



**Address by DPWI Deputy Minister, Ms. Bernice Swarts, During the Mpumalanga EPWP Summit,  
Steve Tshwete Local Municipality, Middleburg, Mpumalanga, Date: 02 November 2023**

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Programme Director:

MEC for Public Works, Roads and Transport in Mpumalanga, Mr MP Ndlovu;

MEC for Public Works and Infrastructure in the Eastern Cape, Ms N Nkopane;

The Executive Mayor of Nkangala, Cllr TD Ngwenya;

The Heads of Departments from all Provincial Departments who are in attendance;

Your Worships, the Mayors from all Municipalities in the Province.

The Acting Deputy Director General of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, Mr. Ignatius Ariyo;

Senior government officials who are attending the event;

The government officials who are driving the implementation and the success of the EPWP.

The media fraternity;

Last but not least – you - EPWP participants who are in attendance at this gathering.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to thank you for providing me with the opportunity to participate and speak at this important gathering.

## About the EPWP Summit

On Such a momentous occasion perhaps we should start by reminding ourselves of the vision behind the establishment of the EPWP. To this end none will differ with me that Amílcar Cabral best captured this vision behind EPWP when he said “the people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone’s head. They are fighting to win material benefits, to live better and in peace, to see their lives go forward, to guarantee the future of their children.”

As we gather today to reflect on the road traversed in our quest to institutionalize EPWP as tool for fundamental socio-economic change, we must do so inspired by Amilcar Cabral’s wisdom. His wisdom must be placed at heart of our endeavors for the reconceptualization and redesigning efforts of the EPWP for the Future.

As of today 610 882 work opportunities have been created during this 2023/24 financial year, which accumulates to a 58.8 % towards our overall target for the financial year and despite the overall Phase cumulative period which created over 4,5 million work opportunities against the target of 5 million work opportunities for the period ending March 2024. It very evident that drastic measures are needed to ensure that we succeed in our resolve of leading the nation to decent and sustainable work.

This gathering must not only inspire hope but must deliberate and bring about practical solutions for the government to consider and implement in order to bring about a significant dent on the high rates of unemployment and inequality in our society.

Access to high-quality jobs is key for the economic well-being of our people. In the country’s transition to a high-income economy, we need to create about two million a year, additional high-quality jobs for workers of all background and skills levels to be at par with other countries that have successfully managed this transition.

The Mpumalanga EPWP Summit is an important event as it brings together all stakeholders who are participating in the implementation of the EPWP in Mpumalanga. This gathering happens hot on the heels of the government's national EPWP Indaba that was held in October in Pretoria. That two-day national EPWP Indaba was led by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, which is the lead coordinator and facilitator of the EPWP. The national Indaba was officiated by Minister Sihle Zikalala, and attended by various stakeholders who are participating in the implementation of the Programme throughout the country. Government officials from this province also participated in the two-day Indaba.

The objective of the national EPWP Indaba was to take stock of what has been achieved by the government since the start of EPWP Phase 4 in 2019 and most importantly to reconceptualise and restructure the EPWP of the Future.

In essence, reconceptualising and restructuring the EPWP of the Future means that moving forward, we want an impactful EPWP programme with clear exit strategies and one which contributes to sustainable livelihoods.

In his address on 10 October, Minister Zikalala said the EPWP needs to be restructured to be impactful and contribute to service delivery.

The Minister stressed that collectively, we must tackle the challenges that have compromised EPWP, including:

1. There is a lack of coordination and ineffectiveness of structures in charge of the programme;
2. We need to improve the implementation framework from recruitment to the end. Implementation should be bolstered through effective monitoring and accountability.
3. There is a need to define impactful projects. Whilst providing jobs opportunities and skills, there is also a need to contribute towards improving the quality and delivery of services to the people;
4. There is a need to improve the training to provide meaningful skills while preserving the cost benefit;

5. Ensure there are proper exit plans through enterprise development and linking other beneficiaries with permanent employment.

Compatriots, we want to create an EPWP that provides participants with skills they can use to not only enter the job market but also venture into entrepreneurship and assist in job creation because it is entrepreneurs and SMMEs that are adept at creating jobs.

The reconceptualization and restructuring of the EPWP also means that we want to create an EPWP that responds and contributes to service delivery in our communities. We want the EPWP to transcend beyond poverty alleviation to a Programme that provides hope to the nation by improving the quality of services.

