

Keynote Address by the Minister of Public Works, Ms Thoko Didiza, on the occasion of the Nkangala District Municipality Expanded Public Works Programme Conference

Venue: Nkangala District Municipality Chambers

Date: 1 November 2007

Programme Director

MEC for Public Works in Mpumalanga, Madala Masuku

Executive Mayor, Inkangala District, Lesetja Dikgale

Executive Mayors from Local Municipalities

Amakhosi

Councilors

Representative from Ceta

Representative from Absa

Officials of government departments

Ladies and gentleman

I would like to start off by greeting the two hundred and seven learners who have successfully completed their training in this region over the past three years. I want to congratulate you on your success and I want to tell you that you are the embodiment of all that we wish for our people in this country: the ability to access job opportunities as well as being fully trained in useful skills.

Programme Director, it is a great honour for me to be invited to this important function, to gain insight into what is being achieved through diligent commitment by municipalities like the Nkangala District Municipality. We were here last year in June to celebrate the latest intake of Vuk'uphile learners. It is greatly heartening today to come back and realize that this District Municipality is making

great strides in fulfilling our government's social contract with our people: providing opportunities for a better life for all.

The successful implementation of the EPWP, just like all government programmes can only be achieved through partnerships between all spheres of government as well as the private sector and communities concerned. I see that the EPWP in this District Municipality is a joint venture with contributions from the District Municipality, our departments in the province and national, the Construction Education and Training Authority, and Absa. I want to congratulate you on this partnership. This is what our country needs if we are to successfully tackle the challenge of underdevelopment, poverty and lack of skills.

A lot of effort is being put in ensuring that the EPWP is massified for maximum impact on the lives of poor people in our country. All the sectors of the EPWP are being stepped up a gear to ensure that by the end of this first phase in 2009, more than one million work opportunities would have been created by this programme. We aim to add value to the lives of as many people as possible in the four sectors of the EPWP.

Inkangala is proving to be one of the more active participants in our two year training programme for emerging contractors, Vuk'uphile, with learning agreements having been signed with more than two hundred and seven learners in the last three years. Vuk'uphile is an integral part of the Expanded Public Works Programme as it is designed to build capacity among emerging contractors, thus equipping learners with skills required to deliver EPWP infrastructure building projects. In doing so Vuk'uphile is helping to fulfill the EPWP's objectives of creating temporary work opportunities for the unemployed and the skilling of those workers for long-term job prospects.

Vuk'uphile is providing a mechanism for combining work opportunities with skills training within the infrastructure development sector. This is critical because our

country is facing a huge infrastructure backlog and skills shortage. In addition to upskilling the learner contractors, the project is spawning employment opportunities for the workers employed by the contractors themselves. Vuk'uphile is also aligned to the initiative of the Construction Industry Development Board to set up a national contractor register. This contractor register is helping in supporting broad-based black economic empowerment as it provides a database of companies that should benefit from preferential procurement initiatives. Learner contractors who enroll for and graduate through Vuk'uphile qualify for inclusion in the register as they are in a strong position to tender for larger civil engineering contracts that are designed with labour-intensive methodologies in mind.

Labour-intensive methodologies are the cornerstone of the Expanded Public Works Programme, not just here in our country, but world-wide. Last month, our Department, in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation and the Department of Transport in KwaZulu-Natal convened the 12th Regional Seminar on Labour Intensive Practices. That conference brought together specialists, researchers and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines. There were also eight SADEC Ministers whose portfolios include Public Works.

The main aim of the conference was to explore, at a regional level, ways and means of fighting this major challenge facing our continent and our global village – the inability of millions to access work. It is my hope that all the deliberations that were undertaken at that conference will enable us to scale up our own labour-intensive programmes in the infrastructure, social and economic sectors of EPWP. It must also enable us to expand regional partnerships for infrastructure development, job creation and the development of our human capital.

Government's commitment to the EPWP is underpinned by budget allocations that prescribe the objectives of labour intensity and skills development as central to the delivery of infrastructure, social and economic services. This year's original EPWP budget of R15 billion to provinces and municipalities has since been increased by a further R3 billion allocated to the provinces for the labour intensive construction and maintenance of access roads.

Further responding to our President's call to expand the scope and impact of the EPWP, both national and provincial Departments of Public Works this year launched the EPWP National Youth Service, underpinned by a vision to support the employment, growth and development of our youth, as well as their ability to contribute to South Africa's ongoing journey of transformation.

We continue to draw on the ongoing support of the Department of Labour, which plays a critical role in the EPWP by providing all the training in the programmes, either directly, or through the various Sector Education and Training Authorities that have been established. Our experience shows that skills development is a key component in the effective and efficient use of labour intensive technologies and that continued emphasis should be placed on training. With the support of the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB), a series of practical manuals have been developed to support the design, implementation and training in labour intensive construction methods. I am pleased to note that these have gained considerable international use, enabling South Africa to contribute to job creation in many parts of the world.

Ladies and gentlemen

Public works programmes are an important initiative in South Africa, but also around Africa and the world. They are geared at alleviating unemployment, and at creating a foothold in the economy for the marginalized, unskilled and unemployed. Some of the papers at the conference highlighted the global spread of public works programmes and how different countries are implementing them. I was pleased that a strong contingent of the South African EPWP staff was there and that they surely benefited from the creative experiences of other delegates.

I believe that the presentations made and discussed at the conference will contribute further to our efforts at job creation and to freeing our people from the trap of poverty.

I would like to urge Municipalities and other spheres of government not to neglect the other components of the EPWP as they can be a great source of poverty alleviation and providing jobs. We need to forever think of ways to improve our through put, just like an excellent project in the Hibiscus Coast Municipality Southern KZN whereby community members are benefiting through the collection of garbage. The programme, called Siyazenzela, is an innovative scheme that started as an environmental campaign to clean up the area has

become both a job creation scheme and the poverty alleviator. The community get generous food parcels for bringing in garbage that it collects. The garbage gets collected at a central municipal vegetable market and it is transported to be recycled. NgesiZulu singathi bashaya izinyoni ezintathu ngetshe elilodwa, to coin a phrase. There are is cleaned up, they get food and provide jobs to those who recycle. It is a brilliant scheme that shows what can be achieved with more inventiveness on our part.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Business Trust, and in this instance, Absa bank for continued support for our endeavours as government. What has been achieved so far demonstrate your commitment to the development of our country as well as the true value of partnerships and what they can achieve if pursued vigorously.

I would like to once again congratulate this District for its diligent implementation of the EPWP. It is showing the way for other District Municipalities and public entities that the EPWP programme is national framework to be implemented by all public entities so as to achieve developmental outcomes in reducing unemployment and poverty. Well done Nkangala District Municipality.

I wish you well in your deliberations during this conference.

Thank you.