

## **Address at the National Council of Provinces**

13 November 2001

Madam Chairperson,  
Deputy Chairperson,  
Honourable Premiers,  
Honourable Members and Councillors,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity you have given us once more to discuss important matters with the National Council of Provinces.

Last year when we addressed this House we spoke about the challenges facing all of us with regard to local government structures and their role and place in the transformation of our society.

Since then, we held successful local government elections, thus completing the important work of bringing about genuine democratic structures at all spheres of government.

The challenge we now face is to ensure that these structures, working together with all our people from all stations of life, function as real agents of change that will help us both to entrench democracy in our country and help us to end the great South African divide between rich and poor, between the developed and the underdeveloped.

The challenge facing the new democratic structures of government is the transformation of the lives of the many in our society whose existence is defined by the prospect of a bleak future. Through concrete programmes, we must inculcate the hope and conviction among our people that together with their government they can and must defeat poverty, disease and marginalisation.

Hence we have, in the last seven years constructed a government, that is not only democratic, non-racial and non-sexist, but one that is developmental.

We have brought into being a government that, while it confronts the challenges of reconstruction and development, it simultaneously involves the people in action, consistent with our vision of people-driven processes of change.

In this context, the strengthening of local government structures following last year's first fully non-racial elections is a critical element in building our democratic system of governance and ensuring that our people have the possibility to engage practically in the processes of governance and development.

By these comments, we seek to emphasise the view I am certain we all share that local government is an important component part for the successful implementation of our development programmes in both rural and urban areas.

Already, all the new local authorities have submitted their Interim Integrated Development Plans which articulate the development needs and priorities of the different communities.

All of us, and particularly members of this House, must ensure that the Integrated Development Plans, to be finalised in March next year, are practical, workable programmes that will be the tools for integrated development and will help us effectively to change the living conditions of all our people, wherever they may be.

In this regard, a special inter-ministerial committee has been formed, at the national level, to assist the municipalities.

In addition, before the end of this year, on the 7th of December, all three spheres of government will take part in a special meeting of the President's Co-ordinating Council in order to assess progress in the establishment of a new system of local government and to determine areas requiring the further strengthening of the system of co-operative governance.

As you are aware, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government, we have restructured the operation of our different departments to ensure integrated planning and implementation.

This means that we are moving away from a fragmented system of governance so that we move faster towards the realisation of the goal of a better life for all.

This approach, of integrated formulation and implementation of development programmes across departments and among spheres of government, informs our work as we implement the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme and the Urban Renewal Strategy.

When we met in the Cabinet Lekgotla in July this year, government had concluded the detailed plans for rural development in the 13 identified nodal points. The further 17 nodal points will be announced soon so that we move with the necessary speed to implement development programmes to our people in the rural areas.

As we have said in the past, we cannot just build a clinic when we have not trained the health personnel, when we have not budgeted for drugs, or the area does not have water, sanitation or access roads.

If we have a programme of assisting black farmers, we should ensure that not only do they have access to machinery and finance, but that the infrastructure in their areas is in good condition, the telephones and roads are in working condition, so that they have the possibility to market their products.

It is also in this context that we have put in motion the implementation of 'one-stop-centres', which are multi-purpose community centres that bring together multiple government services in a single place, ensuring easy access for people and communities that are otherwise cut off from the services they rightly deserve as citizens.

Implementation of the Urban Renewal programme began in earnest in May with the Alexandra project. Further elaboration of the Urban Renewal Strategy into a programme on a par with the rural development programme is at present in progress. Following an assessment in September of all the eight urban nodes, nodal business plans and reprioritising of funds were completed in October in preparation for a national workshop in March that will see a finalised strategy and programme going to Cabinet in May next year.

The urgent matter of capacity has been addressed through the appointment of nodal delivery teams whose members have core capacities in project management, financial management and community facilitation. In this way, the quality of work will be enhanced, ensuring financial accountability and expediting the pace of delivery.

