

Researchers slam Mbeki on delivery

Government accused of silently dropping 'failing' programmes

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Researchers have cast doubt on the service delivery targets set by President Thabo Mbeki.

The government has also been accused of silently dropping programmes that are not achievable.

This was stated by David Hemson and Michael O'Donovan in *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 say in a chapter titled "Presidential targets and the state of delivery".

They cite the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) target of providing housing for all by 2003; last year's ANC election promise of 1-million jobs over the next five years through the 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% had not been carried out.

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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 the government often does not take these considerations into account," the authors say.

The authors also caution against how the 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 has to be placed on national surveys rather than departmental statistics, largely because these are not often readily available or verifiable."

The authors accuse the government of 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 as well.

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

"The doubts about statistics expressed by ministers make it difficult to assess social progress against basic indicators."

But the authors say there has 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.

Government spokesperson Joel Netshitenzhe was not available to comment on the book.

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