

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the thesis. In this chapter attention is given to the initial motivation why the research was embarked upon and to the aims of the study. It summarizes the findings of the study in an attempt to determine whether the aim of the research was achieved. Thereafter the findings are discussed per different questionnaires and certain recommendations based on the findings are made.

10.2 Orientation and statement of the problem

Long queues at pay-points (in certain regions old and fragile beneficiaries sleep at the pay-point the night before the payment commences), inhumane conditions at pay-points such as no shelter, no running water or toilet facilities, missing files, lost applications, lengthy turn-around time before social grant applications are approved, broken payment machines at pay-points, late arrival by payment contractors and SASSA staff at pay-points, fraud and corruption, were all pertinent problems at the time of SASSA's establishment.

Apart from these service delivery challenges severe staff shortages at critical operational levels where grant applications are processed and infrastructural challenges such as insufficient office space (too many staff in a specific office) and insufficient or no connectivity at certain service delivery points are all organisational challenges that SASSA is facing. As much as these undesirable service conditions, human resource and infrastructural challenges were prevalent during the time of SASSA's establishment one could argue that some of these challenges are still very much prevailing today.

Since the establishment of SASSA the administration of the social grant system has not been assessed with the result that its strengths and weaknesses have not been identified scientifically. It has as yet thus not been possible to establish the necessity for possible adjustments to the system. For improved service delivery the researcher wanted to determine how the grant administration system operates.

Certain policy changes were made since the inception of SASSA in order to expand its services and to reach more people in its striving to push back the frontiers of poverty. The following are some of the important policy changes:

- Age equalization where men and women could qualify for old age pension at the qualifying age of 60 years (previously men could only receive an old age grant at the age of 65 years).
- Extension of the child support grant up to 18 years of age (previously children could only access the child support grant up to the age of 7 years).
- Applications with alternative proof of identity documents (previously a valid identity document was a prerequisite to access a grant).

Considering that no evaluation has been done of the strengths and weaknesses of the application-to-approval process of grant administration in SASSA it is regarded as desirable that such a venture be embarked upon. In view of this the following research question emerged: What are the strengths and the weaknesses in the application-to-approval process of grant administration in SASSA?

10.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

The general aim of the research project was to assess the application-to-approval process of grant administration in SASSA up to the payment of social grants at pay-points. The specific objectives of the study were therefore to:

- To describe the current application-to-approval process of grant administration;
- To assess the strengths and weaknesses in the grant administration process of specified administrative procedures and structural issues as perceived by attesting officials (front-line staff responsible for taking down the grant applications), data-capturer officials (staff responsible for capturing the information on the application form onto the SOCPEN system), pay-point team members (staff responsible for rendering services at pay-points) and beneficiaries at pay-points;

- To provide a report on the strengths and weaknesses of the grant administration process from application to pay-out, to the top management of SASSA.

10.4 MAJOR FINDINGS

Four different questionnaires were used during the research project. The first instrument was designed to collect data on the actual grant application process and problems and strengths in this regard (questionnaire front-line staff). The second questionnaire was developed to collect data on the capturing of the application (questionnaire data-capturer) onto the SOCPEN system. The third data-collection instrument (pay-point team member) was developed to measure services at pay-points and to determine the problems experienced at pay-points. The fourth questionnaire (questionnaire for beneficiaries) was developed to target the beneficiaries who receive grant payments at pay-points. The major findings will be presented per category.

10.4.1 Major findings in respect of the front-line staff

Steele (2006) states that the administration system of the South African grant system can be somewhat cumbersome for both the applicant and the administrator because the forms used for most grants are detailed and often quite technical. The writer further states that this could lead to applicants feeling frustrated, but administrators on the other hand can also feel intimidated in the process especially in cases where no proper training has been provided to administrators on the application process. With reference to the first target group, front-line staff who are responsible for taking down applications the empirical investigation revealed the following:

- Front-line staff have considerable working experience (more than five years) in SASSA.
- Front-line staff are experiencing dissatisfaction with their work space. Esser *et al.* (2009) and Van Rensburg and Horsten (2004) state that inadequate infrastructure can be viewed as an obstacle in effective grant administration.
- Training, supervision and support from supervisors occur irregularly. Steele (2006) states that administrators can feel intimidated in the grant administration process especially in cases where no proper training has been provided to administrators on the application process.

