

Keynote Address by the Minister of Public Works, Mr Geoff Doige, on the occasion of the handover of Dalisoka Primary to the Department of Education

Venue: Dalisoka Primary School, Nyandeni

Date: 29 September 2008

Programme Director

Deputy Minister for Public Works, Mr Kganyago

MEC for Education, Mr Qwase

Executive Mayors Present

Traditional Leaders Present

Councillors

Chairperson of the IDT

CEO of the IDT and other Leaders of Public Entities

School Governing Body members

Esteemed Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be part of this historic function today whereby the actual fruit of our labour get shown to the public. The handover of this school is the culmination of a concerted effort from the part of the Independent Development Trust and the Departments of Public Works and Education to see a complete eradication of mud schools and inadequate structures that our children have been enduring for a long time. It is really heartening to see the first fruit of this campaign and to be here to say to the people of this area: as it was promised

by the former Minister Thoko Didiza in June last year, a completed school has been built in eight months instead of the allocated time of ten months. The children are already using this school. That is heartening and heart-warming.

Programme Director, fellow South Africans, the eradication of mud schools and undesirable structures whose first fruit we are celebrating today is a national effort that is geared towards the construction, reconstruction and rehabilitation of schools in poor areas. We are using innovative technology that accommodates rapid delivery, without compromising quality. The eradication of mud schools and inadequate structures programme also serves another function; that of providing further impetus to the Expanded Public Works Programme. As we all know, the EPWP is meant to provide short-term job opportunities to poor people. But more than anything else, the EPWP is meant to bump up the skills base of our country as people get to be trained in different trades, even as they work.

It is wonderful to see a magnificent structure like this school in a rural setting like this village. I understand that Dalisoka Primary Senior Primary School is one of the schools in the Nyandeni Local Municipality that were affected by the storms in 2006. The plight of the learners was publicized in the media including national TV and it became a source of grave embarrassment to all stakeholders. The IDT, as a strategic partner to the Department of Education (DOE) in their programme to eradicate mud and other inappropriate structured schools, provided funding for the construction of this and other four schools in the province.

The IDT has really been a catalyst to the reconstruction of Dalisoka. The IDT prioritized this school and kick-started the programme to eradicate mud schools in the country using its own resources. Actually, the IDT set aside R150 million to launch this national programme. It is under the Presidential Apex Priority Projects to eradicate mud schools and other inadequate structures particularly in the rural areas dotting the South African landscape.

I am happy to see that the undertaking made at the sod-turning ceremony at this very site has been fulfilled. The former Minister of Public Works launched the conversion of a few dilapidated rondavels into this sparkling structure on 22 June last year. I understand that at that function she promised a working school within ten months but as records show, a working school was delivered in only eight months. The IDT has really worked hard on this project and I would like to applaud the IDT and the project team that has been working on this project.

The provision of adequate infrastructure like good schools and sports fields should not only be afforded to urban youngsters. Rural kids should also enjoy the same as their urban counterparts. Some of the structures, like the rondavels that used to serve as a school here, are just shocking. These structures have all sorts of health hazards that one can think of. We are committed to changing all of that. This handover today marks the first of many that will happen across this province and across the country.

The programme of eliminating mud schools is being coupled with other programmes to make life easier for rural school kids in our country. We plan to build access roads and bridges that service schools. It is always painful to learn of young children who drown during rainy season as they try to cross dangerous rivers and streams in full flood. We want to eliminate the incidents of children drowning, we want to facilitate access to schools by children and thus eliminate illiteracy that still plagues most of our rural areas.

There are also major spin-offs that we envisage to come out of this programme in the long run. Rural areas of our country are affected the most by poverty and unemployment. In order to help the government reach the millennium goals, we plan to unlock employment and development opportunities in areas that we will be undertaking this work. We will also pursue environment rehabilitation using amongst others, government infrastructure development funding. We would like

to see this programme stimulating local economic development through utilization of local resources and skills development and transfer.

Compatriots, huge resources have been dedicated to this programme. The IDT has pledged close to eight hundred million rand for this whole project of eradicating mud schools and access bridges. But even though this is the case, it is obvious that even more resources will be needed to carry the project through to a successful conclusion throughout the country. I would therefore urge all of us to mobilize resources for sustainable development of these areas by working in partnership with government, donor agencies, civil society and community based structures.

I would like to pay tribute to the former leaders of this Department, Comrade Jeff Radebe, the late Minister Stella Sigcau and the immediate past Minister Thoko Didiza. These Ministers worked very hard in ensuring that the Department of Public Works carried out its mandate diligently and fought rural poverty. In fact, the Department started with the Community-Based Public Works Programme right at the beginning of our democracy in 1994. The government realized the great potential of this programme to improve the lives of our people not only in rural areas but also in urban areas. That is why then that the CBPWP was changed into the Expanded Public Works Programme and launched in 2004. The difference was that it became a government-wide programme whereby all departments are expected to implement it. The main goal of this massive effort on the part of the government is the halving of poverty and unemployment by 2014. That is why I want to salute the visionary leadership of these comrades. They laid the foundation for the massive effort of government to help our country and develop the rural areas. The second phase of the EPWP will kick in on the first of April next year.

The Expanded Public Works Programme has also spawned its own offspring in the form of the National Youth Service. The National Youth Service is also a collaborative effort with Umsobomvu Youth Fund, the National Youth Commission and the Department of Labour. Even as we make progress with this sub-programme, it is clear that we should bump it up even more in order to deal with the stubborn problem of youth unemployment and lack of skills in our country.

When we launched the NYS in Botshabelo in Bloemfontein in April last year, we promised that we will create a cadre of skilled artisans for our country. We said that we want our youth to be proud and committed citizens of the country, imbued with the passion for their people and their country. I am happy to say that we are on track.

I would like to also congratulate all the stakeholders who have been involved in the building of this community resource. In line with the sentiments of government to foster partnerships, the community has been intimately involved in the project from the beginning through the School Governing Body (SGB) that also acted as the Project Steering Committee. They were involved in organizing local labour and held regular meetings with the project professional team and a contractor to monitor progress. As a result 40 local jobs were created of which 13 went to women. This also conforms to the undertaking that was made at the sod-turning ceremony in that EPWP principles have been applied in this project.

The successful implementation of this programme, we believe, will improve the physical accommodation of our children, promote their human rights and well-being, whilst supporting the Integrated and Sustainable Rural Development Strategy of our government. Once again, I would say boldly that we are on the right track and we shall overcome.

I thank you