For us as national government, it is important we all work together from head office, the regions, all the way to the local level to ensure that our processes are streamlined and that we are aiming for the same targets and results.

As the Executive authority, we have already outlined the vision, a vision inspired by the concerns of Cabinet and society itself. It is no longer time for quarrels or unending disagreements, but to implement to satisfy the wishes of our people and government.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**, the national EPWP Indaba formed several commissions that looked at how a reconceptualised and restructured EPWP of the Future should look like. These commissions were as follows:

**Commissions 1 looked at increasing work opportunities using Labour Intensive Construction methods in all implemented programmes/projects.** This commission focused on the following questions:

- What are new/relevant & impactful programmes that could be identified?
- How to enforce compliance with Labour Intensive methods to maximize on Work Opportunities?

- What strategies to look into to address the challenge of construction mafias in the provinces?
- What are the best ways to meet the industry rates vs EPWP minimum Wage?
- Possible best implemented programmes to be replicated.
- Increasing labour intensity of projects vs conventional methods in the era of 4IR.

**Commission 2 zoomed into how to enhance and maximize youth participation and people with disability strategies across all sectors.** The participants in this commission sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the relevant & impactful programmes that could be identified?
- How to increase youth participation across all sectors?
- How to increase People with Disabilities participation across all sectors?
- Possible collaboration with other external stakeholders for youth exit strategies
- EPWP participation vs the disability grant .What are the remedial actions?
- Identification of youth-appealing projects

**Commission 3 delved into the issue of skills. This commission looked at the skilling & training of participants & enterprise development –with clear exit strategies.** This commission tackled the following questions:

- What other ways/avenues should be pursued to secure funding to capacitate participants?

- Are the training courses we offer as a programme able to sustain our participants, if not what can be done?
- Possible partnerships with other stakeholders for exit strategies (various Sector Education and Training Authorities, TVET Colleges, civil society etc.)

**Commission 4 focused on how to ensure successful coordination & implementation of the EPWP programme.** This commission delved into the following questions:

- Under the theme “Changing the EPWP Outlook” , it was discussed how collectively can we make the programme attract more participation and be more impactful
- What can be done differently in EPWP?

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** the commissions in the national EPWP Indaba deliberated and came up with possible resolutions. Phase V proposal emphasised the following:

- Improving coordination, accelerating implementation and improving service delivery. Recognises the importance of the Programmatic Approach. Recognises that Programmes need to be reviewed and aligned in terms of procedures for recruitment, duration standards, wage standards, labour intensity, etc. Need for strengthening learning in terms of: Payment Systems, Procurement measures, Programmes aligned to service delivery priorities of the country (improve the social value of programmes), Monitoring and oversight (including supervision and adherence to legislation) and Training, exit and SMME interventions

- Ensuring effective and fair recruitment to reach the EPWP target group. Linkage with existing government platforms i.e. ESSA and SA Youth Mobi. Targets 5, 2 million work opportunities between April 2024 and March 2029. The target is based on a combination of the current performance of the sectors, the budgets allocated to them in the MTEF, the assumptions that these budgets will increase by inflation in the outer years. It also assumes that the EPWP incentive grant will continue, with improvements undertaken in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.
- Blue – sky effect: Proposal to introduce a Youth Employment Programme (YEP). Strategy to scale up and achieve 5.7 million Work Opportunities for Phase V.
- Improve exit strategies- including training, enterprise development.

The proposal was presented at the MinMEC which was held last week, 26 October 2023. The MinMec is chaired by the Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure and is attended by myself and several MECs.

The Minmec made valuable inputs to the Phase V proposal which include amongst others: strengthening the EPWP Monitoring and Evaluation (Impact study), work with Provinces to identify challenges in terms of coordination, ensure buy-in of proposed EPWP targets and develop extensive plan for the exit strategy. The proposal will be submitted to various clusters and the Cabinet for endorsement. Once approved, the detailed implementation plan will be developed.

### **Performance of the EPWP during the 2022/23 financial year**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**, we are heartened to announce that during the 2022/23 financial year, the government created a total of 990 686 EPWP work opportunities for the poor and unemployed South Africans.

These work opportunities were created from a total of 13 586 EPWP projects that were implemented by various public bodies across the country. We are pleased that over R12 billion was paid out as wages to community members who participated in EPWP projects during this period.

