

# Question mark over delivery targets

MOSHOESHOE MONARE  
POLITICAL BUREAU

## Researchers accuse State of dropping projects

Researchers have cast doubt on the service delivery targets set by President Mbeki and accused the government of silently dropping programmes that are not achievable.

David Hemson and Michael O' Donovan wrote in the *State of the Nation* – a book compiled by the Human Sciences Research Council which was launched yesterday – “more difficult to understand is the appearance and disappearance of specific targets in government pronouncements”.

“Many key targets are set out but others are not.

“While it is difficult to imagine all targets being reported on in each state-of-the-nation speech, some key commitments are not repeated, not even by line department ministers,” the authors said in a

chapter titled “Presidential targets and the state of delivery”.

They cited the RDP target of providing housing for all by 2003, last year's ANC election promise for one-million jobs over the next five years through Expanded Public Works Programme and sanitation for all by 2010, saying these “have been dropped from view”.

“Unfortunately, as public statements are made of progress in terms of distance targets, there is the danger that old targets will slip off the record and be replaced by departmental inputs rather than achieved outcomes”.

Mbeki said during his state-of-the-nation address early this year that 51% of the 307 programmes of action targets had been met; there were slight delays in 21% of the programmes while 28% were

not carried out.

“With low levels of delivery the backlogs may be growing even as delivery increases. Such are the dimensions of the problem that backlogs among the dispossessed tend to grow faster than delivery in many sectors. Unfortunately, the assessment of the targets and benchmarks set out by government often does not take these considerations into account,” the authors said.

They also cautioned against how government announces the results of its targets, adding that measurement is based on how much is being spent rather than the outcomes of the programmes.

“Greater reliance had to be placed on national surveys rather than departmental statistics, largely because these are not often readily available or verifiable,”

said the authors.

They blasted the government for disregarding or ridiculing statistics that are different from those anticipated by public policy. They cite tensions between Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, Mbeki and Statistics SA on poverty and unemployment figures.

The authors say a defensive attitude and scepticism mark not only HIV but other aspects of government policy.

“A rational model of public administration is also undermined by the growing tendency for government to evince an attitude of scepticism, doubts or rejection of statistical trends which do not reflect progress in the past decade.

“The doubts about statistics expressed by ministers make it difficult to assess social progress

against basic indicators,” the authors said.

But they said there had also been scepticism from other quarters about national government statistics, including local government officials who know that any underestimation of the backlog would mean no budget increase for them.

The authors said a number of promises seem to stand alone without the funding to support them.

“While progress in many sectors is being made, in others (water, sanitation, school infrastructure), the targets set out in 2004 are unlikely to be met. The cost of meeting fundamental social objectives is substantial and is not acknowledged in budgetary reviews. Clearly, many of the social goals will not be met unless there is substantial change in budgetary allocations in infrastructure delivery,” said the authors.

Government spokesman Joel Netshitenzhe was not available for comment.