

**Minister of Public Works
Ms Stella Sigcau
17 March 2001
Grahamstown**

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Launch of the National Youth Service Community Based Pilot Projects

Master of Ceremonies, Mr Phila Nkayi, MPL
Premier, Rev Makhenkhesi Stofile
Executive Mayor of Makana Municipality, Councillor Vumile Lwana
National Chairperson of the Youth Commission, Jabu Mbalula
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Today we are visiting this historic town of our country to officially launch the Youth for Environmental Accessibility in the Eastern Cape. This launch takes place in an area full of the history of the struggle of our people in one form or another - a struggle by our kings against colonialism, and by our activists against the apartheid regime.

Our youth has played a leading role in the struggle for national liberation. On Youth Day this year we will be marking the 25th anniversary of the Soweto uprising. This anniversary will focus on the role of youth in the reconstruction of post apartheid South Africa. A fitting monument to the fighters of colonialism and apartheid is the reconstruction and development of post apartheid South Africa.

Today our youth is facing many challenges such as HIV/AIDS, unemployment, and inadequate scientific and technical education and creeping political apathy. Recognising the challenges facing our youth, the President's job summit identified the youth and the disabled as some of the most needy sections of society.

Steadily but surely we are moving away from the legacy of apartheid. In his State of the Nation Address on 9 February 2001 the President of South Africa, Mr Mbeki said, " These important successes demonstrate practically what we can achieve if indeed, as a country and a people, we unite in action for change"

I am indeed pleased to officially launch this remarkable programme from Grahamstown today. The projects we visited indicate that albeit small, a definite change has been brought to the ease of access by the disabled to government buildings from where they have to obtain services.

This Programme comprises an important element within the Department's overall Community Based Public Works Programme.

It demonstrates the Government's commitment to partnerships, poverty alleviation, upliftment of youth and caring for the disabled.

The Programme comprises a significant partnership between the Department of Public Works and the Office on the Status of Disabled Persons within the Deputy President's Office and the National Youth Commission. The Programme's name "Youth for Environmental Accessibility programme" encapsulates its objectives, the results of which include:

- * Training of Youth;
- * Empowerment and employment of Youth;
- * Provision of facilities at Government Buildings to ensure accessibility by people who are disabled.

The Programme comprises the identification of strategic government buildings that do not have adequate access and facilities for disabled persons in both urban and rural areas and equipping these buildings with the necessary facilities.

As a pilot project, this programme is a national effort to kick-start the establishment of a National Youth Service in South Africa. The concept of a National Youth Service is viewed as an investment in a valuable national asset. Youth will be afforded an opportunity to realise their national worth by being of service to the nation while appreciating the experience of responsible citizenship. It is hoped that this will allow them to shape healthy value systems and moral resolve.

In tandem with such a National Youth Service, the government will recruit and train youth in various technical and other skills to render them of effective service to nation building, economic development, reconstruction and social transformation.

About 420 young people from KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and the Northern Province volunteered, were recruited, trained and employed under this programme to use labour-intensive construction methods to make identified public buildings more accessible to disabled persons.

The youth participating in the programme derive the benefit of receiving technical training while executing the required modifications to public buildings. The training is compliant with the relevant SETA requirements. This was set down, as a provision to allow youth who wish to pursue a career in a specific trade to have adequate preparation to take the trade tests required being skilled artisans. These include bricklaying, carpentry, plastering/tiling, painting, plumbing, road construction and paving and carport construction. The technical training is complemented with a Life-skills training component to allow the youth to recognise and realise their potential.

Initially the Programme was implemented within KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, which are the Provinces that have been identified with the highest need for disabled facilities due to the combination of a large population, lack of facilities for the disabled at government buildings and the steep terrain. The Northern Province was also included.

Within the R50 million budget allocated to this programme, 267 projects were identified and are currently being finalised. The facilities comprise improving the access at government buildings for disabled people, in the form of construction of parking areas for the disabled, ramps into the buildings as well as toilets for the disabled.

The 267 projects include modifications to 20 colleges, 36 courts of law, 25 hospitals or clinics, 47 police stations, 92 schools and 47 other government buildings. In the Eastern Cape 95 projects, in KwaZulu-Natal 48 and in the Northern Province 124 projects are being dealt with.

In the Eastern Cape, 144 youth were exposed to training in life-skills and various technical training courses. The technical training courses were divided into two categories: short 14-day courses and longer 45-day courses.

Sadly, one of the most dedicated volunteers died and seven absconded during the programme. Further to the site training, the youth enjoyed the privilege of working with skilled people on a ratio of one skilled person to two trainees. This created further employment for some 80 people.

Youth received a small payment of R35 per day. They were issued with tools, protective clothing and T-shirts.

The project prioritisation and selection process is targeted to ensure that the developmental impact of the programme is achieved as set out fully in the Programme Management System. It includes:

- * Targeting Poverty Pockets - in the Budget Allocation Process;
- * Appropriate Project Selection - including community, local authority and provincial government inputs;
- * Maximising Job creation for disadvantaged youth - by incorporating specific employment targets in all construction contracts;
- * Maximising Sustainability - by ensuring that recurrent expenditure is committed prior to project approval.

In Grahamstown, environmental accessibility has been improved at the following buildings:

- * Settler's Day Hospital
- * Department of Public Works
- * Department of Health
- * Department of (Welfare) Social Development
- * Department of Education
- * Grahamstown library
- * Three Schools.

I trust that the disabled persons in this community will have the benefit of unhindered access to public buildings that were previously not possible. This benefit, which most of us take for granted, makes an enormous contribution to the status, self-worth and independence of disabled persons. I also trust that the participating youth will enjoy the future benefit of their training, and be role models for a South Africa united in action for change.

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