Since the EPWP recruits people to do useful work in their respective communities, research shows that community members who participate in the Programme spend a substantial amount of their wages in their respective communities, which in turn contributes to the socio-economic improvement of these very communities.

During the said period - 2022/23 financial year - the participation of women in the EPWP stood at 69 percent while young people accounted for 39.95 percent of the overall number of work opportunities created.

We remain convinced that we will achieve our target of creating 5 million EPWP work opportunities by the end of Phase 4 of the Programme next year March.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**, the figures we have highlighted are not just mere numbers. Those figures represent women and men who are participating in the EPWP to carry out vital developmental work in our communities.

They are men and women who – by participating in the EPWP – are able to contribute to development and upliftment of the poor. Like you and I – these community members – wake up every morning and go out to fend for their loved ones.

The community members who are working in EPWP also contribute to the delivery of beneficial community services such as caring for the elderly and the sickly; looking after children through work they perform at Early Childhood Development facilities in our communities as well as ensuring that children eat nutritious meals at schools through the government's school nutrition programme.



We see them proudly wearing their uniform in scorching sun cleaning towns, rivers, patching roads, and assisting in construction of courts and schools.

We wish to applaud each EPWP participant for contributing to the success of this Programme and for helping in the delivery of services.

Critical community assets such as bulk water infrastructure, the Welisizwe Rural Bridges, roads, police stations, and clinics are delivered through the EPWP. As we get into the 20 Year milestone of the EPWP Programme, the rebranding of the programme will emphasise and highlight this aspect of improving service delivery.

### **In Conclusion Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We must enter into the Phase 5 of EPWP with vigor and determination to bring about EPWP reforms that must bring about real change in lives of our people. To this end this summit must go beyond the basics, this conference must turn the corner for us, it's must usher us into a clear path of how we are going to model the Next Phase of EPWP in order to;

1. Leverage the current Public Procurement Reforms, through the draft Procurement Bill to be more deliberate in utilizing the colossal public procurement spend to create decent and sustainable Jobs
2. Linked to the opportunities of the Public Procurement Bill, EPWP phase 5 must be at the center of creating a people driven alternative Social Solidarity Economy
3. EPWP Phase 5 must give practical integration of the Public Procurement Bill, Industrial Policy Action Plan and BBBEE Act, through a targeted enterprise development model led by social enterprises

4. At the heart of the Phase 5 EPWP must be improved quality of delivering basic services to our communities
5. Our EPWP reforms must look beyond our boundaries, EPWP can no longer afford to be targeted and low or semi -skilled beneficiaries, given the number of unemployed graduates in our country. To this end we must leverage our international platforms, Intra- Africa Trade, BRICS and the 4<sup>TH</sup> Industrial Revolution terrain to bring about modernization and jobs for the future.

Allow me, as I would like to take this opportunity to thank all government entities – at all three spheres of government – as well as the private sector and civil society for working together to ensure the success of the EPWP.

The Minister and myself have emphasized that in the EPWP of the future, the Department of Public Works must also think outside the box and create work opportunities linked to our core mandate instead of merely counting targets from other departments and state-owned entities.

We know that while DPWI has been the leading in the coordination of the EPWP, the real work of creating EPWP work opportunities for our people has been driven by public bodies such as Municipalities, National and Provincial Departments, State-Owned Enterprises as well as civil society such as NPOs, and private sector organisations.

As DPWI, we wish to thank every stakeholder for contributing to the success of the EPWP.

We commit to add impetus by also directly contributing to the creation of job opportunities be it in the filling of potholes, cleaning and maintenance of buildings properties under DPWI, recycling and renewable energy initiatives.

We commend all stakeholders who participated in the development of the revised EPWP Policy. Late last year, the Department hosted the countrywide EPWP Policy Consultation

Roadshows. At these Roadshows, oral submissions were solicited from various stakeholders on the Policy.

This 20 Year anniversary in March next year (2024) is an appropriate time to give new dynamism to the programme and deliver an EPWP of the Future in line with the Cabinet mandate.

In due course, the Department will communicate plans to celebrate the 20th anniversary of EPWP.

We call on all South Africans to join us as we celebrate this EPWP milestone.

South Africa Works Because of Public Works!

I thank you.