I mention these in part to illustrate what can and should be done by all of us to ensure the provision of goods and services to all our people on a sustainable basis. In this context, we must also emphasise the point that all of us should, at the same time, refuse to accept the provision of shoddy goods to our people as this, apart from anything else, constitutes a waste of scarce public resources.

As we have said earlier, we also seek to involve the people in the work of the reconstruction and development of our country. We therefore seek to make ours a truly participatory democracy.

To this end, Government has embarked on the Imbizo programme of engaging our people, to have dialogue with them, to hear their views, to listen to their concerns, their grievances and advice about the pace, direction and content of our work.

As we speak here today, we have just participated in the first Imbizo Focus Week as part of this campaign. Using the theme of "Intergovernmental Co-operation for Local Delivery" it saw sustained activity in all of our provinces around implementation at the local level.

The events involved members of the executive from all three spheres of government. Many ministers and deputy ministers of our national ministries were involved, as was the Presidency, with the Deputy President during the week itself, and I myself paid a visit to the Eastern Cape shortly before the week itself.

This interaction is important because the people who voted us to government have done so because they want us to change their lives. It is important that we do not seek their views only during election periods, but consistently and at all times.

Through the Imbizos and the interactive, participatory engagements with the people, democracy is enhanced and the content of this democracy is fully expressed on an ongoing basis. As we carry out this work, it is important that the different spheres of government as well as the various departments communicate a coherent message to the people and not respond in a fragmented and contradictory manner.

We have to do this because we must interact with the people in an honest manner, confronting practically the challenges that face the people. Through this interactive programme the people should know exactly what we are doing and how we are doing it, why there are delays in specific instances and what government is doing about obstacles to the implementation of our development programmes.

Through the Imbizos we should make it possible for all of us to celebrate the successes we have registered and together plan for the initiation or acceleration of outstanding programmes.

The interactive programme should also assist us in clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of government, the state owned enterprises, private business, NGO's, the trade unions and the masses of our people in the transformation process in each and every locality.

This interactive programme should also help to improve the effectiveness of our public representatives by making them alive to the practical difficulties facing the public servants who are at the coal-face of the implementation of our programmes as well as service delivery.

In my own interaction with people working at the delivery level, I have often been confronted by problems that should be solved in the course of a day's work. Yet, these problems drag on for months or even years without anyone attending to them.

Surely, it cannot be that problems will only be solved because the president has visited an area. It is the responsibility of all of us, the Councillor, the Mayor, the traditional leader, the MP and MPL, the MEC, Premier, Deputy and Minister to attend to each and every problem that face our people.

In this way, we will bring government closer to the people and contribute practically to the acceleration of the process towards improving the lives of especially the poor in our country.

The Imbizos highlighted problems in implementation, but also presented practical solutions that could be achieved by working together. What we saw during two of these, what we heard and learnt, was both

inspiring and challenging. While the majority of South Africans all over the country have experienced poverty, our programme took us to areas where it is worse than most.

We learnt that some of the problems experienced by people in these communities were as a result of the inability of the managers appointed by government to carry out their work and that the blockages experienced were a result of this.

There was, for example, the case that due to bad management at a hospital, it was only through our visit, that an intergovernmental procedure was unblocked which up until then had prevented a hot water geyser in a hospital being repaired, resulting in the hospital having no hot water.

We learnt that where communities had some years ago advised the government on how to deal with projects, government had refused to listen. This had resulted in the collapse of these projects after all the necessary investment had been made.

We were told of councillors who had not been in touch with their people and were only seen towards election time. Fortunately, the situation has improved significantly since our last local government elections.

Above all, it is clear that our people are eager for change and want to work as partners with government in expediting change, ensuring that it benefits them. The people are conscious of their roles in developing themselves and the entire country and believe that we, as elected representatives, should act as true partners with them in everything we do. They are also driven by a sense of confidence that together we will win.

