

CHAPTER 6: FRONT-LINE STAFF: THE STARTING POINT OF GRANT APPLICATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

A research project was embarked upon in SASSA to determine the strengths and weaknesses in the grant administration process from application to approval. The grant administration process, from application to approval, includes various steps. The staff members include the screening official (step one) who checks the completeness of required documentation, followed by the attesting official (step two) who takes down the application and captures it on SOCPEN and then forwards it to the next level, namely quality control (step three). Thereafter the verifying official verifies the information captured on SOCPEN against documentation submitted and approves or rejects the application on SOCPEN (step four).

Four different questionnaires were developed by the researcher to be used during the research. The first questionnaire focuses on the actual application process. This particular chapter focuses on the statistical findings in respect of the application process that emanated from the research project (see front-line staff questionnaire attached). The questionnaires were distributed electronically or personally delivered by researcher at various offices. Front-line staff who were available (availability sampling) and prepared to complete the questionnaire at the time of the research, were requested to complete the questionnaires. A total of 82 front-line staff from various offices in the Northern Cape and Western Cape completed the questionnaires. The completed questionnaires were collected by the researcher from the various offices.

6.2 FINDINGS IN RESPECT OF THE FRONT-LINE QUESTIONNAIRE

The front-line staff are responsible for taking down the grant application. This is usually where the process of a grant application starts. The districts are presented in alpha-numerical order as a way to preserve the identity of the respondents and for ethical reasons.

6.3 Table 1 Front-line staff: working experience in SASSA

	Number of respondents	Less than a year	One year to less than three years	Three years to less than five years	More than five years	
District A	4	0	2 (50%)	0	2 (50%)	5%
District B	8	0	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	0	10%
District C	9	3 (33%)	0	2 (23%)	4 (44%)	11%
District D	20	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	13 (65%)	24%
District E	6	1 (17%)	0	0	5 (83%)	7%
District F	12	0	3 (25%)	2 (17%)	7 (58%)	15%
District G	8	2 (25%)	0	0	6 (75%)	10%
District H	7	0	2 (29%)	1 (14%)	4 (57%)	8%
District I	8	0	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	4 (50%)	10%
Total	82	8	13	16	45	
Percentage		9%	16%	20%	55%	100%

Table 1 reflects that District A, District B, District F, District H as well as District I do not have front-line staff with work experience at SASSA of less than a year. This finding suggests that some offices in these Districts have not appointed new front-line staff in the past year. District A front-line staff have an equal distribution with 50% one to less than three years working experience and 50% five years and more working experience. The following districts namely District C (33%), District D (10%), District E (17%) and District G (25%) are the only districts that have staff with less than a year's track record at SASSA. One would therefore assume that the average turnaround time for the completion of grant applications might be longer than districts where staff are employed with long working experience at SASSA. The majority of the front-line staff at the districts, namely District B (75%), District D (65%), District E (83%), District F (58%), District G (75%) and District H (57%) have either three to five years or more than five years working experience at SASSA. These findings suggest that the front-line staff at SASSA have solid work experience basis. A general overview of the contents of the above table indicates that a majority of the staff members in the various Districts have considerable working experience (more than five years) in SASSA from which the employees with less experience will benefit from. It gives the different Districts a sound basis on which to render services.

6.4 Table 2: Front-line staff: adequate work space

	Number of respondents	Adequate work space	Inadequate work space	
District A	4	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	5%
District B	8	0	8 (100%)	10%
District C	9	4 (44%)	5 (56%)	11%
District D	20	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	24%
District E	6	5 (83%)	1 (17%)	7%
District F	12	9 (75%)	3 (25%)	15%
District G	8	3 (38%)	5 (62%)	10%
District H	7	1 (14%)	6 (86%)	8%
District I	8	0	8 (100%)	10%
Total	82	36	46	
Percentage		44%	56%	100%

Significant differences regarding work space are reflected in Table 2. It reflects that the front-line staff at the following districts, namely District A (75%), District B (100%), District C (56%), District G (62%), District H (86%) and District I (100%) do not have adequate working space to perform their daily duties. It is six out of nine Districts that do not have adequate work space. Based on these findings, one can therefore suppose that inadequate working space could lead to the creation of backlogs, misplaced or lost applications, employee frustrations and other unnecessary pressure such as tension among colleagues in the work place. However, the most obvious assumption one can make is that infrastructure at these districts is not intact.

On the other side, Table 2 also reflects the fact that a substantially high percentage of front-line staff in three Districts indicated they have adequate working space to perform their duties, namely District D (65%), District E (83%) and District F (75%). One might therefore assume that adequate working space would secure better file management, improved service delivery in terms of grant administration and a harmonized working environment. Although the findings suggest that there are indeed offices with adequate working space, it is clear that the vast majority rather have inadequate than adequate working spaces and this is an issue of concern. This finding unfortunately does not capture the fundamental nature of SASSA's Service Delivery Model, where it states that

proper and enabling physical infrastructure (all facilities and buildings where beneficiaries interact face-to-face with SASSA staff) is necessary for effective service delivery.

