An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the South African Social Security Agency in the Northern and Western Cape Provinces

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DECLARATION

I, Donald Edward Joseph declare that

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is my own work, that all the sources used or quoted have been duly acknowledged by means of complete reference and that I have not previously submitted the thesis for a degree at another University.

Donald Edward Joseph
ABSTRACT

An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the South African Social Security Agency in the Northern and Western Cape provinces

Key words: social grants, beneficiary, South African Social Security Agency, pay-point, pay cycle, front-line staff, pay-point team member, process-evaluation, implementation-evaluation, SOCPEN.

The research was directed at assessing the strengths and weaknesses in the application-to-approval process of social grants up to the payment of social grants at pay-points in the South African Social Security Agency (hereafter SASSA).

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 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; and
- 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.

The study was conducted in two regions, namely the Northern Cape and the Western Cape. Various offices in the Northern Cape and the Western Cape were therefore part of the research. The grant administration process from application-to-approval includes various stages. The staff members include the screening official (step one) who checks the completeness of the required documentation, followed by 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 a verifying official verifies the information captured on SOCPEN against documentation submitted and approves or rejects the application on SOCPEN (step four). Staff at pay-points (where beneficiaries receive their payments) and beneficiaries at pay-points were also part of the research focus.

Four different data-collection instruments were therefore used during the research project. The first data-collection instrument was designed to collect data on the actual grant application process and problems and strengths in this regard (questionnaire front-line staff). The empirical investigation revealed the following with regard to the front-line staff:

- 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 spent 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.

The second data-collection instrument was developed to collect data on the capturing of the application (questionnaire data-capturer) onto the SOCPEN system.

The empirical investigation revealed the following with regard to data-capturers:

- The majority of data-capturers have solid work experience as data-capturers in SASSA although some data-capturers have inadequate work space;
- Training on the implementation of new policy changes occurs irregularly;
- Supervision, mentoring and support from supervisors happen haphazardly;
• Data-capturers receive between 20 and 29 applications per day and they capture all applications successfully;
• Data-capturers receive support from colleagues on a more regular basis than from supervisors;
• Documents or guidelines that regulate the implementation of policy changes are not always available in the work place;
• Applications sometimes get misplaced or lost after capturing;
• No proper mechanisms are in place to record the movement of files, 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 in the capturing and approving of normal applications exist and staff shortages and system-related problems are the main reasons why backlogs exist;
• Backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases and
• Staff shortages, a centralized review management approach, lack of office space and lack of connectivity points constitute the main reasons why review backlogs exist.

The third data-collection instrument (questionnaire pay-point team member) was developed to measure services at pay-points and to determine the problems experienced at pay-points. The empirical investigation revealed the following with regard to this category as seen by pay-point team members:
• Some pay-points are not disabled-friendly;
• There are not always enough chairs, toilet facilities or drinking water available at pay-points;
• 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 just under two hours to get more money;
• Grant recipients hardly ever receive wrong grant amounts;
• Hawkers and vendors operate mainly outside the pay-point;
• 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 round and
• First Aid kits are available at pay-points most of the time.

The fourth data-collection instrument (questionnaire for beneficiaries) was developed to target the beneficiaries who receive grant payments at pay-points. The empirical investigation revealed the following:

• Some pay-points are not disabled-friendly;
• There are not always enough chairs, toilet facilities or drinking water available at pay-points;
• 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 rarely receive wrong grant amounts;
• Hawkers and vendors operate mainly outside the pay-point, but there are exceptional cases where they operate inside the pay-points;
• Beneficiaries do feel safe at pay-points most of the time;
• Beneficiaries mostly live within walking distance from the pay-point;
Beneficiaries hardly experience problems at pay-points and if they do, their problems get resolved;

- Not all pay-points provide shelter from the elements;
- Beneficiaries are satisfied with the services SASSA renders and the grant has improved their quality of life.

