

Minister of Public Works
Mr J Radebe
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At the North-West visit to NPWP Projects

The Reconstruction and Development Programme commits the Government of National Unity to a programme that brings together strategies to harness all our resources in a coherent and purposeful effort that can be sustained into the future. It is a people-driven process, focusing on our people's most immediate needs. But above all, it is about the democratisation of South Africa, requiring fundamental changes in the way that policy is made and programmes are implemented.

The main thrust of the RDP is addressing the issues of social, institutional, environmental and macro-economic sustainability in an integrated manner. The RDP integrates growth, development, reconstruction and redistribution into a unified programme that will provide access to modern and effective services like electricity, water, telecommunications, transport, health, education and training for all our people.

The RDP does not look at development in a straightjacketed way, which is just enlarging growth. In the RDP approach, development is a deduction in growth, a marginal effort of redistribution to areas of urban and rural poverty.

This is in line with the definition of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which declared human development as a process of enlarging people's choices, among the most important of which are leading a long and healthy life, being educated and enjoying a decent standard of living by way of fulfilling and remunerative job alternatives.

According to the UNDP: "Human development brings together the production and distribution of commodities and the expansion and use of human capabilities. It also focuses on choices - on what people should have, be and do to be able to ensure this livelihood. Human development is, moreover, concerned not only with basic needs satisfaction but also with human development as a participatory and dynamic process. It applies equally to less developed and highly developed countries."

According to a study by the Development Bank of Southern Africa, published in March this year, human development levels in the North-West show severe spatial and racial disparities. For example, infant mortality rates are up to seven times higher for the disadvantaged section of the population. Black infant mortality rates are 43 per 1000 live births, while life expectancy at birth is up to eight years lower than that of whites. Poverty is especially acute in rural areas.

The same study notes that the most striking feature of the North-West's economy is the dominant role of the mining sector. This concentration, says the Development Bank of Southern Africa, renders the economy vulnerable to fluctuations in international price and demand. Whilst the mining sector is fairly sophisticated, the real effect of the "success" of the sector is not felt locally as there are few, if any, backward and forward linkages. There is now evidence of the decline of the influence of the mining sector although it still remains the dominant sector in the economy.

The official rate of unemployment in this region in 1991 was 22,3 per cent, but this does not include people trying to make a living in the informal and marginal sectors. In 1991, only 48,9 per cent of the extended labour force was formally employed. Low employment levels contributed to the high poverty levels in the province.

The North-West is no exception to other provinces who are facing almost similar problems. There is therefore an urgent and pressing need for the democratic government to play a leading role in building an economy which offers all South Africans opportunities to contribute productively.

The National Public Works Programme is therefore a key area where special measures to create jobs can link to building the economy and meet basic needs in redressing the infrastructural imbalances of the past.

R250 million is being spent by the Department of Public Works on the National Public Works Programme. R150 million of this went directly to the provinces while R250 million is being used through non-governmental organisations. R70 million has been allocated to the IDT which in turn has allocated R6 million to 57 projects in the North-West. Thirty-eight projects are currently receiving funds and about 2 500 people will be employed for an average period of 6 months (if working every day).

By February R50,7 million had been allocated to 368 projects in all the provinces and 150 communities had signed contracts to receive funding. The projects involved including road construction, water reticulation and sanitation, community halls, chreshes, clinics and class-room building.

To show the level of delivery of the NPWP, it is expected that we will be able to created 30 000 jobs in the next fiscal year as we have established that this year alone, that already 5 700 people should already be having jobs under the programme and 25 000 by August.

Our projections are that by year 2000, between 150 000 and 200 000 more people could be employed on infrastructural projects of the NPWP labour intensive methods become widely used.

The NPWP aims at ensuring short-term delivery to communities through the Community Based Public Works Programme. At the same time we are pursuing a number of strategies which will not only ensure that government transforms the way it provides infrastructure, but which will contribute to overall government restructuring and reorganisation. The latter part of the programme is therefore aimed at reorienting public expenditure on infrastructure and to transform the institutional capacity of line functions of institutional and provincial government to ensure much more larger scale job creation, skills development and capacity building through the provision of infrastructure in forthcoming years.

Through the NPWP we aim to reduce unemployment by creating productive jobs and opportunities for local contractors, using labour intensive construction methods.

We aim to create, rehabilitate and maintain physical assets which will improve the quality of life of poor communities as well as promote broader economic activity.

Through the programme, we are able to provide education and training to unemployed people, especially women, youth and rural dwellers, to increase their chances of becoming self-employed or entering the formal economy.

At the same time, we are providing a channel to empower communities through building their capacity to manage their own affairs. This will contribute to building and strengthening local government and other local institutions.

A key principles of the NPWP is that communities need to make decisions about their own lives. This will lead to community empowerment and enhance institutional development, which is particularly important in the light of the forthcoming local government elections. It can also lead to sustainable development and payment for services.

The NPWP thus stresses that communities need to be involved in the planning, designing, implementation and management of infrastructural projects. To ensure this provisions must be made in the budgets of projects for community capacity building and project implementers, especially at local government level, must facilitate this process.

Attention has also been given to the projects management process to ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable communities, who are often the least organised, are not neglected.

The NPWP insists that there should be an entitlement for education and training for all workers on projects. This entitlement is not restricted to learning construction skills, but should include adult basic education and life skills. We are trying to ensure that as far as possible, education and training is accredited.

To ensure the production of good quality assets, the training and retraining of engineers and technicians in the private and public sector is crucial. It is important that the construction sector sharpens its skills on the subject to ensure that communities receive the best possible service and that sound technical skills are maintained. We also lay emphasis on affirmative action in respect of race and gender.

Experience in the rest of the world has indicated that the success of public works programmes rests on their ability to proceed only as fast as technical development and training proceeds. A particular weakness is the adequate number of trained engineering staff, especially those from previously disadvantaged communities, to design and manage labour intensive construction projects.

The NPWP has therefore embarked upon a programme of technical co-operation with the International

Labour Organisation, which will include short-term training, particularly for RDP and Community-Based Public Works Programmes, and put in place the institutional capacity for large scale medium-term training. This is being done in co-operation with the Department of Labour, Department of Education, the industry training board, trade unions and training NGOs.

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