6.5 Table 3: Front-line staff: Training on the implementation of new policy changes

	Number of respondents	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always	
District A	4	0	3 (75%)	1(25%)	0	5%
District B	8	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	0	0	10%
District C	9	0	8 (89%)	0	1 (11%)	11%
District D	20	5 (25%)	14 (70%)	1 (5%)	0	24%
District E	6	0	2 (33%)	3 (50%)	1 (17%)	7%
District F	12	1 (8%)	7 (59%)	3 (25%)	1 (8%)	15%
District G	8	1 (13%)	3 (37%)	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	10%
District H	7	2 (29%)	4 (57%)	1 (14%)	0	8%
District I	8	0	7 (88%)	1 (12%)	0	10%
Total	82	11	54	12	5	
Percentage		13%	66%	15%	6%	100%

The findings in Table 3 indicate that training of front-line staff in seven out of nine Districts only takes place sometimes with District A (75%) District B (75%), District C (89%), District D (70%), District F (59%), District H (57%) and District I (88%). However, based on the argument that SASSA is a relatively new service delivery agency with new legislation and policy developments occurring on a regular basis, one would assume that training in all districts would be a high priority and that it should occur on a more regular basis. The absence of regular training regarding policy changes remains a huge concern.

6.6 Table 4: Front-line staff: Supervision by supervisors during the implementation of new policy changes

	Number of respondents	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always	
District A	4	0	0	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	5%
District B	8	4 (50%)	4 (50%)	0	0	10%
District C	9	1 (11%)	5 (56%)	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	11%
District D	20	9 (45%)	9 (45%)	2 (10%)	0	24%
District E	6	0	1 (17%)	3 (50%)	2 (33%)	7%
District F	12	5 (41%)	3 (25%)	2 (17%)	2 (17%)	15%
District G	8	2 (25%)	1 (13%)	3 (37%)	2 (25%)	10%
District H	7	2 (29%)	4 (57%)	0	1 (14%)	8%
District I	8	1 (13%)	3 (37%)	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	10%
Total	82	24	30	14	14	
Percentage		29%	37%	17%	17%	100%

The findings in Table 4 indicates that supervision in the majority of Districts occur haphazardly. However, based on the argument that SASSA is a relatively new service delivery agency with new legislation and policy developments occurring on a regular basis, one would therefore assume that supervision in all districts would be a high priority and that it should occur on a more regular basis. The absence of regular supervision regarding policy changes remains a huge concern.

6.7 Table 5: Front-line staff: Mentoring from supervisors during the implementation of new policy changes

	Number of respondents	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always	
District A	4	0	0	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	5%
District B	8	0	0	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	10%
District C	9	1 (11%)	6 (67%)	1 (11%)	1 (11%)	11%
District D	20	7 (35%)	9 (45%)	4 (20%)	0	24%
District E	6	0	0	1 (17%)	5 (83%)	7%
District F	12	3 (25%)	5 (41%)	2 (17%)	2 (17%)	15%
District G	8	2 (25%)	1 (13%)	2 (25%)	3 (37%)	10%
District H	7	3 (43%)	3 (43%)	1 (14%)	0	8%
District I	8	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	3 (38%)	1 (12%)	10%
Total	82	18	26	17	21	
Percentage		21%	32%	21%	26%	100%

Table 5 reflects that the highest percentages of front-line staff in District A, District B (75%) and District E (83%) always receive mentoring. However, the general overview of the findings in this table reveals that mentoring in the majority of Districts occurs haphazardly. Based on the fact that legislation and policies change continuously, one would expect that mentoring should occur on a more regular basis. The absence of regular mentoring from supervisors during the implementation of new policy changes remains a huge concern.

6.8 Table 6: Front-line staff: Support from supervisors during the implementation of new policy changes

	Number of respondents	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always	
District A	4	0	0	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	5%
District B	8	6 (75%)	2 (25%)	0	0	10%
District C	9	1 (11%)	4 (45%)	3 (33%)	1 (11%)	11%
District D	20	7 (35%)	11 (55%)	2 (10%)	0	24%
District E	6	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	0	3 (50%)	7%
District F	12	3 (25%)	5 (42%)	3 (25%)	1 (8%)	15%
District G	8	2 (25%)	0	4 (50%)	2 (25%)	10%
District H	7	2 (29%)	4 (57%)	1 (14%)	0	8%
District I	8	1 (13%)	3 (37%)	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	10%
Total	82	23	31	16	12	
Percentage		28%	38%	19%	15%	100%

The general overview of the contents of the findings in this particular table is that support from supervisors occurs haphazardly. However, based on the fact that legislation and policies change continuously, one would expect that support from supervisors should occur all the time. The absence of regular support from supervisors during the implementation of new policy changes remains a huge concern.

There seems to be a correlation with regard to the findings in the previous four tables. The correlation relates to training, supervision, mentoring and support from supervisors during the implementation of new policy changes. The correlation is that training, supervision, mentoring and support from supervisors during the implementation of new policy changes happen haphazardly. This is a matter of concern.

