**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**CONTRIBUTION TO THE SECOND READING**

**BUDGET DEBATE 2016 – 2017**

**Thursday 10 March 2016**

**By: Hon. Elma Jane Dienda, MP**

**Hon Speaker,**

**Hon. Members,**

Allow me to rubber stamp towards this budget debate, which I cannot add or subtract anything. When going through the speech of the Minister of Finance and also the documents distributed for this financial year, I realize how unfortunate it is for a Member of Parliament not to be involved in the drawing up process of the budget. It is indeed a disgrace that as a lawmaker of this country I will be crucified by the nation for budgeting for things which are not necessary like building a new parliament, instead of budgeting for things which are a matter of bread and butter, and which directly affect the livelihood of Namibians.

***Hon. Speaker, Hon Members*** everything in life cannot be measured in monetary terms. To give you an example. Efficient and effective service delivery in this country is one of the lowest issues on the agenda of public servants, and yet the largest chunk of the budget goes towards paying civil servants.

***Hon. Speaker***, I will challenge you now to visit the entrance of Parliament and ask one of the police offers on duty for the list of MPs available, you will be shocked to see the name of the late Hon. Moongo still on that list. When visitors are looking for the offices of MPs of the DTA, you will be told that they only have Hon. Moongo and Hon Kaura on their list, what a shame. For this Hon. Speaker we certainly don’t need a budget and to allocate further money towards the National Assembly Vote, but rather effective planning and co-ordination of functions within the Public Service. The same goes for the rest of the Public Service. People are getting paid every month, but yet you will find long queues everywhere and at all ministries. When one goes to the hospitals or clinics you have to take “padkos” along, because that is how long you will wait in those queues. At the Katutura Hospital they cannot distinguish between emergencies and casualties.

***Again Hon Members***, another example is the estimates that are being done by the City of Windhoek on our Water and Electricity accounts.

This boils down to laziness and inefficient service delivery. They are too lazy to come out and check our meters and also come up with a lot of excuses on why they cannot read our meters. Hon. Minister of Urban and Rural Development, I hope the 2.3 Billion that was apportioned to Khomas Region will make up for this loophole. The reason why I bring this issue of electricity meters is because what we must realize is that the National Budget directly impacts on our lives as ordinary Namibian citizens.

***Hon. Members,*** allow me to now specifically concentrate on some of the votes individually. The remainder of the votes I will make contributions as we proceed into the committee stage.

**1: Health**

I have noticed with concern that the Ministry targets for three indicators are Malaria, TB, and HIV/AIDS. Hon. Speaker, I would like to invite the Minister of Health to table in this August house, the latest statistics on the causes of death for the past 5 years. One will be surprised to notice that diseases like Cancer, Diabetes, High Blood Pressure and Strokes and other non-communicable diseases, just to mention but a few, are the diseases which are taking the lives of the majority of people. Hon. Speaker, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology is responsible for creating awareness on GRN programmes and activities. Little or nothing in this regard is being done to educate the nation via radio and TV programmes regarding these dangerous diseases that I have just mentioned. These days one will be diagnosed with cancer and within 8 months you will hear that the person died of aggressive cancer. What does it mean, we as a nation are not properly informed and educated on the causes and treatment of these diseases.

***Hon. Speaker, Hon. Members***, the Namibian people and its Nation are well educated on the dangers of HIV/AIDS. The desired Malaria Mortality Rate was not achieved, not because it was not sufficiently budgeted for in the past, but because of other reasons like poor or non-implementation of targeted programmes – a common occurrence in the Public Sector.

***Hon. Speaker, Hon Members***, the concerns relating to this Ministry are many, and I will touch on the rest in more detail when we are discussing its vote.

**2. Education**

***Hon. Speaker,*** this is the topic close to my heart. As the saying goes: “Once a teacher, always a teacher”. Yes it is true that this Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture almost always receives the biggest chunk of the National Budget. The truth of the matter is that half of this budget allocation goes towards salaries and I can guarantee you today that as we speak, many teachers are not satisfied with their salaries, as the grading system that is used does not match with their experience and qualifications. I will elaborate more on this during Committee Stage. Congratulations once again on the provision of Free Secondary Education.