Grant administration processes in SASSA are labour-intensive and officials play a vital role in the correct administration of social grants. The study has revealed that although there is clearly some strength in the grant administration process from application-to-approval up the payment of social grants at pay-points, it is unfortunately true that the weaknesses are overwhelming.
OPSOMMING

‘n Assessering van die sterk- en swakpunte binne die Suid-Afrikaanse Sosiale Sekerheidsagentskap in die Noord- en Wes-Kaap provinsies

Sleutelwoorde: maatskaplike toelaes, begunstigde, Suid-Afrikaanse Sosiale Sekerheidsagentskap, (SASSA), betaalpunt, betaalsiklus, eerste kontakpersoon, betaalpuntspanlid, prosesevaluering, implementerings-evaluering, SOCPEN.

Die navorsing was gemik op die assessering van die sterkpunte en swakpunte in die aansoekproses vir maatskaplike toelaes vanaf die aansoekpunt tot by die goedkeuring van toelaes insluitende die uitbetaling van toelaes by betaalpunte binne die Suid-Afrikaanse Sosiale Sekerheidagentskap.

Die algemene doel van die navorsingsprojek was om die proses van maatskaplike toelaes vanaf die aansoek tot die goedkeuring, insluitende die uitbetaling van maatskaplike toelaes binne die Suid-Afrikaanse Sosiale Sekerheidagentskap te assesseer. Die spesifieke doelwitte van die studie was daarom:

- Om die huidige aansoek-tot-goedkeuringproses van maatskaplike toelaes te bespreek;
- Om die sterkpunte en swakpunte in die toelaagadministrasieproses te assesseer ten opsigte van spesifieke administratiewe procedures en strukturele aspekte soos ervaar deur die eerste attesteringbeamptes, (beamptes verantwoordlik vir die afneem van die aansoek) data-invoerders (beamptes verantwoordelik vir die invoer van die inligting in die SOCPEN-stelsel soos dit verskyn op die aansoekvorm), betaalpuntbeamptes (beamptes verantwoordelik vir dienstlewing by betaalpunte) en begunstigdes by betaalpunte; en
- Om ‘n verslag met betrekking tot die sterkpunte en swakpunte in die administrasie van maatskaplike toelaes vanaf aansoek-tot-goedkeuring, insluitende die uitbetaling van maatskaplike toelaes by betaalpunte aan hoofkantoor te voorsien.

Die studie is gedoen in twee provinsies, naamlik die Noord-Kaap en die Wes-Kaap. Verskeie kantore in die Noord-Kaap en Wes-Kaap was deel van die navorsing. Die
maatskaplike toelaagadministrasieproses vanaf aansoek tot goedkeuring sluit verskillende stappe in.

Die attesteringsbeampte kyk of alle vereiste dokumentasie vir ‘n toelaagaansoek beskikbaar en korrek is (stap 1). Daarna word die aansoek deur die tweede attesteringsbeampte afgeneem en op die SOCPEN-stelsel ingesleutel (stap 2). Daarna vorder die aansoek tot by kwaliteitsbeheer (stap 3) waar die korrektheid van die aansoek nagegaan word. Dan word die aansoek elektronies geverifieer deur ‘n verifiëringsbeampte, waarna die stelsel ‘n brief genereer wat aandui of die aansoek afgekeur of goedgekeur is (stap 4). Beamptes by betaalpunte sowel as begunstigdes wat hul toelaag uitbetalings by betaalpunte ontvang was ook deel van die navorsing.

Vier verskillende data-insamelingsinstrumente is gebruik tydens die navosingsprojek. Die eerste data-insamelingsinstrument is ontwerp om inligting in te samel oor die toelaagaanmoekaansoekproses en die swak– en sterkpunte in hierdie verband (vraelys attesteringsbeampte). Die tweede data-insamelingsinstrument is ontwerp om inligting in te samel oor die invoer van data in die SOCPEN-stelsel (vraelys data-invoering). Die derde data-insamelingsinstrument (vraelys betaalpuntbeampte) was ontwerp om dienslewing te meet by betaalpunte en om vas te stel wat die probleme by betaalpunte is. Die vierde data-insamelingsinstrument (vraelys begunstigde) is ontwerp om begunstigdes wat hul betalings by betaalpunte ontvang te teiken.