6.9 Table 7: Front-line staff: Number of applications per day

	Number of respondents	0 - 10	11 - 19	20 - 29	30+	
District A	4	0	4 (100%)	0	0	5%
District B	8	3 (38%)	3 (38%)	2 (24%)	0	10%
District C	9	3 (33%)	4 (44%)	2 (23%)	0	11%
District D	20	4 (20%)	8 (40%)	2 (10%)	6 (30%)	24%
District E	6	0	0	1 (17%)	5 (83%)	7%
District F	12	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	6 (50%)	4 (34%)	15%
District G	8	1 (13%)	1 (13%)	1 (13%)	5 (61%)	10%
District H	7	0	1 (14%)	5 (72%)	1 (14%)	8%
District I	8	0	1 (13%)	4 (50%)	3 (37%)	10%
Total	82	12	23	23	24	
Percentage		15%	28%	28%	29%	100%

The findings in Table 7 indicate that the majority of front-line staff in only two out of nine Districts, namely District E (83%) and District G (61%) indicated that they receive more than 30 applications per day. Based on these findings one could argue that front-line staff in the majority of Districts are not very busy taking down grant applications. Nevertheless, this finding might be misleading because taking down of applications might not be the only activity front-line staff are tasked with. Other activities might include aspects such as responding to enquiries, amending information on existing applications such as changes of address, changes of payment method, outreach programmes and so forth.

6.10 Table 8: Front-line staff: Completion of applications per day

	Number of respondents	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always	
District A	4	0	0	4 (100%)	0	5%
District B	8	0	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	4 (50%)	10%
District C	9	0	0	5 (56%)	4 (44%)	11%
District D	20	0	2 (10%)	6 (30%)	12 (60%)	24%
District E	6	0	0	2 (33%)	4 (67%)	7%
District F	12	0	0	5 (42%)	7 (58%)	15%
District G	8	0	1 (12%)	2 (25%)	5 (63%)	10%
District H	7	0	1 (14%)	3 (43%)	3 (43%)	8%
District I	8	0	0	3 (37%)	5 (63%)	10%
Total	82	0	6	32	44	
Percentage		0	7%	39%	54%	100%

Table 8 points out that the majority of front-line staff in five out of nine Districts indicated that they always complete all applications received per day.

6.11 Table 9: Average time in taking down an application

	Number of respondents	Less than 30 minutes	30 minutes to less than a hour	A hour to less than two hours	More than two hours	
District A	4	4 (100%)	0	0	0	5%
District B	8	7 (88%)	1 (12%)	0	0	10%
District C	9	8 (89%)	1 (11%)	0	0	11%
District D	20	17 (85%)	3 (15%)	0	0	24%
District E	6	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	0	0	7%
District F	12	8 (67%)	4 (33%)	0	0	15%
District G	8	6 (75%)	2 (25%)	0	0	10%
District H	7	3 (43%)	4 (57%)	0	0	8%
District I	8	5 (63%)	3 (37%)	0	0	10%
Total	82	61	21			
Percentage		74%	26%	0%	0%	100%

Table 9 points out that the majority of front-line staff in seven out of nine Districts spent 30 minutes or less to take down an application. Based on the information in the previous two tables regarding the average number of applications received per day as well as the

completion of all applications per day, it seems as if the task of taking down grant applications is not a lengthy and difficult process. One can therefore assume that once an applicant gets assistance by the front-line staff the time spent at the front desk is not very long. One can further assume, based on the findings that the majority of Districts receive less than 30 applications per day and the majority of Districts manage to complete applications received per day, that there are no backlogs with regard to the taking down of applications.

6.12 Table 10: Front-line staff: Support from colleagues during the implementation of new policy changes

	Number of respondents	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always	
District A	4	0	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	5%
District B	8	0	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	4 (50%)	10%
District C	9	0	3 (33%)	2 (22%)	4 (45%)	11%
District D	20	0	8 (40%)	6 (30%)	6 (30%)	24%
District E	6	0	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	2 (34%)	7%
District F	12	0	3 (25%)	6 (50%)	3 (25%)	15%
District G	8	1 (13%)	1 (13%)	2 (24%)	4 (50%)	10%
District H	7	1 (14%)	4 (57%)	0	2 (29%)	8%
District I	8	0	0	5 (63%)	3 (37%)	10%
Total	82	2	25	26	29	
Percentage		2%	30%	32%	36%	100%

The general overview of the findings in this table is that front-line staff do not get support from colleagues very often. Based on the overall findings, one could argue that there might be working relationship problems among staff in some instances, but it might not necessarily be the rule as to why there is not always a high percentage of support from colleagues. Other contributing factors might be inadequate work space and insufficient infrastructure which could contribute to the general lack of support from colleagues. There might also be other underlying problems which were not necessarily captured by this research project.

