

Deputy Minister of Public Works
Rev KM Zondi
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Corporate Forum "Opportunities for Public/Private partnerships to combat poverty"
RosebankHotel
Johannesburg

Chairperson and Members of the Corporate Forum
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to the leadership and management of the Corporate Forum for extending an invitation to me to participate in this meeting.

I believe the Corporate Forum is suitably placed to play an even greater role not only in the growth of our commerce and industry, but also in lending a helpful hand to the developing effort of the poorest of the poor which government is spearheading through its various programmes.

South Africa has, because of apartheid, always been a country of stark contrasts and contradictions. It is a country where affluence exists side-by-side with abject poverty. The challenge we all face is to normalise the situation by narrowing the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

The affluent are few in most societies around the globe. In South Africa, the affluent are even fewer because of the developmental stage of our economy and because of the retardation caused by apartheid. We all should realise that it is highly undesirable to have the affluent few surrounded by a sea of poverty.

It is for this reason that our President first spoke of the need for an African Renaissance and then worked tirelessly for a continent-wide programme of Africa's development such as NEPAD. It is again for this reason that South Africa plays a leading role in striving for equity between the developed rich North and the underdeveloped and poor South.

There has to be equity and there has to be economic and social justice if our world is to be a peaceful place.

The affluent bear a particular responsibility to use their wealth responsibly. Just as the wealthy nations of the world are called upon to exploit the resources of the earth responsibly and in a manner that will ensure sustainability, our business and corporate sectors are implored to so develop their business and industries in a manner that is prone to sustainability.

It is my firm belief that the long-term future well-being of this country will depend on how viable and how comprehensive our efforts as government, as private sector and as NGO's are in reducing the appalling levels of poverty that is found in our country. It will also depend on how determined and successful we are in establishing opportunities for development for our communities and individuals still trapped in abject poverty.

The Government through its various Departments and para-statal is spearheading war on poverty. It is also mounting significant efforts for development of our country and people, but there is a limit to what the Government can do. It cannot do this alone in view of limited resources at its disposal. This is where you come in, as good corporate citizens, in lending a helpful hand to the efforts of Government.

As you probably know, the Department of Public works has since 1994 taken on a new component of grassroots development in keeping with the Reconstruction and Development Programme. The mandate of the Department was expanded to include the establishment of the Community Based Public Works Programme that is now called LETSEMA or ILIMA.

Through this programme we work with communities to determine priorities for development and we provide financial resources and project management expertise to kick-start viable and sustainable projects for the communities' self-uptliftment and progress.

Our intervention through the CBPWP is two-fold. First, we provide community assets and develop infrastructure. This translates to the provision of community halls, taxi ranks, additional classrooms, sporting facilities, rural roads, multi-purpose centres etc. Second we assist communities to establish sustainable

Community Production Centres and this we do working hand-in-hand with the Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs.

Community Production Centres (CPCs), are mostly rehabilitated from existing infrastructure that have become dysfunctional. This concept is an attempt by the Department of Public Works to increase the short to long term impact of the anti-poverty intervention in the rural areas.

It is acknowledged that the Integrated Rural Development Strategy (IRD) is the best approach to be adopted in the planning, design and implementation of the CPCs. This approach requires that there be effective co-ordination by relevant government departments, different spheres of government, participating communities, private sector and service institutions.

This approach further emphasises community empowerment and ownership, cost-effectiveness, sustainability and the creation of a vibrant local economy (as economic node) that is linked to external markets.

Public Works is currently accelerating the creation of Community Production Centres for sustainable rural development, integrating functions and operations with the appropriate government departments.

The implementation of these Community Production Centres that entails crop and food production, for example, serving 56 000 and 200 000 people respectively in Lambasi in the Eastern Cape and on the Makhatini Flats in KwaZulu-Natal, is now well underway. We are currently active on 13 CPCs; 5 in the Eastern Cape, 2 in KwaZulu-Natal, 2 in Limpopo and one each in Mpumalanga, the Northern Cape, Free State and North West.

These centres have revitalised existing infrastructure and incorporated workshops, social services, training facilities and market outlets.

It is in particular around these larger scale rural developments that I would appeal to you to give some thought as to how you can contribute - be that in providing and transferring expertise in terms of management of particular lines and aspects or whether it be in market related activities, either buying from or providing supplies to these production centres. This really is an open invitation for you to contact me, or Afzal Brey, who is here with me, and who will gladly provide you with his contact detail, with any suggestion and/or proposal.

Another interesting project is that of Operation Plough Back. A group of concerned professional people from around the country has embraced the call to lend a hand and established what they simply call "Operation Plough-Back". This initiative has been officially launched earlier this month. At Umzimkhulu, Plough-Back has resulted in a group of professionals using their diverse skills and knowledge to build capacity for the local government. These professionals adopted wards for voluntary work within the community to improve the quality of life. They are, in the spirit of Vukuzenzele, the true champions of rural development.

You can see from the foregoing that we could actually revolutionise our countryside if we could concentrate on what we have begun to do. Our efforts have just scratched the surface and are so far like a drop in the ocean if you look at them against the background of abject poverty that exists out there.

Here there are wonderful opportunities for the private sector to work in partnership with us as we seek to transform and develop our people in the countryside to stand on their own feet. People out there do not want hand-outs but they need inputs based on a partnership of trust and commitment to help them overcome adversity.

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