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TASK TEAM SPENDS A LONG WEEKEND WITH ACTIVE CITIZENS IN THE WESTERN CAPE FOREST VILLAGES TO ENSURE THAT A LASTING SOLUTION IS FOUND FOR THESE COMMUNITIES

Government's effort to find a permanent solution to the plight of South African citizens occupying forest villages in the Western Cape, is gaining momentum. Forest villages are compact settlements that were established around forest plantations. Communities occupying these villages situated on government land under the custodianship of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI), have limited basic services such as water.

During his visit and address in George, Western Cape, on **16 March 2024**, the DPWI Minister Hon. Sihle Zikalala, engaged with the forest villages community members, highlighting the imperative of collaboration among stakeholders and government bodies to redress this situation, with a focus on formalizing settlements, delivering basic services, and fostering economic opportunities. This collaborative effort, he stressed, should involve private sector participation and uphold constitutional rights. Proposed actions include establishing committees, deploying social facilitation teams, and exploring employment avenues through EPWP initiatives. The main goal was to introduce lasting solutions that prioritize the well-being of forest village communities and promote socio-economic growth in a way that respects human dignity and protects the environment.

To realize the commitments made by the Minister, members of a task team handling the forest villages matter, convened on **20 April 2024** to formulate a comprehensive site visit plan. This plan aimed to deeply engage each community within the forest villages, particularly focusing on implementing one of the core tenets of Social Facilitation: **Organic** engagement. This approach involved conducting community profiling to gain a thorough understanding of socio-economic dynamics, demographics, and specific needs. The profiling serves as a crucial foundation for developing tailored engagement strategies in implementing both short-term and long-term interventions pledged by the Minister to the villagers.

The task team comprised representatives from the DPWI (Head Office and its Cape Town Regional Office), DFFE, HDA, SALGA, DWS, and DALRRD. The task team was bifurcated into two teams: **Team A**, led by Chief Director Ms. Morongwa Leseke from DFFE, and **Team B**, led by Chief Director Mr. Mohwasa from DPWI (PMO – Social Facilitation). The task team commenced site visits from **26 to 29 April 2024**, working tirelessly over the weekend. Equipped with questionnaires, the teams aimed to ascertain key issues such as **community demographics, livelihoods, employment rates, access to basic services, security of tenure, prevalent hazards, social dynamics, cultural aspects, and future development aspirations**. These efforts were geared towards crafting informed and responsive interventions tailored to the specific needs of each Forest Village community.

Information and pictures supplied by Chief Director: Programme Management Office (PMO) **Mr Molatelo Mohwasa** and Regional Manager: Cape Town Regional Office **Ms Phucuka Penxa**

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