6.13 Table 11: Front-line staff: The availability of policy documents that regulate the implementation of new policy changes

	Number of respondents	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always	
District A	4	0	0	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	5%
District B	8	0	6 (74%)	1 (13%)	1 (13%)	10%
District C	9	0	3 (33%)	2 (22%)	4 (45%)	11%
District D	20	0	8 (40%)	6 (30%)	6 (30%)	24%
District E	6	0	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	2 (34%)	7%
District F	12	0	3 (25%)	6 (50%)	3 (25%)	15%
District G	8	1 (13%)	1 (13%)	2 (24%)	4 (50%)	10%
District H	7	1 (14%)	4 (57%)	0	2 (29%)	8%
District I	8	0	0	5 (63%)	3 (37%)	10%
Total	82	2	27	27	26	
Percentage		2%	33%	33%	32%	100%

The findings in Table 11 indicate that the majority of front-line staff in only two Districts namely District A (75%) and District I (63%) indicated that policy documents that regulate the implementation of new policy changes are available most of the time. On the other hand, the majority of front-line staff in the District B (74%) and District H (57%) indicated that such policy documents are only available sometimes.

The general overview of the findings in this particular table is that policy documents that regulate the implementation of new policy changes are not always available. Nonetheless, legislation and policy changes in SASSA occur on a regular basis. It is therefore of critical importance that legislation and policy changes are implemented correctly. Hence, one would have expected that policy documents for the regulation of the implementation of policy changes should always be available. Based on the average percentage of front-line staff who have indicated that such policy documents are either sometimes or most of the time available, one can assume the following, namely, firstly, that confusion might exist among staff in terms of how new policy changes should be interpreted and implemented, secondly, that there might be inconsistency among districts on how new policy changes are interpreted and implemented and lastly, that

new policy changes might be interpreted and implemented incorrectly. This is a matter of concern.

6.14 Table 12: Front-line staff: Misplaced/lost applications after processing

	Number of respondents	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always	
District A	4	0	4 (100%)	0	0	5%
District B	8	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	0	0	10%
District C	9	1 (11%)	8 (89%)	0	0	11%
District D	20	4 (20%)	12 (60%)	3 (15%)	1 (5%)	24%
District E	6	0	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	2 (34%)	7%
District F	12	3 (25%)	9 (75%)	0	0	15%
District G	8	1 (13%)	1 (13%)	2 (24%)	4 (50%)	10%
District H	7	0	7 (100%)	0	0	8%
District I	8	0	0	5 (63%)	3 (37%)	10%
Total	82	11	49	12	10	
Percentage		13%	60%	15%	12%	100%

Table 12 points out that 100% of the front-line staff from District A and District H are of the view that applications sometimes get misplaced or lost after processing. This is a matter of concern. The findings in Table 11 also point out that the majority of front-line staff in the following districts, namely District B (75%), District C (89%), District D (60%), District F (75%) are of the view that applications sometimes get misplaced or lost. The majority of front-line staff from District I (63%) hold the view that applications are most of the time misplaced or get lost. The general overview of the findings in this particular table is that the majority of front-line staff in six out of nine Districts indicated that files get misplaced or lost after processing. Misplaced or lost files are a huge concern because it has so many ramifications. It negatively affects the turn-around time of applications and it might lead to the creation of large amounts. It may also lead to a scenario where clients must re-apply for grants and this might damage the image of SASSA. The following charts shed some light on the reasons why misplaced or lost applications prevail. However, respondents could have opted for more than one reason and therefore the total sum might be more than 100%.

6.15 Chart 1: Front-line staff: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District A

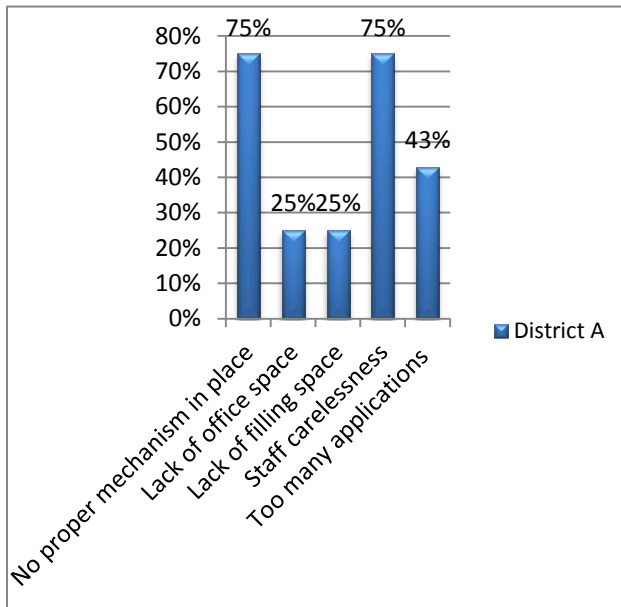
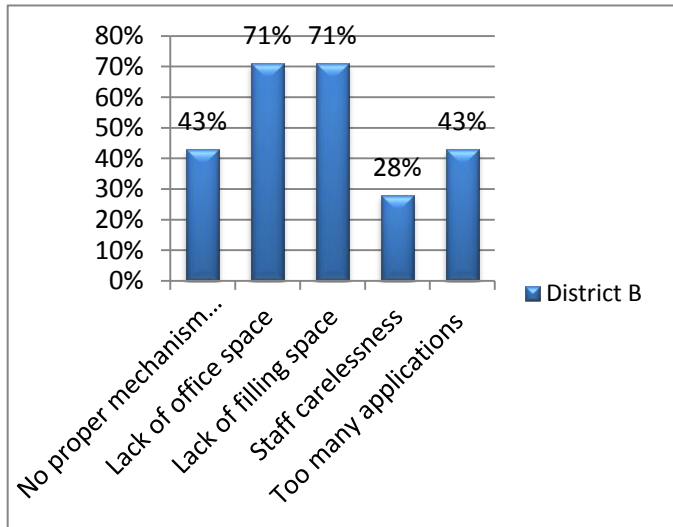