- Front-line staff always receive mentoring.
- Front-line staff receive between 11-29 applications per day and spend 30 minutes or less to take down an application.
- Support from colleagues is irregular.
- Policy documents that regulate the implementation of new policy changes are available most of the time. This is commendable since Kabeer (2008) and Van Rensburg and Horsten (2004) state that the complexity of regulations and officials who do not understand the guidelines and policies or different interpretation and implementation of policies are major reasons why eligible beneficiaries are excluded.
- Files get misplaced or lost after processing.
- Staff carelessness is one of the main reasons why files get lost or misplaced.
- Front-line staff experience technical difficulties with the computer on a regular basis and it takes one to three days to resolve technical difficulties.

10.4.2 Major findings in respect of the data-capturers

With reference to the second target group, data-capturers who are responsible for capturing data onto the SOCPEN system the empirical investigation revealed the following:

- Data-capturers have solid work experience as data-capturers in SASSA.
- Some data-capturers have inadequate working space. However, Esser *et al.* (2009) and Van Rensburg and Horsten (2004) state that inadequate infrastructure can be viewed as an obstacle to access grants.
- Training on the implementation of new policy changes only occurs irregularly. This is regrettable since Steele (2006) states that administrators can feel intimidated in the grant administration process especially in cases where no proper training has been provided to administrators on the application process.
- Supervision, mentoring and support from supervisors occur on an irregular basis.
- Data-capturers receive between 20 to 29 applications per day and they capture all applications successfully, because they require less than 30 minutes to capture an application.

- Data-capturers receive support from colleagues on a more regular basis.
- Documents or guidelines that regulate the implementation of policy changes are not always available in the work place. This is a concern since Kabeer (2008) and Van Rensburg and Horsten (2004) state that the complexity of regulations and officials who do not understand the guidelines and policies or different interpretation and implementation of policies are major reasons why eligible beneficiaries are excluded.
- Applications sometimes get misplaced or lost after capturing.
- No proper mechanism is in place to record the movement of files and staff carelessness and either lack of office space or filing space are the main reasons why applications get lost or misplaced.
- Data-capturers sometimes experience technical problems with computers and it takes one to less than five days to resolve technical difficulties;
- Data-capturers receive sometimes incomplete applications from the attesting officials (those staff officials who are responsible for taking down the application) and they usually take such applications back to the first attesting officer.
- Backlogs on the capturing and approving of normal applications exist and staff shortage and system related problems are the main reasons why backlogs exist. Van Rensburg and Horsten (2004) regard backlogs as an obstacle to access grants.
- Backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases.
- Staff shortages, a centralized review management approach, lack of office space and lack of connectivity points constitute the main reasons why review backlogs exist. Steele (2006) states that delays are currently being experienced in terms of the capturing, validation and approval of applications by a number of factors such as the lack of sufficient human resources, lack of technological resources and the large number of backlogs to be dealt.

10.4.3 Major findings in respect of the pay-point team members

Reddy and Sokomani (2008) state that despite the privatization of the payment service problems such as long queues, lack of shelter, water and sanitation at some pay-points still exist while paymasters arrive late at pay-points with pay machines breaking down.

With reference to the third target group, pay-point team members who are responsible for rendering services at pay-points the empirical investigation revealed the following:

