

**Minister of Public Works
Ms Stella Sigcau
19 October 2000**

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Launch of Poverty Eradication Strategy of the Free State Government

The Premier of Free State, Ms Winkie Direko
Members of the Executive Council of the Free State
Members of the Provincial Legislature
Various Heads of Departments
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I greet you all.

One aspect of poverty that is often overlooked by media and the so-called experts on poverty is the accompanying loss of human dignity and self-esteem. This is succinctly captured in the definition of poverty as espoused by the United Nations Development Report:

Poverty is the denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development to lead to a long healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self esteem and respect from others.

As people become stripped of their material and other possessions, a part of their soul is lost in the process, leading many poor communities to sink further into the poverty quicksand characterised by crime, witchcraft, illiteracy, unemployment, diseases and more often violence.

Daily we read about cases of livestock theft, witch hunts, cholera, rampant spread of HIV/AIDS and violent factional fighting - most of the time we even fail to make associations with the prevalence of poverty in the affected areas.

Often we believe poverty is a problem that will solve itself out with the passage of time. Even worse, sometimes the poor are blamed for their conditions. The question of dispossession and disenfranchisement is never entertained.

Fortunately for the poor people of South Africa, since 1994 they have had a government that for the first time in the history of South Africa, is dedicated to creating a better life for all.

High on the agenda of government is a need to bring essential services closer to the people that before never had. These include access to capital, health, education, community assets, social services, employment and any other infrastructure development for life improvement.

Today we see the addition of yet another arrow in the quiver of efforts and programmes initiated by government to fight poverty and help restore the dignity of many poor people.

The launch of Poverty Eradication Strategy by a provincial government completes the government's plan to integrate resources and co-ordinate efforts in a fight against poverty. Considering our history of co-operation with the local government on poverty eradication, the launch today completes the three dimensional approach by all government levels to poverty eradication.

Congratulations should go to the Free State government for displaying a remarkable foresight in conjuring up a concrete programme to combat poverty in the province. We are certainly encouraged by the commitment of the Free State government to make this a Flagship Programme for the province and a high priority too.

Perhaps a first among the provinces, the Poverty Eradication Strategy is relevant, necessary and urgent. It comes against the backdrop of an indicting report on poverty, released by the Statistics South Africa recently.

In the report, the province of Free State is said to be one of the most impoverished provinces in South Africa, taking its place among others such as Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Province.

In my travels, as I traverse the breadth and width of the countryside, I am greeted by stark reminders of poverty such as women ploughing the fields with babies strapped on their backs. Or images of kids taught in an open veld with a solo tree to shield them from elements. I look at these images and become even more determined to work harder to bring a change in their lives.

Since 1996, my department through a poverty alleviation programme known as Community Based Public Works Programme (CBPWP), has invested more than R1,2 billion to fight poverty, unemployment, rural underdevelopment and neglect.

The aims and the objectives of CBPWP in brief include:

- Working with the communities, identifying and building community assets. These assets are intended to make a difference in the quality of life of those communities.
- Using labour intensive methods to create opportunities for employment and
- Developing human resources through training and skills transfer

In short, through CBPWP, we build projects where there were none before. As a result the asset base of the community improves and the quality of life is positively affected, for the better. By giving jobs to women, youth and the disabled, we increase the consumption base and create a demand for more goods and services. This helps to stimulate local economies.

With a trained corps of community members, skills are localised and people are at an advantage to compete for job opportunities should they arise. This is important because it creates self-reliance in the community.

Six years into its operation, CBPWP has built more than 2500 projects mainly in the poverty-stricken provinces of Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Province because of their acute poverty indices. We have created in the process 43 000 jobs of which 2365 are sustainable.

The disparity between the two figures is a cause for concern. In essence it means that most of the jobs we create are of short-term nature. Perhaps this is necessary to alleviate poverty but definitely not sufficient to eradicate it. It is because of this concern that my department in conjunction with the National Ministry of Agriculture have initiated Community Production Centres in line with international trends to create a demand driven (i.e. community based) approach to development.

Because the majority of the people in the rural areas depend on agriculture to provide income and employment, the concept of Community Production Centres will promote production activities that are controlled by the communities and linked to market requirements.

Community Production Centres use infrastructure development as an engine for agricultural and rural development through the creation of roads, irrigation schemes, markets and agricultural infrastructures, thereby creating long term employment and wealth creation opportunities.

Pilot projects have been identified in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Province with an anticipated potential to benefit between 250 000 and 300 000 people. The first Community Production Centre will be launched in the Eastern Cape tomorrow.

The launch of Poverty Eradication Strategy at QwaQwa could not have come at a better time for the province of Free State. It coincides with our plans to expand into the provinces of Free State, Mpumalanga and North West. From our 1999/2000 budget of R274 million, almost R55 million is being invested in the three above provinces.

In conclusion I want to wish the efforts of the Free State government a success. I am particularly impressed by their integrated approach, involving the collective wisdom of the various government departments. This will surely maximise the impact of the Poverty Eradication Strategy and benefit more people in many ways.

The days of the so-called gum tree approach to development and social prosperity are gone. Instead of having government departments and institutions competing with one another for a spot in the sun, economies of scale dictates that pooling of resources ensures efficiency - that is achieving more with less.

The successful implementation of the strategy in QwaQwa and the southern Free State areas should serve as a benchmark for similar applications in the entire province. Free State and the government are on course to contain the scourge of poverty and the beneficiaries will be all the people of South Africa.

I thank you.

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