

Keynote Address by the Minister of Public Works on the Occasion of the launch Umsebenzi Portal

Venue: Zenzile Training Centre, Khayelitsha

Date: 19 November 2007

Programme Director

MEC for Public Works and Transport, my colleague, Marius Fransman

Departmental officials

Esteemed guests

Ladies and gentlemen

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 Departments like this one as we continue our united effort at fighting poverty and unemployment.

We were here in Cape Town in early August to celebrate the launch of the Masakh'isizwe Bursary Scheme, that focus strictly on the building up of a cadre of built environment professionals in collaboration with institutions of higher learning and private sector in this province. It is thus greatly heartening to again be invited here to come back and realize that my comrade and colleague here, MEC Fransman and his Department continue to make great strides in fulfilling our government's social contract with our people: providing opportunities for a better life for all.

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.

I understand that the Western Cape Provincial Economic Review and Outlook of 2006, indicates that unemployment among young people in the Western Cape is becoming "increasingly dire", despite the fact that the educational profile of young people is superior to that of their older counterparts.

The Reviews shows that over 52% of 15 to 24-year-olds in this province are unemployed. Among 25 to 34-year-olds, the unemployment rate is substantially lower at 25%, dropping to about 13% among 45 to 54 year-olds.

The unemployment rate of matriculants between 15 and 34 is more than 2.5 times higher than that of those between 35 and 65.

What these figures are telling us is that older people are tending to keep their jobs, while younger people are struggling to find employment. This has important implications for future economic growth as long-term unemployment entrenches itself among the youth and begins to erode skills and knowledge that younger labour force members currently have, but are unable to extend or even maintain through employment.

That is why it is heartening to see initiatives like the EPWP Opportunities Portal whose main aims are:

- To assist job seekers in finding jobs and employers in finding workers with the required skills,
- To provide access to job training and related services.
- To link to existing initiatives and programmes

This programme should be able to help in solving one of the pressing challenges right across the country which the Department of Labour is also trying to solve: the actual number of unemployed people in a province or particular locality. Without the accurate information, we really would be shooting in the dark. This initiative should be able to help us and provide us with accurate statistics instead of estimations.

The development of a comprehensive electronic database of unemployed people and their skills will indeed assist job seekers in finding opportunities for employment and

employers in finding qualified workers. I like the idea of initially focusing on the beneficiaries of EPWP and other Public Works Programmes. This is so because I understand that you have already started the ball rolling by registering some fifteen thousand unemployed / under-employed individuals that you had on your Learnership 1000 database on this new portal.

As the database will utilise existing Internet-enabled public access infrastructure (for example the City of Cape Town's Smart Cape centres – launched by the Premier in 2006) to allow people to get information on programmes, register, develop and update CVs, get access to the Internet and email and apply for jobs. This will be so because the youth is hooked up on internet and other high technology gizmos. The main challenge that we need to solve will be to publicise this initiative as much as possible.

Through training Community Development Workers (CDW's) in the use of the system and calling on volunteers to assist at access points, unemployed persons will have the opportunity to develop their CV's on the database as they participate in EPWP projects or any other short term employment creation initiatives. Potential employers will also have an opportunity to register themselves on the system and to source employees who meet their requirements for specific skills.

I applaud the department's efforts, together with e-Innovation in the Department of the Premier, for developing a strategy and proposal for extending the network of internet-enabled public access points to areas where they are currently not available. I know that you already have identified 114 access-points throughout the Western Cape, where the unemployed can register themselves on the Opportunities portal.

The reported success and frequency with which the Smart Cape access points are used in the poorest communities in Cape Town, shows that, given the opportunity to access information technology, the innovativeness of unemployed persons can be harnessed to not only access employment for themselves, but also to create employment within their communities.

In order to meet the millennium goals of halving unemployment by 2014, a lot more is needed from all of us to deal with the scourge of poverty and unemployment. We need to continuously think creatively on what can be done to take forward our struggle.

The Western Cape is proving to be one of the more creative provinces as I understand that you have already recruited more than 800 learners in your Learnership 1000 programme.

Although not dissimilar from the Vuk'uphile programme which is a two year training programme for emerging contractors, your learnership 1000 is wider than Vuk'uphile, with learners getting more skills than just on building. This is highly recommended as we need a vast array of skills in the build environment to get complete artisans and project managers, who are able to deliver complete infrastructure building projects.

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.

It is greatly heartening to realise that all spheres of government are continuing to come up with fresh ideas on how to expand and deepen the impact of the EPWP. It is important 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 impact on the lives of poor and marginalised people like the rural and semi-urban poor.

There is an excellent project in the Hibiscus Coast Municipality of 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 they collect. The garbage gets collected at a central municipal vegetable market and it is transported to be recycled. They are achieving three objectives in one project. NgesiZulu singathi bashaya izinyoni ezintathu ngetshe elilodwa, to coin a phrase. Their environment is cleaned up, they get food and jobs are being provided to those who recycle. It is a brilliant scheme that shows what can be achieved with more inventiveness on our part.

It is therefore my fervent hope that this programme will help us push on forward towards giving dignity to our people by providing job opportunities and releasing them from the trap of poverty.

Once again, thank you for the innovation and the invitation.