- Some pay-points are not disabled-friendly.
- There are not always enough chairs at pay-points.
- There are not always toilet facilities available.
- Drinking water is not always available.
- Payment contractors and SASSA staff sometimes arrive late at pay-points.
- Payments are usually delayed between 15 minutes to less than an hour, but beneficiaries are not always informed about delays.
- There are sometimes broken machines at pay-points and this causes 15 to 45 minutes delay in payments.
- There is not always enough money at pay-points and it takes an hour to less than two hours to get more money.
- Grant recipients hardly ever receive wrong grant amounts. This is commendable since Steele (2006:64) states that any administrative system concerned with the delivery of benefits must be adequate to meet the volume of delivery of cash benefits and that the SOCPEN system as a transfer and payment system of social grants can successfully carry the volume of transactions without any noticeable problems.
- Hawkers and vendors operate mainly outside the pay-point although Lund (2002) claims that private insurance companies are being allowed access to pension lists and few provincial governments are given selective access to certain firms on the same day when payments are done.
- Security guards are available at pay-points and there is access control at pay-points (mainly driven by security guards from the payment contractor).
- Not all pay-points are fenced all-around.

- First Aid kits are available at pay-points most of the time.

10.4.4 Major findings in respect of the beneficiaries at pay-points

According to Walker (2005) cited in Steele (2006) internationally recipients require ease of application, simplicity of rules and procedure, good communications and avoidance of repetition in providing information to agencies. In addition, Steele (2006) states that speed and response in the delivery of services are important and beneficiaries of cash benefits generally dislike having to queue and wait in offices or pay-points because delays are inconvenient and stressful.

With reference to the fourth target group, beneficiaries at pay-points the empirical investigation revealed the following:

- Some pay-points are not disabled-friendly.
- There are not always enough chairs at pay-points.
- There are not always toilet facilities available.
- Drinking water is not always available.
- Payment contractors and SASSA staff arrive sometimes late at pay-points.
- Payments are usually delayed between 15 minutes to less than an hour but beneficiaries are not always informed about delays.
- There are sometimes broken machines at pay-points and this causes 15 to 45 minutes delay in payments.
- There is not always enough money at pay-points and it takes an hour to less than two hours to get more money.
- Grant recipients hardly ever receive wrong grant amounts.
- Hawkers and vendors operate mainly outside the pay-point.
- Beneficiaries do feel safe at pay-points.
- They mostly live within walking distance from the pay-point. Lund (2002) states that the outsourcing of delivery to private firms has without a doubt brought certain benefits in terms of speed of service delivery and in bringing pay-points closer to where beneficiaries live.
- They hardly experience problems at pay-points and if they do, their problems get resolved.

- Not all pay-points have shelter.
- They are satisfied with the services SASSA renders and the grant has improved their quality of life.

10.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Based on the finding that there are offices with inadequate working space the researcher recommends that SASSA make the necessary funds available to acquire more office buildings in order for staff to perform their duties effectively. Although Casey and McKinnon (2009) argue that it would be unnecessary to build new structures, because it is expensive and governments might not have these funds and therefore existing community service points for other basic services can be used.
- Based on the finding that training occurs haphazardly especially on the implementation of new policy changes the researcher recommends that in-service and formal training regarding grant related matters be made available to all SASSA staff in order for them to perform their work more effectively.
- Based on the finding that supervisors and team leaders provide irregular supervision and support to front-line staff and data-capturers the researcher recommends that supervision and support functions form part of the key performance areas of supervisors and team leaders and that it get incorporated in their work plan. In addition, that managers closely monitor whether supervision and support does take place. The researcher further recommends that local office managers, grant administration managers and district managers from time-to-time liaise directly with front-line staff and data-capturers in order to detect problems as early as possible.
- The researcher recommends also that local office managers, grant administration managers and district managers perform quality assurance spot-checks on grant applications on a regular basis preferable in a planned fashion and not leave such an important function to supervisors and team leaders.
- Based on the finding that policy documents for the implementation of new policy changes are not always available the researcher recommends that programme

managers put systems in place to ensure that when new policies and regulations change they immediately provide clear written documentation (electronically and in hard-copy format) to all staff in order for them to execute their duties correctly and swiftly.

