

**Minister of Public Works
Ms S Sigcau
14 October 2001**

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Hand Over of the Senqu Multi-Purpose Community Centre

- The President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, who will join us later today
- The Premier of Eastern Cape, Reverend Makhenkesi Stofile
- MEC Masualle, Public Works
- MEC Balindlela, Sports and Culture
- The Mayor of Ukhahlamba, Councillor Goduka
- All members of Parliament and the Provincial Legislature here today
- Distinguished guests,
- Ladies and gentlemen

On 17 October, South Africa will join the rest of the world in commemorating the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. In 1983 the United Nations, representing a family of nations of the world, set aside the day to remind the world that despite advances in technology and wealth creation, poverty remains a stumbling block in many parts of the world.

Poverty manifests itself in many ways. Significantly poverty is characterized by:

- Lack of choices
- Lack of access to services
- Lack of infrastructure
- Lack of resources to change those conditions responsible for poverty in the first place.

Even South Africa with its well documented economic prosperity under apartheid, systematically continued to breed ever-increasing pockets of poverty in the country.

Many rural areas and many urban black townships still experience these syndromes of poverty as listed above. Hunger, unemployment, illiteracy, homelessness, diseases including HIV/Aids and Tuberculosis persist to ravage our children, youth and the elderly who are the repositories of African culture and good moral values.

It was this stark reality of the other side of South African life that confronted our new government in 1994. It is the very same reality today that undermines our democracy and threatens our new-found freedoms.

Before 1994 we were made to believe, almost to a point of accepting, that it was natural for our people to be poor. Successive colonial governments including the apartheid National Party government which ruled for nearly 50 years, perpetuated poverty through racist laws and racially discriminatory social planning systems which compounded poverty and entrenched hopelessness.

Since 1994 South Africa with its relative economic strength did distribute wealth to all its people equally and equitably.

President Mbeki's Government, our government is committed to reversing the hardship caused by apartheid. Our presence here today is an indication of our unwavering resolve to uproot poverty and bequeath a better life for all, particularly the to the poor and the historically disadvantaged.

One of the ways to fight poverty is to build infrastructure where none existed before. Our strategy includes bringing services, information and help closer to the people. As government, we are doing it. Others are dreaming it. Delivery for a better life remains deeply entrenched on our strategy of Integrated and Sustainable Rural Development.

As government we have the will to improve quality of life. In you we have the power to do it successfully.

Today we are officially opening a Multi-Purpose Community Centre here at Sterkspruit in the municipality of Senqu in the District of Ukhahlamba. Already your warm welcome is like the stream of strength (Sterkspruit).

Your patience is never ending like Senqu (Orange River) on its way to the Atlantic Ocean. Your determination to succeed is as unshakeable as the Ukhahlamba (Drakensberg Mountains)

This project is however, more than just bricks and mortar. It is an embodiment of our commitment as government to work together with communities to improve their quality of lives.

In Public Works we describe this spirit of working together to fight poverty as an African work ethic of ILIMA/LETSIMA. This spirit is expressed through our programme of community - based public works which alleviates poverty by constructing community - based projects and creating jobs to make life easier, better and rewarding.

In 2000/2001 the Department of Public Works spent R22,4 million developing, upgrading and building in total 23 MPCC's in Kwa Zulu-Natal, Northern Province, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape and Western Cape.

As a target, the government plans to establish at least one MPCC in each of the District and Metropolitan municipalities, rolling out 60 such structures by end of March 2003.

To date, twelve (12) MPCC's have been launched. Gauteng provinces has 3 including a satellite, Mpumalanga has 2, and Free State boasts 3. Other provinces of Western Cape, Northern Province, North West and Eastern Cape have one each, completing a total of 12.

After today, Sterkspruit under the District Municipality of Ukhahlamba will join Tombo in O.R. Tambo District, to bring the tally for Eastern Cape to 2. Also in line for development are three more facilities in the Eastern Cape at:

- Cofimvaba (Chris Hani District)
- Centani (Amatola District)
- Zalu Hill, Lusikisiki (Alfred Nzo District)

The Senqu Multi-Purpose Community Centre was built at a total cost of R1 million by the Department of Public Works, funded from our 2000/2001 allocation.

The implementation was done strictly using the guidelines of the ILIMA/LETSIMA-community based public works programme, building on the notion of social cohesion and viewing this project as an anchor project around which future development will take place. We have planted the seed. Make it grow.

Also notable is the concept of employment creation and community assets development inherent in ILIMA's drive to eradicate poverty.

At the heart of ILIMA, lies the following golden principles:

- Cluster of projects within identified poverty pockets in the rural areas
- Targeted employment of female-headed households and the youth through labour intensive methods.
- Creation of jobs by implementation of sustainable directly productive assets and access to trade opportunities

As a result, about 172 temporary jobs were created during the construction stage of the project, of which 25% and 47% went to women and youth respectively.

We are encouraged by the knowledge that as we launch this facility today, it has already started dispensing services. Service providers on site include:

- Department of Welfare
- Department of Home Affairs
- Government Communications and Information Systems
- Police Services
- Universal Service Agency

In the immediate vicinity of the MPCC the following services occur - magistrate,s court, Agricultural Advice Centre and a Post Office.

We are further informed that a lease agreement has been finalized between Public Works and Senqu Municipality and that the latter are in the process of appointing a centre care taker.

In conclusion, I like to share with you some of the critical success stories and challenges around MPCC's. At Tombo alone, 10 000 birth certificates and 5000 identity documents have been issued since the facility was launched in December 1999.

Approximately 200 people are visiting the Namahadi MPCC on daily basis in Qwa-Qwa, Eastern Free State.

Value has also been added by the growing number of government departments who have extended their services range. For instance, the Department of Justice has opened offices and will run regional courts in the Faranani MPCC at Brakpan, (Gauteng) and Galeshewe outside Kimberley.

I was personally touched but equally encouraged by the remarks of an old woman following the launch of a MPCC at Tombo in 1999. When interviewed, she thanked the government for saving them time and money. Before the development of the MPCC, she and other members of the community had to travel long distances for longer hours, often on foot, to get access to government services at Umtata. Along the way they were vulnerable to physical danger and certainly susceptible to natural elements.

To the communities of Sterkspruit, my challenge to you is to ensure sustainability of MPCC's through maximum community participation in the centre. The structural decay would rather result from over-use than be the result of neglect and scorn. Amongst yourself, find innovative ways to make the centre an important way to add value to the life of the community. Let the centre make a difference in your midst.

To the stakeholders who are involved in offering services through MPCC's, my appeal to you is to view the centre as an enabler, bringing you in touch with communities who seek and value your services. Learn to enrich the lives of the communities.

To government employees who will be staffing the centre, be reminded that your actions and utterances mirror service delivery levels of government. Always remember to put people first (Batho - Pele). You are the great ambassador on new governance.

To each and everyone present here today, may you be reminded that you get judged by your actions, not intentions.

Let us all unite in action for change. Thank you.

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