

“The Jomo factor”

Close to 20 years in the Human Settlements Department and I have been to almost every rural area in the province.

This has allowed me to appreciate what I have always taken for granted. I have seen disabled persons being moved around in wheelbarrows from their makeshift homes to makeshift toilets. I have seen children with no safe place to play sharing makeshift homes with over 20 other people. I have seen frail grandmothers staying awake in their mud structures at night so they can protect the sleeping children against rats and dangerous weather conditions.

I felt useless as people would often tell me that “you guys are always putting plans in place to improve living conditions. When are we going to see things really changing?” I knew that there was delivery.

I have seen 90-year-old first-time homeowners opening windows for the first time in their new homes. I have seen women over 100 years of age unlocking doors for the first time to enter their decent homes after spending most of their lives in collapsing mud structures.

But still I felt no reason for me to celebrate being a public servant. Things were not happening quickly enough.

Then came “the Jomo factor”.

MEC for Human Settlements and Public Works, Jomo Sibiya, makes no empty promises and hears no excuses for slow delivery. He is redefining the mechanisms of infrastructure delivery through an emphasis on speed and efficiency. And he is hands-on and leads by example – a servant leader.

He will hear of a case through social media, of a person living in totally unacceptable and unsafe conditions and the very next morning we will be accompanying him to visit that person. In less than a month, that person will have a decent home. This has happened more than once and we know that we are always on standby as the MEC moves very quickly to improve lives.

We have experienced, first-hand, so many lives improving that I often have to remind myself that this MEC was only sworn into office three months ago. I feel invigorated. I feel powerful. I, and my colleagues in both the human settlements and public works departments, understand what is expected of us as we work together and double our efforts to better the lives of all people, fuelled by “the Jomo factor”.

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