

**Deputy Minister of Public Works
Ms BM Nzimande
8 December 1999**

[Back](#)

FNB Vita 3 Capes Craft Exhibition

Master of Ceremonies, distinguished guests, participants, ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed an honour and pleasure for me to share in the opening function of your exhibition. I really look forward with great anticipation to viewing the exhibits after our formal proceedings. This function is so important to me because it is a visual display of the creative spirit, the honest expression and intrinsic value of the products crafted by hands that bring life to inanimate substance and for the pleasure and appreciation of their fellow human beings.

Reflecting on the status of crafts in South Africa - from a national perspective - please allow me to share a few remarks with you.

I think that thus far we have under-estimated and under-emphasised the role and contribution of craft in more ways than one. For instance, our indigenous craft has only recently been impacting on interior decorating and commercial branding as well as being reflected or alluded to in corporate identities. The appreciation of the craft value in economic terms, in providing employment, enhancing our tourism, trade and cultural activities, and also as an avenue of artistic expression, has been on the backburner, as an afterthought for a long time. That is why, initiatives such as this one, are highly commended events.

We must remember that craft, similar to art, provides a window to tradition, to social values and history, and so it would be sad indeed if we lost the skill and understanding of this creative activity, which, while it enhances who we are, also offers opportunities for income generation.

The Department of Public Works, working on the ground in the rural areas through our Community Based Public Works Programme, is aware of the means of livelihood posed by the production of craft. In many of the local infrastructure projects we develop with the communities, facilities such as community halls, taxi ranks, market stalls and access roads, the matter of craft production and trade plays an important role. This rural physical infrastructure is normally linked to rural development nodes and integrated with Spatial Development Initiatives to ensure access to public services and the unlocking of development potential in these poorest of the poor communities. A few examples of such market stalls built through the Community Based Public Works Programme are: Gatyana, Isidenge and Vidgesville in the Eastern Cape; SizuZulu, Zamimpilo and Siyabonga in KwaZulu-Natal; and Letsitele and Bushbuckridge Midlands in the Northern Province.

While Public Works is championing SMME and black economic empowerment particularly in the construction and property industries, with dedicated programmes for emerging contractor development as an example, we target women and youth for capacity building, employment, skills transfer and entrepreneurial training in areas broader than participation in the construction phase only. Rural women, youth and the disabled are also empowered to maintain, operate and manage the infrastructure created, and this is where I see a link to crafts - in the production and marketing of crafts; and the entrepreneurial development of craftspeople to ensure sustainable business development.

I will strongly encourage all affected bodies and institutions to link via the Department of Arts, Culture Science and Technology, in order to enhance coordination at a national level between departments such as Trade and Industry, Environmental Affairs and Tourism, ourselves as Public Works and other departments directly involved in community development.

Coordination at this level could also expedite the publication of a national catalogue on indigenous crafts, where tangible contributions such as photographs and descriptions of specific items could be obtained from various programmes, including once again, from the side of Public Works.

Having such a catalogue, even on internet, would obviously enhance the trade and tourism value of craft.

Public Works, as custodian of state fixed property assets and champion of the National Public Works Programme which includes piloting government's Procurement Reform and in particular the Affirmative Procurement Programme and targeted procurement in the construction and property industries, is not mandated to drive the institutionalisation of a national crafts policy. Public Works however, agrees that the craft industry needs an institutional framework, that entrepreneurial development should be promoted and that

a cohesive strategy for industry development are challenges to be addressed. To this endeavour of transformation of the industry we pledge our support.

I would also encourage a strategy where duplication is avoided through the building of appropriate and effective partnerships, (always remembering that 'together we stand - divided we fall'). I would regard such partnerships as key to a successful delivery programme.

I can give you the commitment, that, appropriately coordinated and channeled proposals on the participation for certain genres of the craft industry in the maintenance and construction of public buildings will be considered by Public Works. We have already indicated our intention of creating a strong blend of diverse cultural expression in the refurbishment of our prestige assets. In the same vein, Government's pronounced policy on rural development and poverty alleviation will embrace the utilisation of handcrafts as gifts, for example on foreign visits - provided that informed selection is possible, which takes us back to a proper and regularly updated catalogue.

We have such a rich collection of tradition, culture and history, embracing all South Africans. Surely we can find ways of acknowledging that the craft industry, leaders and masters in this field of expression, may be identified and honoured? I will leave this thought as another challenge to the industry, to deal with in an appropriate manner.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to declare this exhibition formally opened - all success in your future endeavours!

[top](#)