***Hon. Speaker,*** I will now address an issue that I refer to as “Quality Education”: This year, as in previous years, NAMCOL could not accommodate all the Grade 10 and 12 failures. They say that “Idle Hands Are The Devil’s Playground.” Schools are full, Namcol is full, which leads to children being sent to the streets to either become pregnant or get involved in criminal activities. Hon. Speaker; are we planning to fail or do we fail to plan? So much is invested in education every year, but the output does not correspondent with the inputs. Is it not time that we consider bringing back the Supplementary Examinations that were common practice during the old academic system and allowed learners who were on the fringes to progress to the next year by sitting for exams in January, instead of having to wait for the next year to end. The system is not uncommon and is also followed by the majority of tertiary institutions the world over.

**3. Social Grants**

I was watching NBC news on Sunday evening when they ran the report on the disabled child of 14 years who is being taken care of by his mother. The mother in her interview informed the nation about her challenges in taking care of him and also how difficult it is for her to get a full time job. Hon. Members, we have a lot of mothers who are being challenged with this situation daily. My request thus to the Hon Minister of Finance is to look into Foster Care Grants for such parents. This will not only put food on the table, but will also help the parent to do a greater job for her child. I cannot say much about the increase of old age Pension of N$100- per month. Just for our information we must not forget that we do not have pro-poor or pro-pensioners shops in Namibia. All the shops have the same prices for all its citizens. And with the prices of all basic goods going up at a fast pace, one wonders whether the increase of N$ 100- per month will not just be swallowed up by the increasing costs of basic goods and services.

Another issue of concern is that old people, particularly in the rural areas, are being paid under trees and no formal structures are set up to accommodate them. At the very least, the company tasked with paying the pensioner’s grant, should be required to put up temporary structures when they head out in the fields to make such payments, especially given that such contracts are tendered over a longer period, thus they can still make use of such structures for the duration of the contract.

**4. Unemployment**

According to the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation, the unemployment rate now stands at 28%. Hon. Speaker we are not doing enough in our country to address the issue of unemployment. The rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. Why: the same people who are occupying high positions are the same people who are serving on 2 or 3 different boards as directors. Namibia’s young graduates and other qualified people are either unemployed or stuck in the same position for many years, because they don’t know people at the right places in the right positions, or they are not part of the connected elite. The Namibian society, and particularly those who are already well off, need to stop being selfish and allow others also to put bread on their tables. You can implement and develop a million projects aimed at eradicating poverty and granting others access to better their lives, but for as long as a small minority continues to hold the monopoly on access to resources, job opportunities and government tenders, nothing will change.

**5. Social Security**

***Hon. Speaker,*** I will table a motion later in this house regarding the Social Security Commission. For now, I will just briefly address one issue which has bothered me for some time regarding social security.

**Hon. Speaker**, when social security was introduce to the Namibian people, I was a Trade Unionist for NAPWU. I attended induction workshops and seminars to familiarize myself with this – at the time – new concept. All citizens are required to contribute towards Social Security. The idea seemed fine, maybe even good, at the time, but once again, implementation has left a lot to be desired.

For me, social security, has become, to borrow from Afrikaans: a “bodemlose put”, meaning something that you are putting money into, with no tangible effects or results. 99.9% of us sitting here today have expired - meaning that we or our spouses cannot make use of the maternity benefits. Men can only benefit if they are sick for more than 3 months or after death. Eventually once you do claim; you cannot get the salary that you were previously earning. Our hard-earned money is being invested in something, which you can only benefit from once you are dead or retired, which is only a small token of appreciation for your contributions for all these years.

**6. Electoral Commission (ECN)**

**Hon. Speaker**, what surprise me the most about the ECN budget grant, is that it is higher than the one of last year. What I cannot understand is that last year and the year before, we had Presidential & National Assembly Elections and Local Authority and Regional Council Elections respectively. So, so one would have expect a high budget provision in those years. Unless the Hon. Minister of Finance is telling us that 50% of the just elected councillors are potential candidates for by-elections, which in my view cannot be the case, then I am genuinely confused as to why the ECN budget allocation is higher this year, than it was last year. According to the Electoral Act, citizens should be allowed to register for elections at all times during the year, but this is not currently the case and registration normally only happens a few months before elections leading to long queues and frustrated potential voters who turn away. For what activities or projects is ECN using this money in the next financial year? Is it perhaps to pay their high electricity bill to keep their building’s lights on 24 hours a day throughout the year. As anyone who drives past ECN at night will confirm, the lights in that building are never switched off.

***Hon. Speaker, Hon Members,***

Thank you very much. I will make further contributions during the Committee Stage.