

**Deputy Minister of Public Works
N Kganyago
31 March 2005**

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Message of support delivered by the Deputy Minister of Public Works Mr. Ntopile Kganyago MP during the graduation of 40 contractor-learners of the Sakhasonke Contractor Development Programme held on 08 August 2005

Minister of Labour Mr. MM Mdladlana
MEC for Public Works in Limpopo Mr. T Mufamadi
Mayor of the Capricorn District Mr. M Monakedi
Mayor of the Polokwane Local Municipality Mr. Makunyane
Chairperson of the Construction Education Authority Mr. N Moloto
Mr. Programme Director
Ladies and Gentlemen

In more ways than one, today marks the coming of age of the 40 learner contractors we are celebrating under the Sakhasonke (Building Together) Contractor Development Programme today.

Today's ceremony also marks yet another victory against the many challenges we have as a country identified as key to unblocking South Africa's full economic potential.

One could argue that terms such as Skills Deficit, Joblessness, are meaningless unless they are juxtaposed with Economic Growth and Stability.

As the Minister of Labour will tell you, the Sakhasonke programme is a result of a realization, particularly during the Growth and Development Summit, of two critical challenges.

The first challenge is that South Africa is a developing country with the added challenge of relatively high unemployment rates.

The second is that South Africa is a young democracy which as it develops has to keep a constant eye on the project to consolidate the creation of a new non-racial South Africa.

Thus at any given time one will see the interaction of these issues of Unemployment, Economic Growth and Building Non Racial Democracy.

It is this understanding which informs the Sakhasonke Contractor Development Programme.

Under this programme the learner contractors have completed two years in a learnership programme which is accredited by the Construction Education Training Authority under the leadership of Mr. Narius Moloto.

Training under a learnership typically consists of a combination of theoretical learning in a class environment and practical application of that training in a real working environment.

In conceptualizing the idea of learnerships government was seeking to deal with Skills but also to increase the overall employability of communities and individuals.

Our history has given us a legacy of underdevelopment which assumes a white-black and urban-rural divide characterized by inequality.

The reality of relative poverty between the rural areas of the country and the urban areas calls on us

to redirect more resources to the poor areas than we have been doing.

I am happy today that we are here in Limpopo where the President Mr. Thabo Mbeki launched the Expanded Public Works Programme in May last year.

Central to the EPWP is the understanding that poverty and unemployment will not be solved without the provision of skills to the majority.

The EPWP seeks to re-orientate government spending so it takes account of the above reality. In the process of creating infrastructure, provinces and municipalities are expected to set aside a third of their infrastructure budgets for the labour intensive projects. This means introducing labour where machines are being used in order to give jobs, but perhaps more critically also to impart skills to the unemployable.

One of the greatest misconceptions around the EPWP is that it seeks to create permanent employment. The fact is that the EPWP provides temporary job opportunities.

It is however the skills acquired through the programme which are long-term and thus place people in positions where they can empower themselves further. The EPWP will have failed if beneficiaries were not able to use their skills and knowledge to enter the job market, start their own businesses or to continue with more advanced training. This is what will ultimately contribute to economic growth and the creation of more opportunities for our people without having to leave their places. The EPWP is one way of bridging the gap between the first and the second economy.

Over the past year under the EPWP government spent R3.2 billion, created more than 174 000 job opportunities and paid R823million wages. Thirty-one percent of the beneficiaries were female, 41 percent were youth and 0, 5 percent were the disabled. From these figures it is clear that we are making an impact.

The challenge facing us is however greater than us especially if we do not coordinate our efforts. Thus cooperation between all spheres of government needs to be strengthened while capacity for service delivery is enhanced.

The graduation of these learners today is just one step in a long journey ahead of us. We dare not turn back or tire, for in front of us lies yet a very long road.

Congratulations to all of you!!

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