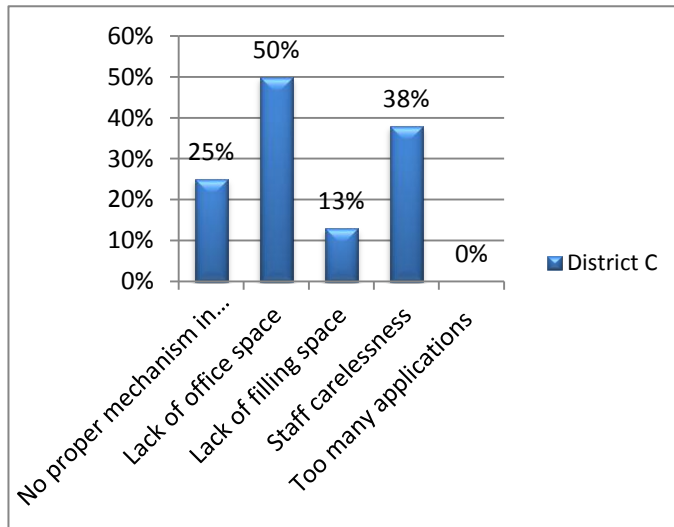
Chart 1 clearly shows that the majority of the front-line staff (75%) from District A feel that no proper mechanism is in place to record the movement of files and staff carelessness is the major reason why files get misplaced or lost. However, an additional 43% of staff cited too many applications to process also as a reason for misplaced or lost files. Staff carelessness is also cited as a main reason for misplaced or lost files, and this is rather a huge concern. Considering the findings in Table 4 (supervision from supervisor), Table 5 (mentoring from supervisors) and Table 6 (support from supervisor) a substantially high percentage of front-line staff (75%) indicated that they receive supervision, mentoring and support from supervisors always. It is disturbing to find, despite the high percentage (75%) of supervision, mentoring and support, that staff are still careless about how they handle applications.

6.16 Chart 2: Front-line staff: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District B



In contrast to the findings of District A in Chart 1, the majority of the front-line staff in District B (71%) hold the view that lack of office space and of filing space is the main reason why files are misplaced or lost. This finding draws a parallel with Table 2 where 100% of all front-line staff from District B hold the view that they have inadequate work space. This finding unfortunately does not capture the fundamental nature of SASSA's Service Delivery Model, where it states that a proper and enabling physical infrastructure (all facilities and buildings where beneficiaries interact face-to-face with SASSA staff) is necessary for effective service delivery. Staff carelessness seems not to be a major reason for misplaced or lost files, despite the difficult working environment.

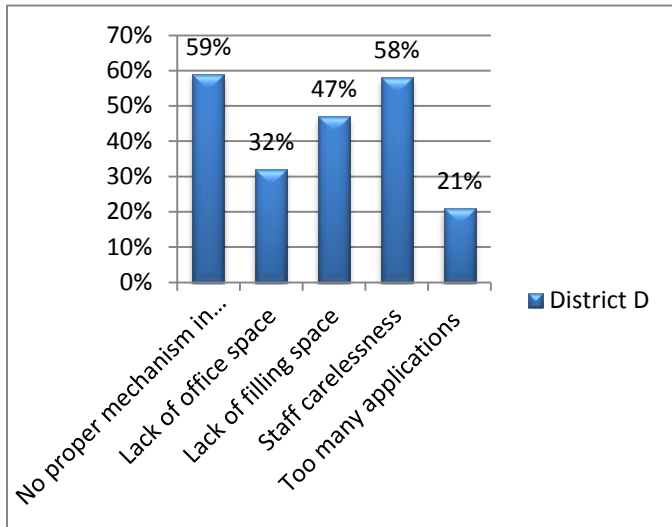
6.17 Chart 3: Front-line staff: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District C



Similar to the findings in the previous chart (Chart 2) 50% of beneficiaries in District C also indicate that lack of office space is a reason for misplaced or lost files. This finding unfortunately does not capture the fundamental nature of SASSA's Service Delivery Model, where it states that proper and enabling physical infrastructure (all facilities and buildings where beneficiaries interact face-to-face with SASSA staff) is necessary for effective service delivery.

