

Eradication of mud schools to now take five years, not three

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SCHOOLS made of mud or other inappropriate materials and schools without basic sanitation will continue to be South Africa's shame for some time to come.

The Budget unveiled at Parliament this week dealt a blow to the government's programme to eradicate hundreds of mud schools.

This came as pressure group Equal Education revealed that only 10 replacement school buildings have been handed over.

Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan announced that the eradication of mud schools would now take five years, instead of the planned three, and that some of the money that had been earmarked for replacing these schools would now be spent on

building new universities.

There are 496 schools with infrastructure that is deemed "inappropriate". Of these, 395 are mud. Most of these schools are in the Eastern Cape.

The school infrastructure backlog grant was introduced two years ago (2011/12) specifically to deal with such schools and to install water, sanitation and electricity at the thousands of schools that do not have these services.

However, because of slow spending, R7.2 billion of this grant has now been reappropriated.

In all, R1.65bn of the reappropriated R7.2bn will now go towards the construction of universities in the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga, and a further R1.1bn would be allocated to library services.

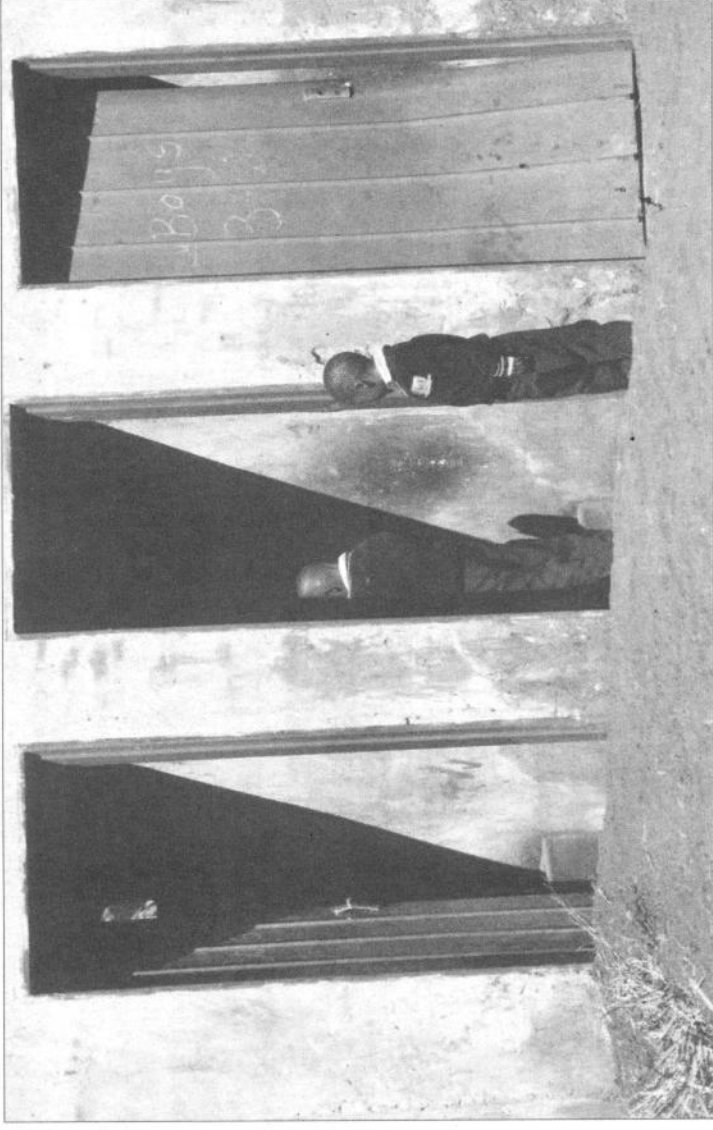
Some R4.47bn will go towards the education infrastructure grant, which is transferred to provinces, to allow them to spend the money on school upgrades. A further R2.5bn which was to be allocated to the grant in future has also been rescheduled.

"As a result, all planned projects in the school infrastructure backlog grant will now be completed over a five-year period, instead of three," states the 2013 Estimates of National Expenditure document.

The Department of Education said this week that the schools would be eradicated by 2015.

On Budget day on Wednesday, Gordhan said that spending of the grant had been slow for two reasons.

In some instances, the



BAD MARKS: Schools built of mud or without adequate toilet facilities were dealt a blow in the Budget as programmes to eradicate this problem were put on hold. PICTURE: MUJAHID SAFODIEN

go-ahead had been given for construction, but services such as roads did not exist, and these had needed to be completed first.

Second, "non-performing contractors" had arrived on site and shown a "hesitancy" to get on with the job.

"Ideally we want to get this done in the shortest possible time," he said.

On Tuesday, Motshekga told Parliament that the 496 mud schools would be done away with within the next two years – 200 of these over the next year.

However, progress over the past year has been slow.

Motshekga said in Parliament that 50 schools had been eradicated, but a statement released after her parliamentary speech revised this to 35 schools that would be ready for handover by the end of this month.

The statement said that with "additional pressure" a further five could be completed.

Yoliswa Dwane, chairwoman of Equal Education said that only 10 of these schools had been completed and handed over.

"We are never going to meet these targets.

"And these numbers of mud schools and inappropriate schools only take into account those that are full mud. What about those that are partially mud, or those made partially of wood or in shacks?"

"There is no pressure on the department to account for its slow spending," she said.

Motshekga said some of the smaller schools would be consolidated, so that all 496 would not have to be replaced.