Die empiriese ondersoek het die volgende aspekte uitgelig met betrekking tot attesteringsbeamptes:

- Die meerderheid attesteringsbeamptes het meer as vyf jaar werksondervinding by SASSA;
- Die meerderheid attesteringsbeamptes het nie genoegsame werksruimte nie;
- Opleiding, toesig, mentering en ondersteuning van toesighouers en collegas geskied op ‘n ongereelde basis;
- Die meerderheid attesteringsbeamptes ontvang tussen 11-29 aansoeke per dag en bestee 30 minute of minder om ‘n aansoek af te neem;
- Beleidsdokumente wat die implementering van nuwe beleid reguleer is nie altyd beskikbaar nie;
- Toelaagaanmoeka word verlê of raak verlore nadat dit geprosesseer is;
- Nalatigheid aan die kant van assesteringsbeamptes is van die hoofredes waarom toelaagaansoeke verlê word of verlore raak en
- Attesteringsbeamptes ondervind op ‘n gereelde basis tegniese probleme met hul rekenaars en dit neem een tot drie dae om tegniese rekenaarprobleme op te los.

Die tweede inligtingsinsamelingsinstrument is ontwerp ten einde inligting in te samel rondom die invoer van data in die SOCPEN-stelsel. Die empiriese studie het die volgende aspekte uitgelig met betrekking tot data-invoerders:

- Die meerderheid data-invoerders het soliede werkervaring as data-invoerders alhoewel sommige onvoldoende werksruimte het;
- Opleiding oor die implementERING van nuwe beleidsveranderings geskied ongereeld;
- Toesig, mentering en ondersteuning van toesighouers geskied ongereeld;
- Data-invoerders ontvang tussen 20 en 29 aansoeke per dag en alle aansoeke word suksesvol op die SOCPEN-stelsel ingevoer;
- Data-invoerders ontvang meer ondersteuning van kollegas as van hul toesighouers;
- Dokumente of riglyne wat die implementering van beleidsveranderinge reguleer is nie altyd binne die werksplek beskikbaar nie;
- Aansoeke raak soms verlê of verlore nadat dit op die SOCPEN-stelsel ingevoer is;
- Daar is geen meganisme in plek om die beweging van lêers te dokumenteer nie, terwyl nalatigheid aan die kant van beamptes, ‘n tekort aan kantoorspasie of ‘n tekort aan lêerberging as die hoofredes genoem word waarom leers verlê word of verlore raak;
- Data-invoerders ondervind soms tegniese probleme met rekenaars en dit neem een tot drie dae om dit op te los
- Data-invoerders ontvang soms onvolledige aansoeke vanaf attesteringsbeamptes en daardie aansoeke word dikwels teruggeneem na die attesteringsbeamptes;
- Daar is ‘n agterstand in die invoer van normale aansoeke terwyl ‘n personeeltekort en stelselverwante probleme as die hoofredes daarvoor uitgelig word;
Daar is 'n agterstand in die invoer van hersieningsaansoekte en 'n Personeeltekort, 'n gesentraliseerde hersieningsbestuursbenadering, 'n tekort aan kantoorpasie en 'n tekort aan netwerk aansluitingspunte word as die hoofredes uitgelig waarom 'n agterstand met betrekking tot die invoer van hersieningsaansoekte bestaan.

