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### **MEDIA STATEMENT**

## **MINISTER MACPHERSON HEARS HOW EPWP IS NOT WORKING IN THE EASTERN CAPE, VOWS TO IMPLEMENT REFORMS**

*(Note to editors: the following is extracts from speeches the Minister of Public Works & Infrastructure, Dean Macpherson, delivered at the launch of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) Listening Tour in Bethelsdorp, Gqeberha, Eastern Cape. A full version of the speeches can be found [here](#), and [here](#))*

- During the launch of the EPWP listening tour in the Eastern Cape, Minister Macpherson said that the EPWP programme is an important stop-gap opportunity to many people caught in the cycle of poverty, but has over the years become open to abuse.
- Therefore, he wants communities such as Bethelsdorp to frankly share their experiences of EPWP and how it can be reformed towards long term employment that pays better.
- Minister of Public Works & Infrastructure Dean Macpherson said it is not the job of the current administration to simply repeat initiatives of previous administrations if those initiatives were open to abuse and corruption.

### Extract from Opening Address

“Today marks an important milestone for the Department of Public Works & Infrastructure as we launch our Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) here in Bethelsdorp, Gqeberha, Eastern Cape.

It is the first time since the EPWP programme was launched in 2003 that we will embark on a nationwide listening tour to hear from communities themselves about their experiences with the programme as we begin to rethink its contribution to better serve communities.

It is essential as government that we do not simply change programmes without listening to communities about the issues they are experiencing.

Equally, it is important that we do not continue with the same programmes, administration after administration, without honestly reviewing their success.

This is why we are here today: to understand the challenges that you face with EPWP so that we can be inspired about how to improve on it.

I firmly believe that the solutions to some of our biggest problems are often found in the communities that face them.

That is why I am here, on the ground with you today. To listen and to learn from you.

Our task is to ensure that the voices with solutions within communities are heard, and that we fully understand the problems they are facing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The EPWP programme has been vital tool in the state's arsenal to address the plight of poverty in many communities, while at the same time improving service delivery through road repairs, grass cutting, and street cleaning.

Over the years, the EPWP has offered a stop-gap opportunity to many people caught in the cycle of poverty through part-time employment.

However, it is evident that the EPWP programme is ripe for reform. There are simply too many allegations of political patronage, jobs-for-pals, and corruption within the programme for it to continue without intervention.”

#### Extract from Closing Address

“The EPWP remains an important tool to instil hope, provide work, and bring dignity and skills development to communities in need. It also plays a crucial role in addressing service delivery challenges, from road maintenance to grass-cutting and, in some places, even library services. The EPWP offers a significant opportunity to improve service delivery in communities that need it most.

However, let me be the first to say—based on what I’ve heard today from community members—that the EPWP has, unfortunately, been subject to abuse by some for jobs-for-pals, corruption, and political patronage.

There are too many allegations in this community alone to allow the status quo to continue.

As many people have courageously shared, South Africans have been let down time and again by a programme meant to benefit them.

How can communities trust a programme intended to empower them when abuse and corruption are widely known?

That is why we must build a better EPWP programme that is safeguarded from such abuses.

The best way we can do this is through transparency in how people are appointed and given an opportunity in the programme. We cannot simply allow people who are friends or hold political party cards to be selected repeatedly for the EPWP.

At the same time, we've learned today that the EPWP, designed as a stepping stone to permanent employment, has become a lifeline for survival for many. It was intended to be a short-term mechanism, empowering recipients with skills or experience for employment elsewhere. Yet, due to our country's dire unemployment situation, many have come to rely on it as their sole source of income.

There are some who would have us believe that because initiatives were started in previous administrations or have been handled a certain way, our job is simply to continue implementing them as they are. Well, they are wrong, and that is not what I will do in Public Works and Infrastructure or in the EPWP.

If something is broken, you must fix it. We are not here to pay homage to inefficiencies or idolise stale ideas. I am here to turn South Africa into a construction site, and we will do that through fresh thinking, new policies, and discarding what doesn't work.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want people in the EPWP to gain meaningful skills they can use to climb the opportunity ladder and build a long-term future anchored in dignity for their family.

Cutting grass or picking up litter for the rest of your life is not the future you have dreamed of.

Let me be clear: the wages from the EPWP are not sufficient to live on long-term.

We need to reform the programme to ensure that recipients are better-paid through permanent jobs that EPWP can be either a gateway to or in partnership with the private sector.

There is something for us to learn from the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme, where we can leverage the budget allocated for the EPWP to work with the private sector to bring more people into better-paid and well-trained employment opportunities.”

## **Enquiries**

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