



public works

Department:
Public Works
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Opening Remarks “Third Summit of the Expanded Public Works Programme” Delivered by the Acting Director-General, Mr. Butcher Matutle, Johannesburg, 26 November 2012

*Honourable Minister of Public Works;
Honourable Deputy Minister of Public Works;
Representatives of the Executives, MECs and Mayors;
Councilors
Representatives of International Labour Organisation
Speaker from the ministry of Rural development - India
Representatives of National Government;
Heads of Departments
Representatives of Local Government;
Representatives of the Private Sector;
Representatives of Public Entities;
Representatives of Civil Society;
Representatives of Research and Academic Institutions, notably, Dr. Miriam
Altman;
The entire Public Works and EPWP family;
Programme Director;
Summit Organisers;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and gentlemen*

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be invited to address the opening session of the 3rd summit of the Expanded Public Works Programme. Let me begin by thanking all of you who have travelled from far corners of South Africa to be present at these deliberations on the implementation, progress, challenges and way forward on delivering on the EPWP at municipal level in South Africa.

Until May 2012, I had the privilege of being close to the work being done on the ground on the EPWP with municipalities when I served as the Administrator for the Limpopo Department of Public Works under Section 100 (1) (b) of the Constitution. With the Honourable MEC, Mme Mohlala, her HOD, Mr Chaamano and I, worked closely in monitoring the work of EPWP. Across the province of Limpopo, Wednesday is declared EPWP day. The MEC, HOD and I were sure to be spotted wearing our orange overalls on Wednesdays regardless of the occasion we had to attend!. Public Works house in Polokwane is perhaps the most appropriately EPWP-branded building I have seen. This is testimony to their commitment to a better life for our people through the work of EPWP.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed timely for me to set the scene today at the opening of the 3rd Summit of the EPWP for a number of reasons that I would like to reflect on given the state of our national economy, the effect of global economic dynamics, the effect of population dynamics, structural unemployment and policy review that the national development outcomes that our present government administration committed to achieve in 2009.

It is my hope that as you deliberate on the complexity of the challenges you face as different tiers of government and your supporting partners in upscaling the work of the EPWP in bridging the gaps created by poverty, inequality and unemployment in South Africa, these next 3 days will be an opportunity for the EPWP community to consider the programme, its vision, its role and its impact going forward as we fast approach the end of the second phase of the EPWP.

Honourable Members in our midst

It is my expectation that the fundamental principles that will go into the conceptualization of a third phase of the EPWP will be birthed in this meeting, by people who have first-hand knowledge of the scale and enormity of poverty, inequality and unemployment at municipal level; by people who understand the complexity of the service delivery challenges to mitigate these triple ills. We cannot afford to misuse this opportunity of the next 3 days to rethink the EPWP, its impact, redesign and role in addressing key challenges facing our mandate as a government.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I want to reflect on **FOUR** key issues for your consideration as you embark on this 3rd Summit of the EPWP.

Firstly, there is no doubt that as a developing nation, South Africa is still grappling with a host of socio-economic challenges in the context of the global economic downturn and its impact on an emerging market economy like ours. eight years of deliberations, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the EPWP since 2004 has provided a long and solid enough foundation for us to all explore how we as the EPWP and Public Works community can move beyond the rhetoric of target setting, to a more meaningful discussion of how we work together to recalibrate the EPWP to change the course of South Africa's history, redress the socio-economic challenges of the past and utilize public finances optimally to address development challenges as we draw closer to the target year of 2015 in achieving the time bound Millennium Development Goals.

This is a tall order for all of you seated here today. It is a tall order for the municipal workers in our midst who will walk away from this Summit to the reality of their municipalities characterized by strained budgets, a lack of capacity to implement, monitor and evaluate, a lack of capacity to report and draw down on EPWP budget allocations to address the growing demands for services that

exceed what planning scenarios had projected and population dynamics that affect their locals but are completely beyond their control. But ladies and gentlemen, it is an attainable tall order. And that is why we are here.

Secondly, this year of 2012 has seen key milestone developments and achievements revealed through first the launching of National Planning Commission's National Development Plan for South Africa. I am pleased, Minister and Deputy Minister, to announce that one of the commissioners; Dr. Miriam Altman, will be sharing her perspective on the role of the EPWP in the context of labour employment scenario planning at this summit. The National Development Plan takes into account the myriad of socio, economic, environmental and policy issues that face South Africa and dares to provide a blueprint for us as a nation towards finding sustainable economic solutions to address social injustice and inequality by the year 2025. The role of the EPWP in this blueprint is both implicitly and explicitly clear.

