



To: The Honorable Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Social Development

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c/o Lindiwe Ntsabo (Committee Secretary)

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And to: The Honorable Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education

Ms Bongiwe Pricilla Mbinqo-Gigaba

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c/o Llewellyn Brown (Committee Secretary)

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Dear Honorable Chairpersons

RE: URGENT JOINT PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE MEETING ON CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO FOOD

1. As education and children's rights organisations and activists, we are deeply concerned about the impact that the national lockdown is having on children's access to food.
2. Hunger and malnutrition are serious concerns, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as both result in compromised levels of immunity. Before the pandemic, 6.4 million children lived below the Stats SA food poverty line and 27% of children under five were stunted. In the absence of adequate income and food relief for poor households, the lockdown and economic recession will increase these already concerning poverty and stunting levels.
3. We call for an **urgent** joint meeting between the Portfolio Committees on Basic Education and Social Development to obtain clear responses from the officials of both departments on their plans to ensure that children have access to basic nutrition.

4. Over nine million children ordinarily benefit from the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) and feeding schemes at DSD subsidized ECD centres. For many of these children, the meal received at schools or the ECD centre is often the only meal received for the day.
5. Despite the crucial role that school meals play in the wellbeing and development of children, the Minister of Basic Education has made repeated public statements indicating that the DBE will not be attending to the nutrition needs of learners during school closures, including stating that:

“...we [the DBE] are not going to do anything different outside of what we normally do; we are not going to have special programmes; we are not going to run feeding schemes. We have accessed our capacity and we will not be able to do it.”

6. Minister Motshekga has instead deferred the responsibility of providing learners with meals to the Department of Social Development (DSD). She highlighted that the DBE will support the provision of nutrition to families in poverty nodes operated by DSD – however, this role and the scope of the support has not been clearly outlined.¹
7. Whilst there is limited public information available, we understand that currently there are efforts by a Food and Nutrition Security Coordination Committee (FNSSCC) co-ordinated by DPME to coordinate various departments, including the Department of Social Development (DSD), the Department of Health (DoH) and the DBE.
8. The FNSSCC’s interventions are reported to include the distribution of food parcels to beneficiaries through local and provincial distribution centres with implementing agents having been appointed for each province, as well as via SASSA. However, the criteria of selection of distribution points, as well as accessibility and safety of distribution points is not clear.
9. In addition, and significantly, the FNSSCC initiatives are not designed to come close to reaching the over nine million children currently benefiting from the NSNP and ECD feeding schemes. At best, the DSD’s and SASSA food parcel programmes are estimated to reach a maximum of 1 million households.² The actual distribution that has occurred to date appears significantly

¹ Department of Basic Education ‘Statement by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, on the basic education sector plans to support learners during the lockdown due to COVID-19’ 26 March 2020 Available at: <https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-angie-motshekga-basic-education-sector-plans-support-learners-during-covid-19>

² See page 6 of DSD (6 April 2020) COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedure for the Distribution of Food Parcels to Vulnerable Households.

lower.³ This is despite the Department of Social Development recognising that '[c]hildren that accessed food through the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) are in their homes with parents and require nutrition support' and 'children that accessed food through the Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDs) are in their homes with parents and require nutrition support'⁴

10. We have noted that these current interventions are apparently being funded through DSD's Disaster Relief fund and Social Relief fund, at R900 million and R500 million, respectively.⁵ While we welcome the utilisation of DSD funds, the DBE has yet to fully explain why NSNP funds, suppliers and stock cannot be used towards the very immediate need to ensure learners have food relief.
11. Moreover, it is reported that existing grant beneficiaries do not qualify for food packages under the DSD and SASSA food relief programmes, which , excludes 13 million children whose households currently receive the Child Support Grant of R440, many of whom would in the ordinary course benefit from the NSNP and ECD meals.
12. The lack of engagement by the DBE on the issue of learner nutrition is particularly concerning as the DBE has indicated that all or some grades may remain out of school until 1 July 2020.
13. We call on Parliament to exercise its constitutional oversight role and require the DBE and DSD to **urgently** respond to the following issues:
 - 13.1. Provide a detailed provincial breakdown of a) how many children are receiving food relief support from the provincial DSDs and SASSA, b) what such food relief support has specifically included, and c) what the value of each parcel is.
 - 13.2. Provide a specific indication of how many children who ordinarily benefit from the NSNP are currently receiving food relief support from the DSD and SASSA.
 - 13.3. Provide an indication of plans to ensure food relief to those children not benefitting from food relief from DSD or SASSA.
 - 13.4. Report on the national and provincial budgets available for food relief programmes for children, including current beneficiaries of the NSNP and ECD feeding schemes, and provide a record of how funds have been allocated to date. Such report should

³ For example, Gauteng DSD reported this week that it had distributed 80 000 food parcels while SASSA reported on Tuesday 14 April that it had distributed 7000 food parcels nationally. These numbers do not come close to the number of learners who should be benefitting from the NSNP.

⁴ See page 5 of the DSD (6 April 2020) COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedure for the Distribution of Food Parcels to Vulnerable Households.

⁵ See page 2 of DBE document titled "Covid-19 Department of Basic Education and National School Nutrition Programme Response Plan."

also indicate clearly how NSNP and ECD subsidy funding, stocks and suppliers will be utilised in light of the current national disaster.

14. We are available to present and engage with the Portfolio Committees on an urgent basis.

Sincerely,

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