- Based on the finding that files go missing the researcher recommends that the local office manager and the grant administration manager put systems in place such as a file-movement registers to record the movement of all files where officials sign the register and the file-movement gets recorded. The researcher furthermore recommends that staff members responsible for missing files be held accountable and that corrective steps such as counselling and disciplinary action be instituted in order to impose greater accountability and sound administration.
- Based on the finding that files go missing and that this compromises the turn-around time of approving applications the researcher recommends the automation of the grant administration process be implemented in the entire SASSA as a matter of urgency.
- Based on the finding that staff experience technical difficulties with computers and wait sometimes days before it gets repaired the researcher recommends that computer technicians be appointed at least at all district offices to expedite the fixing of technical problems.
- Based on the finding that there are not enough connectivity-network points in all offices the researcher recommends that connectivity-points per grant administration official be installed so that applications can be captured onto the SOCPEN-system where the application was taken down. This will ultimately eliminate the unnecessary movement of files and hopefully the problem of missing files.
- Based on the finding that the staff establishment at certain offices does not complement the grant administration business processes the researcher recommends that more staff be appointed as a matter of urgency. However, attention should be directed towards the critical posts at operational level including supervisory and team leader posts in order to ensure finalization of the

application process at each service point and to ensure compliance with grant administration regulations.

- Based on the finding that certain pay-points do not have enough chairs, toilet facilities, drinking water or shelter the researcher recommends the upgrading of such pay-points to comply with the minimum standards of pay-points in order to ensure that social grant payments to beneficiaries at pay-points are done in a humane and dignified manner.
- Based on the finding that not all pay-points are disabled-friendly the researcher recommends that SASSA avail the necessary funds and appoint the necessary service providers to ensure disabled-friendly pay-points in order to ensure that social grant payments to disabled-beneficiaries at pay-points are done in a humane and dignified manner.
- Based on the finding that all pay-points are not fenced all round the researcher recommends that SASSA avail the necessary funds and appoint the necessary service providers in order to ensure that all pay-points are fenced all round. This will ultimately assist with access control at all pay-points. In addition, the researcher recommends that clear direction be given in the service level agreement between SASSA and the payment contractor in terms of pay-point upgrading.
- Based on the finding that certain offices have insufficient transport the researcher recommends that SASSA avail the necessary funds to supplement its transport fleet. The researcher furthermore recommends that the acquired transport be suitable for the unique operations of SASSA such as pay-point monitoring and therefore recommends 4x4, air-conditioned vehicles for rural areas.
- Based on the finding that payment contractors sometimes arrive late at pay-points the researcher recommends that the service level agreement between SASSA and the payment contractors be adhered to and that SASSA enforces the service level agreement firmly in order to ensure compliance at all times.
- Based on the finding that beneficiaries are not always informed about possible delays, reasons for delays and giving an indication of how long it might take before payments will resume the researcher recommends that SASSA staff be

available at all times during payments at pay-points to ensure that beneficiaries are always kept informed about such matters.

- Based on the finding that payment contractors do not always take enough money to pay-points the researcher recommends that enough money be made available by payment contractors in order to prevent a scenario where they must go back to collect more money.
- Based on the finding that payment machines sporadically malfunction at pay-points and cause unnecessary delays the researcher recommends that payment contractors must have technicians available as part of their payment teams to expedite the fixing of broken machines at pay-points. The researcher furthermore recommends that payments contractors replace faulty payment machines with new ones.
- Based on the fact that various role-players are involved in the grant administration and payment process the researcher recommends monthly meetings between SASSA, the payment contractors and beneficiaries in order to address challenges as they occur and to prevent malpractices from remaining unresolved indefinitely.
- Based on the findings that various challenges exist with regard to the outsourced-payment arrangement with payment contractors the researcher recommends that an in-house electronic payment-model be developed and implemented as a matter of urgency.

10.6 CONCLUSION

The aim of the research project was to determine what the strengths and weaknesses in the grant administration process are from application-to-approval. Based on the major findings the researcher is of the opinion that the research project has indeed accomplished its aim because various strengths and weaknesses in the grant administration process have been identified. The theoretical assumption that an assessment of the grant administration process in SASSA will highlight its strengths and weaknesses has therefore been proven correct.

Since no records can be found that could establish that a similar scientific study has to date been done on the strengths and weaknesses of the grant administration process in SASSA, the researcher is further of the opinion that this work indeed contributes to knowledge-building in this particular area and the professional field as a whole.