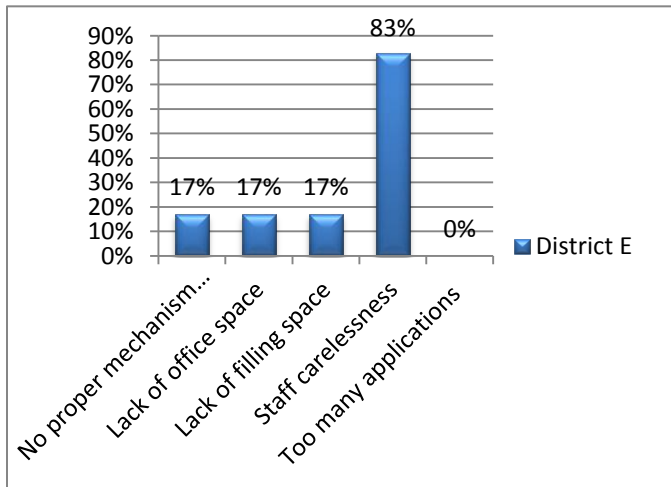
The findings in Chart 3 further show that 0% of staff regard too many applications as a reason for misplaced or lost applications. This finding without doubt correlates with an earlier finding in Table 7 which indicates that 44% of the front-line staff in District C receive 11 to 19 applications per day. Noteworthy, however, is the second highest score, namely (38%) of front-line staff who regard staff carelessness as a reason for misplaced or lost applications. It therefore seems as if, apart from operational challenges and inadequate working space, a fundamental attitude problem is prevalent among front-line staff in District C.

6.18 Chart 4: Front-line staff: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District D



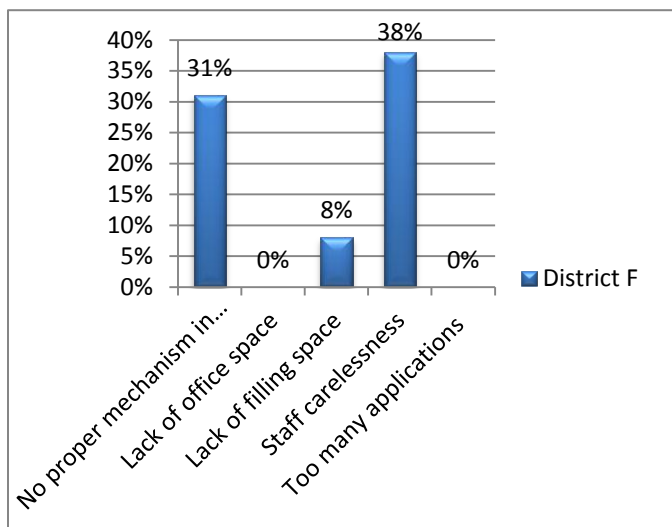
The findings in Chart 4 suggest that office space is not necessarily a problem in District D. The majority of the front-line staff (59%) cited that no proper mechanisms are in place to record the movement of files and 58% indicated staff carelessness as the two main reasons why files are misplaced or lost. The relatively low percentage (32%) who indicated lack of office space is in line with an earlier finding in Table 2 (adequate working space) where 65% of front-line staff indicated that they have adequate working space. Staff carelessness (58%) as a reason for misplaced or lost files is almost equally high as the percentage of no proper mechanism in place (59%). This is a matter of concern.

6.19 Chart 5: Front-line staff: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District E



The findings in Chart 5 reflect that an overwhelming 83% of the respondents indicated that staff carelessness constitutes the main reason why files are misplaced or lost. This is a matter for concern. The relatively low response (17%) with regard to lack of office space is in line with earlier findings in Table 2 where only 17% of respondents have indicated that they have inadequate work space.

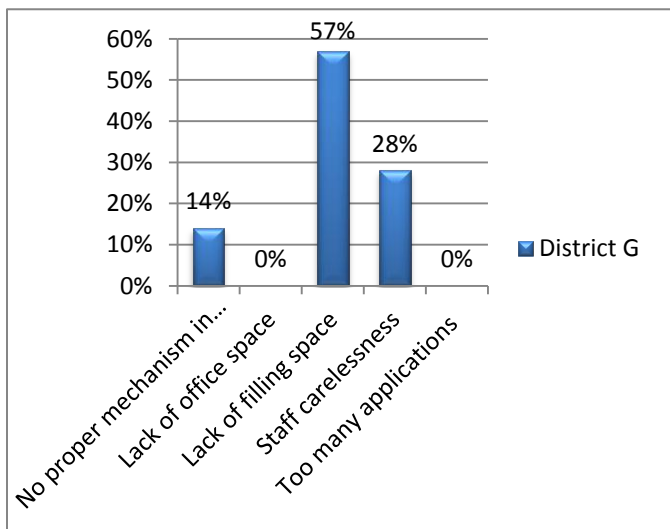
6.20 Chart 6: Front-line staff: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District F