The year 2012 also saw the release of the Census 2011 results which were presented to President Jacob Zuma by the Statistician-General last month. The Census 2011 reveals that the South Africa we understand, the home we understand, is home to over 51, 7 million people. The census results brings some measure of good news for us as a nation that indeed we are getting some things right. The census reveals the positive inroads that have been made in providing formal dwellings for up to 77.6% of the population; increased percentages of households with access to piped water, electricity, flushed toilets, and mobile telephony connectivity. The role of our municipalities present today must be commended in making these achievements possible.

But the census results also show significant population dynamics that impact on alarming employment and income disparities. In particular inter-provincial migration draws attention to redrawn spatial population patterns with in-migration to Gauteng and the Western Cape and out-migration from the Eastern Cape and

KZN. The impact on employment patterns and the demand for access to services, health and education is surmounting. This ladies and gentlemen, requires our due consideration in terms of the implications of the EPWP as a responsive mechanism to these changes. How these changes will influence the 3rd phase of the EPWP must also be taken into account. We must recognize that the EPWP cannot and must not remain static, as our economy, spatial patterns of population, poverty, unemployment and inequality are far from static.

Distinguished guests,

Thirdly, as Dr. Altman will demonstrate later, levels of unemployment and poverty are extremely high and remain as two of South Africa's most pressing problems. The rate of unemployment in the second quarter stood alarmingly over 25%. Ladies and gentlemen this requires us to revisit why our democratic government of 1994 saw fit to introduce public works programmes. Our amnesia of the architectural blue print of the community works programme, public works programme and other community based programme has to be dealt with. I had the privilege of re-reading through the White Paper on Public Works of 1997 and a paper by the former Chief Operations Officer of Public Works, Dr. Sean Phillips, now in the Presidency, on the role of the EPWP in overcoming underdevelopment in South Africa's second economy. I also had the privilege of cross-referencing these writings to how the country must achieve its goal of progressing along an inclusive growth path that can provide better standards of living for all South Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen, I found us wanting in remaining anchored to where we started. We have been preoccupied with chasing targets at all costs with little if any, consideration to stop, recalibrate the EPWP and change course where needed. I hope these three days together will help us to do that. I believe our international speaker from India will provide the international best practice to help us do so as history demonstrates that public works programmes have a long history in the industrialized and some unindustrialized countries as an economic-

policy tool, both as a fiscal measure to expand or contract public spending in periods of unbalanced domestic demand as well as a short-term measure to alleviate unemployment.

Deputy Minister Cronin will lay the foundation for us to recalibrate. There is so much scope to do so especially since we know there is widely acknowledged need for housing and municipal infrastructure (water supply, sewerage, streets, storm water drainage, and electricity, refuse collection). From a theoretical perspective supported by experience elsewhere in Africa, there are reasons for considering that properly formulated employment creation programmes based on the use of labour-intensive methods could be established to construct and maintain the required physical infrastructure, thus creating employment, skills and institutional capacities.

For this, join me in commending his Worship, the Executive Mayor of the City of Tshwane, his administration and the Department of Environmental Affairs for the visionary employment-creation programmes being rolled out in this regard. For those of you who take time to leave your air-conditioned offices and walk through the streets of Tshwane (I do this often during the early afternoon for a few minutes to gain fresh perspective) you will be confronted with evidence of armies of orange-shirted EPWP workers diligently attending to the streets, municipal infrastructure and environment of this beautiful city.

It is these initial conceptual anchors, best practice and innovativeness of public works programmes that must fixate our deliberations during the duration of this summit.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Distinguished guests

Finally, if the EPWP must fulfill its goal, if it must meaningfully enter a third phase, if it must provide the much needed employment it was created to provide, if it must bridge gaps bite by bite, if it must restore dignity to the unemployed and disenfranchised, the EPWP requires us to act, engage, be decisive, be proactive, responsive, selfless and resolute as leaders. Leadership is about forging a future direction. As leaders, we must establish strategic directions. We must harness change. We must consistently question and we must seek new answers for changing environments. We must review the relevance of our programmes for the changing environments and use public finances more innovatively and responsibly. The EPWP is not for the faint hearted. The EPWP is not about targets and statistics. It is about the real lives of men, women, boys and girls we have been called to serve. It is about making a difference, providing an opportunity, closing a gap and bringing back hope. For this, we must not lose focus or else we will have failed to deliver on democracy for our people.

I thank you

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