

■ JOBS

# KZN first to launch EPWP phase four

SIHLE MAVUSO

KWAZULU-NATAL has become the first of the country's nine provinces to launch the fourth phase of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) with a promise to improve training of the programme's participants, as well as working conditions.

Launching the phase at Esikhawini township in Richards Bay on Friday, KZN MEC for Public Works, Ravi Pillay, said the programme will come with 643 268 job opportunities in the next five years. Pillay added that they wanted to improve working conditions.

"We want to make the conditions of work better, we want to make the outcomes and outputs in the communities even more effective so they can respect the work that we do as EPWP. And we want to increase the level of skilling," Pillay announced to the more than 1 000 EPWP workers who had gathered for the launch, adding that there would be better certificate grading for the participants.

However, he warned that these targets would be met only if there was no corruption and "ghost employees" smuggled into the programme by corrupt elements within the system.

He also raised the alarm that the country's stagnant economy could hinder the expansion of the programme and the bid to improve the stipend from R2 300 a month to a much more decent one.

"There are challenges that we are dealing with at this point in time and the president has made it clear that there are five or six tasks that we have to deal with.

"The first one is to grow the economy to create the jobs that we need and we must understand that, even if we want to increase the stipend (paid to EPWP workers) the economy must grow so that more people are paying tax and there is enough money to do that," Pillay said.

The EPWP programme was launched 16 years ago to give unemployed youth a chance to gain skills and experience that would later propel them to other

employment opportunities.

It is also a key government initiative which contributes to policy priorities in terms of decent work and sustainable livelihoods, education, health, rural development, food security, land reform and the fight against crime and corruption.

Among the work the young people do is waste collection, environmental rehabilitation, state infrastructure maintenance and social work in various communities.

Despite the ambitious plan by the government, some recipients like widows complained that the work sometimes ends abruptly, cutting off their income and throwing them back into poverty.

Khethiwe Dlamini, leader of an organisation of widows engaged in a poultry project in Richards Bay, said they would also like to see consistency in funding for their projects.

"Yes, we have been able to stand strong for eight years, but there are challenges along the way as sometimes projects stall because of the abrupt



WORKERS employed through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) load goods in the Durban CBD. KwaZulu-Natal launched the fourth phase of the EPWP last Friday. | African News Agency (ANA) Archive

stopping of funding.

"We would like to request the authorities to ensure that if they have pledged that a programme would be

three years, it should be like that, instead of having gaps along the way. That is very disruptive to our programmes," Dlamini said.