The findings in Chart 6 indicate that 38% of front-line staff in District F indicated that staff carelessness followed by no proper mechanism in place to record the movement of

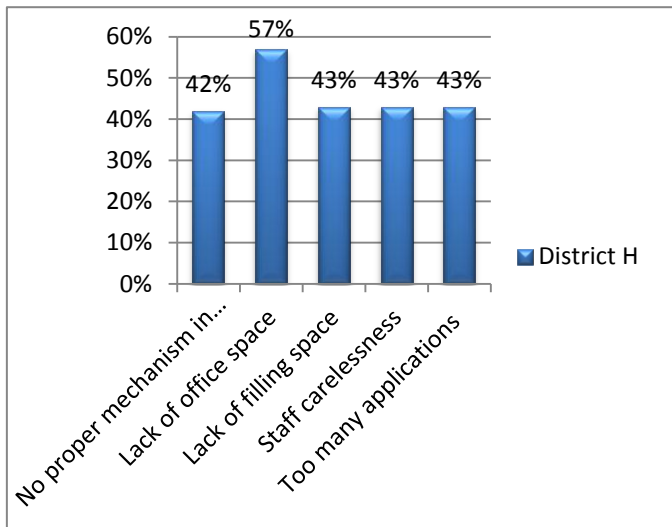
files (31%) constitute the main reasons why files are misplaced or lost. This is a matter of concern. The 0% response to lack of office space is in line with the earlier finding in Table 2 where 75% of the front-line staff indicated that they have adequate office space. Likewise, the 0% response to too many applications to work with is also in line with the earlier findings (Table 7) that 50% of respondents receive 20 to 29 applications per day.

6.21 Chart 7: Front-line staff: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District G



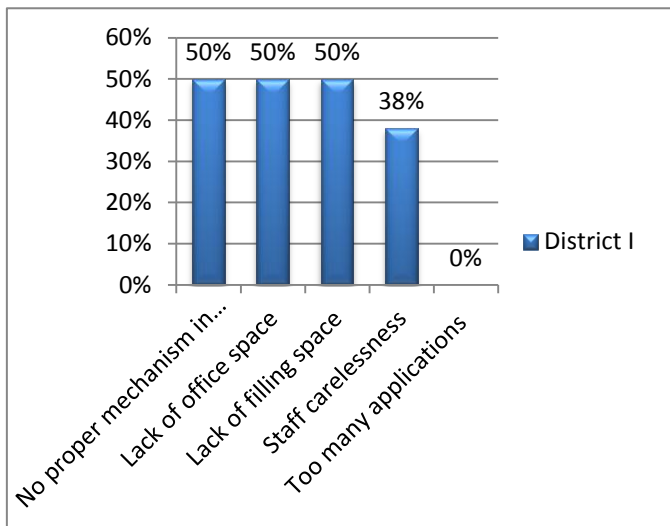
The findings in Chart 7 indicate that the majority of front-line staff (57%) indicated that lack of filing space is the major reason why files are misplaced or lost, followed by 28% of respondents who regard staff carelessness also as a reason for misplaced or lost files. This is a matter of concern. Although earlier findings in Table 2 point out that a substantively high response rate (62%) indicated they have inadequate working space, 0% of respondents indicated that lack of office space is a reason for misplaced or lost files.

6.22 Chart 8: Front-line staff: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District H



The findings in Chart 8 suggest that the majority of front-line staff (57%) regard lack of office space as the main reason for misplaced or lost files. In addition, 43% of respondents regard lack of filing space, staff carelessness and too many applications to work with as equally important reasons for misplaced or lost files. This is followed by an almost similar response (42%) that indicated that no proper mechanism is in place to record the movement of files as a reason for misplaced or lost files. This is a matter of concern. These findings correlate with earlier findings in Table 2 where an overwhelming response of 86% indicated they have inadequate work space. This finding unfortunately does not capture the fundamental nature of SASSA's Service Delivery Model, where it states that proper and enabling physical infrastructure (all facilities and buildings where beneficiaries interact face-to-face with SASSA staff) is necessary for effective service delivery.

6.23 Chart 9: Front-line staff: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District I



The findings in Chart 9 are almost similar to the findings in the previous chart. No proper mechanism is in place to record the movement of files, lack of office space and lack of filing space have been equally regarded by respondents (50%) as the main reasons for misplaced or lost files. This finding unfortunately does not capture the fundamental nature of SASSA's Service Delivery Model, where it states that a proper and enabling physical infrastructure (all facilities and buildings where beneficiaries interact face-to-face with SASSA staff) is necessary for effective service delivery.