In some parts, it seemed that the people were not attending meetings as they should, to speak to their councillors about their problems and perspectives. It is clear that through the imbizos we had created a space for more meetings to take place, more possibilities where government and people could converse and reach conclusions on the way ahead.

Above all, we have learnt that government ought to listen more to what the people are saying, that the people have an important input to make about what must be done.

The lessons learnt from the imbizos pose challenges to us at all levels of government.

- Our management capacity needs to be strengthened in order for projects and programmes to happen effectively and within the time frames agreed.
- Relations between different levels of government must be strengthened through a fully integrated approach to expedite delivery.
- Government needs to learn to listen, to take note and to act quickly on concerns raised by the people.
- More opportunities should be created for imbizo-type meetings to occur so that government by the people and for the people is clearly seen to be an ongoing relationship of accountability, a conscious partnership true to the electoral mandate that has been given.

Madam Chairperson;

I am urging all of us that in the course of our work, we should travel beyond the end of a tarred road. We should be prepared to forgo the luxury and smoothness of a tarred road and deal with the bumpy potholes and rough surface of a gravel road. That is where we will see the real South Africa that is posing the challenges that we must overcome.

Although burdened by poverty and underdevelopment, these South Africans who live beyond the tarred road, have refused to be defeated by their conditions. They have refused to be victims of circumstance.

We will be inspired to experience, at first hand, the determination of these people to work with government to change their lives.

Because of this partnership, we have seen communities enjoying the fruits of democracy and of the implementation of government policies - farm labourers becoming owners of the farms they had worked in for many years; villagers blessing the gift of life, as clean piped water came to them for the first time.

We have seen how this partnership has made it possible for a nurse in a rural area to use tele-medicine to access specialised medical services both to diagnose and treat maladies affecting their patients.

We have come across young people in the rural areas using the Internet to learn mathematics and the sciences because Eskom brought electricity to their village and the CSIR and the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology brought in computers.

We have seen the practical partnership between Afrikaner farmers assisting black farmers to overcome historical barriers and become successful commercial farmers, thus improving their standards of living.

We have been inspired by these masses of our people, who have confidence that this democratic government will address their needs that have for so long been neglected, who understand that even if the road ahead is still long, change, of necessity, reaches some before others.

We have seen inspiring examples of what we can do to define ourselves as patriotic South Africans who are prepared to work hard, even if it is at a small scale, to make a difference in the transformation process.

This confidence in the future on the part of the very poor in our country places a great responsibility on all of us who have been elected to represent these masses.

The leadership represented in this House must occupy the frontline as we go beyond the tarred roads to work together with all our people to ensure that there are no impassable roads, that there is no community in our country that is isolated from the rest by poverty, underdevelopment and inhuman suffering.

We are approaching the halfway of our national and provincial parliaments and governments. Much commendable work has been done to build on the foundations laid during our first five years of democracy. The results of this effort are visible to every honest person both inside and outside our country.

We have a clear view of what we should do further to advance the objective of securing a better life for all our people. We have put the necessary institutions in place to enable us to achieve this objective. What remains is for us to act with vigour and consistency to accelerate the process of progressive change.

We will do this better if we act together with the masses of our people, relying on them as conscious partners in the struggle for the reconstruction and development of our country. For this to happen, we must go out to the people to report to them, to assess the impact of our policies and programmes, to listen to their views especially those that are critical of our performance, to interact with them honestly and truthfully.

I trust that as this National Council of Provinces enters the second half of its life, it will take up this challenge without hesitation and help us further to improve our system of democratic governance and further to improve the lives of our people.

We have a duty to justify the confidence of the masses of our people in their elected legislatures and government, to demonstrate practically that their hopes for a better life are not misplaced.

In the words of Frantz Fanon:

"To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean making a political speech. What it does mean is to try relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility and that if we go forward it is due to them too." (The Wretched of the Earth, p. 159)

I am certain that the National Council will respond to this challenge.

I thank you.