Die derde inligtinginsamelingsinstrument is ontwerp ten einde dienste by betaalpunte te meet. Die vierde inligtinginsamelingsinstrument is ontwerp met die fokus op begunstigdes by betaalpunte. Die empiriese studie het die volgende aspekte uitgelig met betrekking tot die twee kategorieë:

- Sekere betaalpunte is nie verbruikersvriendelik vir persone met gestremdhede nie;
- Daar is nie genoeg stoele, toiletfasiliteite of drinkwater beskikbaar by betaalpunte nie;
- Die betalingskontrakteur sowel as SASSA-beamptes arrIEEE diewels laat by betaalpunte;
- Betalings word diewels vertraag met tussen 15 minute tot net minder as een uur, maar begunstigdes word nie altyd oor vertragings ingelig nie;
- Daar is soms gebreekte betalingsmasjiene en dit veroorsaak 15 tot 45 minute vertragings in betalings;
- Daar is nie altyd genoeg geld by betalingspunte nie en dit neem een uur tot minder as twee ure om weer geld by die betaalpunt uit te kry;
- Toelaagbegunstigdes ontvang selde verkeerde toelaaguitbetalings;
- Smouse opereer hoofsaaklik buite die betaalpunte;
- Sekuriteitsbeamptes is beskikbaar by betaalpunte en daar is toegangsbeheer by betaalpunte (hoofsaaklik sekuriteitsbeamptes van die betalingskontrakteur);
- Alle betaalpunte is nie toegespan nie;
- Eerstehulpkissies is die meeste van die tyd beskikbaar by betaalpunte;
- Begunstigdes woon meestal stapafstand vanaf betaalpunte;
- Begundigdes ervaar weinig probleme by betaalpunte en indien wel word hulle probleme opgelos;
• Daar is nie skuiling teen die elemente by alle betaalpunte nie en
• Begundigdes is tevrede met die dienste wat SASSA lewer en die toelae wat hulle ontvang het hul lewenskwaliteit verhoog.

Die administrasie van maatskaplike toelaes is arbeid-intensiewe prosesse en beamptes speel 'n belangrike rol in die korrekte administrasie van maatskaplike toelaes. Die studie het getoon dat daar duidelike sterkpunte maar ook oorweldigende swakpunte in die administrasieprosesse van maatskaplike toelaes is vanaf die aansoek tot die goedkeuring, insluitende die uitbetaling van toelaes by betaalpunte.
Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................. I
ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. III
OPSOMMING .............................................................................................................................. VIII
CHAPTER 1 ORIENTATION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT ..................................................... 1
1. TITLE OF THE STUDY ............................................................................................................ 1
2. ORIENTATION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM ............................................. 1
3. AIM OF THE STUDY .............................................................................................................. 5
4. BASIC THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS ............................................................................. 5
5. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION ............................................................................................ 6
   5.1 ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE ..................................................................................... 6
   5.2 EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION ......................................................................................... 6
      5.2.1 The research design ............................................................................................... 6
      5.2.2 Participants ............................................................................................................ 7
      5.2.3 Data-collection instruments .................................................................................. 8
   5.3 PROCEDURES .................................................................................................................. 9
   5.4 DATA-PROCESSING ....................................................................................................... 10
   5.5 ETHICAL ASPECTS ......................................................................................................... 10
6. CHAPTER DIVISION ............................................................................................................. 10

CHAPTER 2: SOCIAL SECURITY FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ...................... 12
   2.1 INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 12
   2.2 DEFINING SOCIAL SECURITY ....................................................................................... 12
   2.3 HISTORICAL MILESTONES INTERNATIONALLY ......................................................... 14
   2.4 SOCIAL SECURITY IN DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ..................... 15
  2.5 SOCIAL POLICY INDICATORS AND STRUCTURAL FACTORS ..................................... 18
  2.6 INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS ............................................................................... 20
  2.7 HISTORICAL MILESTONES OF SOCIAL SECURITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN ......................................................................................................................... 22
  2.8 HISTORICAL MILESTONES: SOCIAL SECURITY IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 23
  2.9 HISTORICAL MILESTONES OF SOCIAL SECURITY IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC ....... 25
  2.10 HISTORICAL MILESTONES OF SOCIAL SECURITY IN BRITAIN AND EUROPE ..... 28
  2.11 HISTORICAL MILESTONES OF SOCIAL SECURITY IN AUSTRALIA ......................... 32
  2.12 CROSS-CUTTING CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND ITS COVERAGE EXPANSION .................................................................................................................. 34
  2.13 CONCLUSION ................................................................................................................ 35

CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL ASSISTANCE: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ............................ 37
   3.1 INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 37
   3.2 DEFINING SOCIAL SECURITY ....................................................................................... 37
   3.3 HISTORICAL MILESTONES IN SOUTH AFRICA PRIOR TO 1994 ............................... 38
   3.4 HISTORICAL MILESTONES IN SOUTH AFRICA AFTER 1994 .................................... 45
      3.4.1 The Lund Committee .............................................................................................. 45
      3.4.2 The Chikane Commission ...................................................................................... 47
      3.4.3 The White Paper for Social Welfare ...................................................................... 48
      3.4.4 The Taylor Committee ............................................................................................ 48
   3.5 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SASSA .............................................................................. 49
   3.6 OTHER IMPORTANT GRANT-RELATED CHANGES ....................................................... 50
   3.7 CONCLUSION ................................................................................................................ 51
CHAPTER 7: DATA CAPTURING AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE GRANT ADMINISTRATION PROCESS... .......................................................... 125

7.1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 125

7.2 FINDINGS IN RESPECT OF THE DATA CAPTURING QUESTIONNAIRE ................................................................. 125

7.3 Table 15: Data-capturer: Working experience in SASSA ................................................................. 126

7.4 Table 16: Data-capturer: Adequate work space ................................................................. 127

7.5 Table 17: Data-capturer: Training on the implementation of new policy changes ................................................................. 129

7.6 Table 18: Data-capturer: Supervision from supervisors during the implementation of new policy changes ................................................................. 130

7.7 Table 19: Data-capturer: Mentoring from supervisors during the implementation of new policy changes ................................................................. 131

7.8 Table 20: Data-capturer: Support from supervisors during the implementation of new policy changes ................................................................. 132

7.9 Table 21: Data-capturer: Number of applications per day ................................................................. 133

7.10 Table 22: Data-capturer: Successful capturing of applications in a given day ................................................................. 133

7.11 Table 23: Data-capturer: Average time to capture an application ................................................................. 134

7.12 Table 24: Data-capturer: Support from colleagues during the implementation of new policies ................................................................. 135

7.13 Table 25: Data-capturer: Receive policy documents/guidelines that regulate the implementation of policy changes ................................................................. 136

7.14 Table 26: Data-capturer: Misplaced/lost applications after capturing ................................................................. 137

7.15 Chart 10: Data-capturer: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District A ................................................................. 138

7.16 Chart 11: Data-capturer: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District B ................................................................. 139

7.17 Chart 12: Data-capturer: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District C ................................................................. 140

7.18 Chart 13: Data-capturer: reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District D ................................................................. 141

7.19 Chart 14: Data-capturer: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District E ................................................................. 142

7.20 Chart 15: Data-capturer: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District F ................................................................. 143

7.21 Chart 16: Data-capturer: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District G ................................................................. 144

7.22 Chart 17: Data-capturer: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District H ................................................................. 145

7.23 Chart 18: Data-capturer: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District I ................................................................. 146

7.24 Chart 19: Data-capturer: Reasons for misplaced/lost applications: District J ................................................................. 147
7.25 Table 27: Data-capturer: Technical difficulties with computer equipment