This is followed by 38% of respondents who view staff carelessness also as a main reason for misplaced or lost files. It is clearly evident from the findings on the reasons why files are misplaced or lost in all districts that staff carelessness is one of the main reasons. This finding remains prevalent in almost all districts despite the fact that earlier findings suggest that supervision, mentoring and support from supervisors occur at times, be it sometimes or most of the time. In addition, this finding remains prevalent, despite the fact that adequate working space and filing space are available in certain Districts. This is rather a worrying finding because even though infrastructure, proper

mechanisms in place to record the movement of files, adequate filing space might be fixed, how does one fix staff carelessness.

6.24 Table 13: Front-line staff: Technical difficulties with computers

	Number of respondents	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always	
District A	4	0	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	0	5%
District B	8	0	5 (63%)	3 (37%)	0	10%
District C	9	1 (11%)	7 (78%)	0	1 (11%)	11%
District D	20	1 (5%)	18 (90%)	1 (5%)	0	24%
District E	6	0	0	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	7%
District F	12	0	5 (42%)	3 (25%)	4 (33%)	15%
District G	8	0	4 (50%)	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	10%
District H	7	0	3 (43%)	3 (43%)	1 (14%)	8%
District I	8	0	3 (38%)	3 (38%)	2 (24%)	10%
Total	82	2	48	19	13	
Percentage		2%	59%	23%	16%	100%

The findings in Table 13 indicate that the majority of front-line staff in the District A (75%), District B (63%), District C (78%) and District D (90%) sometimes experience technical problems with their computers. The general overview of the findings in this particular table indicates that the majority of front-line staff in the majority of districts experience technical difficulties with the computer on a regular basis. Computers can be regarded as tools of trade and therefore constitute an important aspect in the value chain of processing grant applications. It is therefore of critical importance that computers are always in a working condition as an enabling condition to process grant applications.

6.25 Table 14: Front-line staff: Average time to resolve technical difficulties

	Number of respondents	Less than a day	One to three days	Three to five days	More than five days	
District A	4	0	3 (75%)	0	1 (25%)	5%
District B	8	2 (25%)	5 (63%)	0	1 (12%)	10%
District C	9	6 (67%)	2 (22%)	0	1 (11%)	11%
District D	20	8 (40%)	8 (40%)	4 (20%)	0	24%
District E	6	0	4 (67%)	0	2 (33%)	7%
District F	12	5 (42%)	4 (33%)	2 (17%)	1 (8%)	15%
District G	8	2 (25%)	5 (63%)	0	1 (12%)	10%
District H	7	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	2 (29%)	3 (43%)	8%
District I	8	0	2 (24%)	3 (38%)	3 (38%)	10%
Total	82	24	34	11	13	
Percentage		29%	42%	13%	16%	100%

The findings in Table 14 indicate that the majority of front-line staff in four Districts, namely District A (75%), District B (63%), District E (67%) and District G (63%) indicated that the average time needed to resolve technical difficulties is one to three days. Based on the fact that computers can be regarded as tools of trade, one can safely assume that once front-line staff experience technical difficulties with their computers, grant applications cannot be processed, nor can other functions be performed. One can also argue that the longer it takes to resolve technical difficulties, the longer it takes for front-line staff to perform optimally.

6.26 SYNOPSIS OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS

With reference to the front-line staff responsible for taking down applications, the empirical investigation revealed the following:

- The majority of front-line staff have considerable working experience (more than five years) in SASSA;
- The majority of front-line staff have inadequate work space;
- Training, supervision and mentoring support from supervisors and colleagues occurs haphazardly;

- The majority of front-line staff receive between 11-29 applications per day and spend 30 minutes or less to take down an application;
- Policy documents that regulate the implementation of new policy changes are not always available;
- Grant application files get misplaced or lost after processing;
- Staff carelessness is one of the main reasons why files get lost or misplaced; and
- Front-line staff experience technical difficulties with the computer on a regular basis and it takes one to three days to resolve technical difficulties.

6.27 CONCLUSION

Grant administration processes in SASSA are labour-intensive and officials play a vital role in the correct administration of social grants. It is therefore of the utmost importance that staff should remain professional in their conduct and that their administrative actions and decisions are always beyond reproach. SASSA staff work with the poorest of the poor from the communities, and such people are desperate for help when they apply for social grants. The assistance that SASSA offers might be the last resort and should therefore be seen as a lifeline to the destitute. There should simply be no room for staff carelessness in the system.

Although there are clearly some strengths in the grant administration process, it is unfortunately true that the weaknesses are overwhelming. Inadequate working space which could lead to various ramifications such as occupational health and safety matters, frustration among colleagues, misplaced or lost files remain a huge concern. There is therefore certainly some room for improvement. Another major concern, however, is the fact that staff carelessness constitutes the main reason why files are misplaced or lost during the application process in almost all districts. This is rather a worrying finding because even though other weaknesses in the process such as infrastructure may be acquired, proper mechanisms are in place to record the movement of files, adequate filing space be fixed, the question remains as to how one addresses staff carelessness. SASSA operates in an environment where there are continuous legislation and policy changes. One would therefore expect that policy

documents regarding legislative changes should always be available in the workplace and that training, supervision, mentoring and support regarding such changes be implemented on a continuous basis.