

**Deputy Minister of Public Works
N Kganyago
2 November 2004**

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KwaZulu-Natal Imbizo

The Minister of Agriculture & Land Affairs, Ms Thoko Didiza
Members of the National Parliament
Members of the provincial legislature
Local Councillors
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Since 1994, the government has rallied behind poverty alleviation in an effort to improve the quality of life of our many communities. In that period, government has initiated various projects and programmes to fight poverty and these include, but are not limited to:

- Free Public Health Care for Pregnant Women and small children
- Feeding schemes for learners at deserving schools
- Free basic services for poor households
- Personal Income Tax reductions
- Children's grants for children under the age of 10
- Programmes to improve both our rural and urban environments and create temporary jobs.
- Roll-out of drugs against HIV and AIDS

All these efforts are aimed at easing the grip of poverty on many of our people. Because poverty is a complex phenomenon, the response of government has also been multi-pronged. Whereas joblessness and lack of income represent the glaring face of poverty, poverty is also expressed through:

- Lack of access to basic and essential services
- Lack of free education
- Lack of infrastructure including houses and roads
- Lack of skills, qualifications and education to enable people to take up available job opportunities

In recognition of the above, the government in 2003 convened the Growth and Development Summit to discuss with business, labour and civil society, plans and strategies to create jobs improve lives and eradicate poverty. At the same forum, government presented its framework entitled the Expanded Public Works Programme or EPWP in short. EPWP is an initiative of government to create jobs, develop skills, improve our communities and take the marginalised poor people out of the spiral of poverty.

According to President Mbeki, "EPWP is a nation-wide programme which will draw significant numbers of the unemployed into productive work, so that workers gain skills while they work, and increase their capacity to earn an income", and is one of many government attempts to alleviate poverty and create employment.

According to the thinking of EPWP, government and its institutions including State owned enterprises, departments, provinces and municipalities, will expand the absorption capacity of existing government programmes to create one million job opportunities in the next five years. In other words, an attempt will be made to use labour intensive methods to procure and deliver service such as roads construction, maintenance of public buildings, environmental clean-ups and the caring of terminally ill and other sick people in the communities using Home Based Care Givers. Both local and provincial governments, because of their proximity to the communities, are expected to identify new and existing opportunities for the ultimate creation of jobs.

Unlike similar programmes before it, the EPWP puts emphasis on skills development to address the problem of unemployability. Therefore workers will be given accreditable and recognizable qualifications while employed on these projects as part of the skills they can, and will use, at the end of the projects as they seek opportunities elsewhere within the realms of our growing economy. Government-established Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA's) have been mobilised to train would-be employers, supervisors and employees in the EPWP Programme. The idea is to train them in labour-intensive technologies so that they procure and deliver good quality services and products meanwhile using labour instead of machines.

The National Department of Public Works which is coordinating the EPWP, is currently communicating with, and meeting with provinces, municipalities and community development organisations to familiarise them about the requirements, methodologies and expectations of the programme, following its official launch by President Mbeki on 18 May 2004 at Giyani in Limpopo. All the nine provincial governments have launched their EPWP Frameworks.

And work is continuing apace nationwide. To date, early reports indicate that at least thirty eight thousand (R38 000) work opportunities were created in the first quarter i.e. between April and June, at a total salary cost of more than thirty three million rand (R33 million). Work is in progress to firm up the monitoring and reporting systems under the programme. This will aid precise data-collection and improve projections.

As the provinces and municipalities begin to fully comprehend the requirements of EPWP and its relationship to provisional grants such as the Provincial and Municipal Infrastructure Grants among others, more resources will be allocated to projects and programmes, within our communities, with the propensity to create jobs and other training opportunities. As community members, we are encouraged to talk to our local representatives about EPWP and any other government interventions to fight poverty, diseases, hunger, illiteracy and underdevelopment.

In conclusion I need to point out that EPWP is bigger than all of us. It is not a Department of Public Works programme, but that of government as a whole therefore the entire nation needs to embrace its spirit and letter. A successfully implemented EPWP will create jobs, enhance skills and contribute to reducing the gap between the rich and the poor. This is of national imperative. We may disagree about the strategies but we are all in sync with regard to the aims and objectives.

Unless we reduce the poverty gap, poverty has the potential to undermine our freedom, destabilise our hard-fought democracy and threaten our nation-building. Our elderly, youth, disabled, women and unemployed are more vulnerable to economic inequalities exacerbated by the system of two economies - one rich and growing and the other stagnant and depended on government intervention.

Central to our endeavour as a government, lies the realisation that our people as much as they appreciate what government is doing for them, would also prefer to do things themselves. They would rather actively assist government, as productive partners in nation-building, economic transformation and social development, than as dependant consumers on perpetual government welfare.

I would like to use this opportunity to all on call municipalities and their relevant structures to become activists for the public works programme and ensure that as many work opportunities as possible are built to create a better life for all.

Thank You.

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