7.26 Table 28: Data-capturer: Average days to resolve technical difficulties with computers

7.27 Table 29: Data-capturers: Incomplete applications

7.28 Chart 20: Data-capturer: District A: Actions taken by data-capturers when receiving incomplete applications

7.29 Chart 21: Data-capturer: District B: Actions taken by data-capturers when receiving incomplete applications

7.30 Chart 22: Data-capturer: District C: Actions taken by data-capturers when receiving incomplete applications

7.31 Chart 23: Data-capturer: District D: Actions taken by data-capturers when receiving incomplete applications

7.32 Chart 24: Data-capturer: District E: Actions taken by data-capturers when receiving incomplete applications

7.33 Chart 25: Data-capturer: District F: Actions taken by data-capturers when receiving incomplete applications

7.34 Chart 26: Data-capturer: District G: Actions taken by data-capturers when receiving incomplete applications

7.35 Chart 27: District H: Actions taken by data-capturers when receiving incomplete applications

7.36 Chart 28: Data-capturers: District I: Actions taken by data-capturers when receiving incomplete applications

7.37 Chart 29: Data Captures: District J: Actions taken by data-capturers when receiving incomplete applications

7.38 Table 30: Data-capturer: Backlogs with regard to the capturing and approving of normal applications

7.39 Chart 30: Data Captures: District A: Reasons why backlogs exist with the capturing and approving of normal applications

7.40 Chart 31: Data-capturers: District B: Reasons why backlogs exist with the capturing and approving of normal applications

7.41 Chart 32: Data-capturers: District C: Reasons why backlogs exist with the capturing and approving of normal applications

7.42 Chart 33: Data-capturer: District D: Reasons why backlogs exist with the capturing and approving of normal applications

7.43 Chart 34: Data-capturers District E: Reasons why backlogs exist with the capturing and approving of normal applications

7.44 Chart 35: Data-capturers: District F: Reasons why backlogs exist with the capturing and approving of normal applications

7.45 Chart 36: Data-capturers District G: Reasons why backlogs exist with the capturing and approving of normal applications

7.46 Chart 37: Data-capturers: District H: Reasons why backlogs exist with the capturing and approving of normal applications

7.47 Chart 38: Data-capturers: District I: Reasons why backlogs exist with the capturing and approving of normal applications

7.48 Chart 39: Data-capturers: District J: Reasons why backlogs exist with the capturing and approving of normal applications

7.49 Table 31: Backlogs with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases

7.50 Chart 40: Data-capturers: District A: Reasons why backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases

7.51 Chart 41: Data-capturers: District B: Reasons why backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases

7.52 Chart 42: Data-capturers: District C: Reasons why backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases

7.53 Chart 43: Data-capturers: District D: Reasons why backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases

7.54 Chart 44: Data-capturers: District E: Reasons why backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases

7.55 Chart 45: Data-capturers: District F: Reasons why backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases
7.56 Chart 46: Data-capturers: District G: Reasons why backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases........................................................................182
7.57 Chart 47: Data-capturers: District H: Reasons why backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases........................................................................183
7.58 Chart 48: Data-capturers: District I: Reasons why backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases........................................................................184
7.59 Chart 49: Data-capturers: District J: Reasons why backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases........................................................................185

7.60 SYNOPSIS OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS........................................................................................................187

CHAPTER 8: PAY-POINT TEAM: THE IMPORTANCE OF HELP-DESK SERVICES AT PAY-POINTS..........................................................189

