries of old-age grants is done in a manner that does not inconvenience senior citizens.

- (vi) The Department of Social Development and SASSA must investigate and report to the Committee on the claims by senior citizens that their grants have airtime deductions they have not ordered and/or used.
- (vii) The Department of Social Development must make a determination on the impact of the leaking sewer system at Esikhulile Centre and ensure that the sewer system is fixed.
- (viii) The Department of Health must lodge an investigation and report to the Committee on the claims of senior citizens that nurses and officials at Siyathuthuka Clinic are taking longer tea and lunch breaks to the detriment of the senior citizens.
- (ix) The Department of Social Development must profile each pay-point for social grants in the province to determine its suitability for a pay-point of old pension grants and report to the Committee on its findings and recommendations.
- (x) The Department of Culture, Sports, and Recreation must ensure that sports fields are accessible to senior citizens when needed.
- (xi) The Department of Health must ensure that there are sufficient mobile clinics to prevent senior citizens from travelling long distance to access primary health care.
- (xii) The Department of Safety, Security and Community Liaison must identify all the police stations without victim-support centres or offices with an aim of developing them.

The Committee recommends that the House adopts this report. The departments, legislature, entities and agencies affected by the resolutions contained in this report must submit progress reports on the implementation of the House resolutions by 30 March 2015 and subsequently on a quarterly basis until such resolutions have been finalised.

8. CONCLUSION

The Chairperson of the Select Committee on Public Participation, Petitions and Members' Legislative Proposals thanked Honourable Speaker of the Mpumalanga Legislature, Honourable Members, Acting Secretary to the Legislature and Legislature staff as well as the officials from the Office of the Premier, Department of Health, and Department of Social Development for their contribution to the success of the Senior Citizens' Parliament. She expressed a special word of gratitude to the senior citizens, especially from the other provinces and the political parties for meaningfully participating in the Senior Citizens' Parliament.



Hon JL Nghondzwani
Chairperson: Select Committee on
Public Participation, Petitions and Members
Legislative Proposals

04/09/2015
DATE