8.1 INTRODUCTION.........................................................................................189
8.2 FINDINGS IN RESPECT OF THE PAY-POINT TEAMS AT PAY-POINTS..........................................................189
  8.3 Chart 50 Pay-point team member: Disabled-friendly pay-points.................................................................190
  8.4 Table 32: Pay-point team member: Enough chairs at pay-points.................................................................191
  8.5 Table 33: Pay-point team member: Toilet facilities at pay-points.................................................................192
  8.6 Table 34: Pay-point team member: Drinking water at pay-points.................................................................193
  8.7 Table 35: Pay-point team member: Late arrival at pay-points: Payment contractor........................................194
  8.8 Table 36: Pay-point team member: Late arrival at pay-points: SASSA staff...................................................195
  8.9 Table 37: Pay-point team member: On-time payments at pay-points...............................................................196
  8.10 Table 38: Pay-point team member: Period of delays in payment.................................................................197
  8.11 Table 39 Pay-point team member: Beneficiaries informed about delays.....................................................198
  8.12 Table 40: Pay-point team member: Broken machines at pay-points.........................................................199
  8.14 Table 42: Pay-point team member: Enough money at pay-points...............................................................201
  8.15 Table 43: Pay-point team member: Delayed payment because of not enough money at pay-points...........202
  8.16 Table 44: Pay-point team member: Waiting period spent by beneficiaries to get payments................203
  8.17 Table 45: Pay-point team member: Wrong grant amount payments...........................................................204
  8.18 Chart 51: Pay-point team member: Hawkers and vendors selling products at pay-points.............................205
  8.19 Table 46: Pay-point team member: Security guard at pay-points.................................................................206
  8.20 Table 47: Pay-point team member: Access control at pay-points.................................................................207
  8.21 Chart 52: Pay-point team member: Fenced pay-points.................................................................................208
  8.22 Table 48: Pay-point team member: First Aid kits at pay-points.................................................................209
  8.23 SYNOPSIS OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS.........................................................................................212
  8.24 CONCLUSION.....................................................................................213

CHAPTER 9: BENEFICIARIES AT PAY-POINTS: THE MOST IMPORTANT LINK IN THE VALUE CHAIN ........................................................................214

9.1 INTRODUCTION.....................................................................................214
9.2 FINDINGS ON THE BENEFICIARIES AT PAY-POINTS..........................................................215
  9.3 Chart 53: Beneficiaries: Disabled-friendly pay-points..................................................................................215
  9.4 Table 49: Beneficiaries: Enough chairs at pay-points..................................................................................216
  9.5 Table 50: Beneficiaries: Toilet facilities at pay-points..................................................................................217
  9.6 Table 51: Beneficiaries: Drinking water at pay-points..................................................................................218
  9.7 Table 52: Beneficiaries: Late arrival: Payment contractor...........................................................................219
  9.8 Table 53: Beneficiaries: Late arrival: SASSA staff.........................................................................................220
  9.9 Table 54: Beneficiaries: On-time payments at pay-points..............................................................................221
  9.10 Table 55: Beneficiaries: Period of delays in payment..................................................................................221
  9.11 Table 56: Beneficiaries informed about delays..........................................................................................222
  9.12 Table 57: Beneficiaries: Broken machines at pay-points.............................................................................223
  9.13 Table 58: Beneficiaries: Delayed payment because of broken machines..................................................223
  9.14 Table 59: Beneficiaries: Enough money at pay-points.................................................................................224
  9.15 Table 60: Beneficiaries: Delayed payment because of not enough money at pay-points.....................225
Annexures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annexure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Questionnaire: front-line staff</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Questionnaire: data-capturer</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Questionnaire: Pay-point team member</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Questionnaire: Beneficiaries at pay-points</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Letter: Request to conduct research in SASSA</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Letter: Research in the Northern Cape</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Letter: Research in the Western Cape</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Declaration: Editing</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIG</td>
<td>Basic Income Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDG</td>
<td>Care Dependency Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSG</td>
<td>Child Support Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPAC</td>
<td>Child Poverty Action Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESSPRSSOSS</td>
<td>European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCG</td>
<td>Foster Care Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIA</td>
<td>Grant-in-Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immune-Deficiency Virus</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISSA</td>
<td>International Social Security Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLSSGS</td>
<td>Minimum Living Standard Guarantee System</td>
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<tr>
<td>OAG</td>
<td>Old Age Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>OAI</td>
<td>Old Age Insurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>OASI</td>
<td>Old Age Survivors Insurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperative development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDG</td>
<td>Permanent Disability Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDG</td>
<td>Temporary Disability Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>SASSA</td>
<td>South African Social Security Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for Social Scientists</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOCPEN</td>
<td>Social Pension System</td>
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<td>WVG</td>
<td>War Veteran Grant</td>
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</tbody>
</table>