

Speaking notes at the Launch of the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme

7 July 2001

We meet today here in the Kgalagadi Cross Boundary Municipality to launch the National Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP).

All over our country, we see that the season of suffering and despair is being transformed into the season of hope and the season of the realisation of our dreams of freedom.

The transformation process must go into the most marginalised communities to ensure that they too are both beneficiaries of and activists for change.

Clearly, throughout our country, our rural areas are characterised by high levels of poverty, limited economic and employment opportunities, undeveloped infrastructure and limited services with marginalised communities economically dependent on urban areas. For decades, our rural communities were denied adequate education and our youth forced to abandon their homes and seek jobs in the cities. Our people were forced out of the countryside to become cheap migrant labourers on the mines and in the factories, in the cities and on the farms.

Our women in rural areas have had to bear the brunt of suffering by having to walk long distances to fetch water and collect firewood, by having to eke out their living and that of their families often on barren land to which they had been removed. Yet they have remained pillars of strength in the community, and we must pay tribute to their fortitude and resilience.

We also meet here today conscious of the fact that the people of this area have suffered greatly as a result of the legacy of apartheid and colonialism, the injustices of the past. I understand that among this community are those who were uprooted from their homes and forcibly removed from their village to other parts.

In the 1880s when the British colonised this region, while the Tswana people were allowed to live in well-watered valleys which were turned into reserves, they could not remain as herders under these conditions, especially after the Rinderpest, and had to become migrant labourers to supplement their income.

Under apartheid, people were removed from the well-watered areas in Kuruman and Vryburgh and sent to the dry areas of Konong, Gatlhose, Smidsdrift, Maremane, Vlakfontein, Dipakwanen and other places, to trust farms in the Kalahari. While the people of Bothitong were allowed to remain, they lost their grazing areas and thus their livelihoods.

The history of this area has also been one of environmental injustice with men and women miners and the people of this area subjected to asbestos contamination.

As recent as 1983, the government of Bophutatswana decided that there were too many donkeys in the area. The result was that 20 000 donkeys were killed and in an area where donkeys were an important means of transport in the absence of access roads, people suffered as a result.

I have also been told that this area has been a living example of a place where there have been roads built that link villages, but there are no access roads to schools or hospitals, where the building of one set of infrastructure has not been followed with the other necessary pre-requisites and linkages to ensure a better and more productive life for the people of this area.

I am aware that as a result of apartheid policies, the levels of poverty and underdevelopment in this area are high, many households have not had access to clean water, sanitation services and electricity, that in some areas there are too many pupils and too few schools.

The integrated sustainable rural development programme is intended to empower all those in rural communities who have been disempowered in the past through conducting a sustained campaign against rural poverty and underdevelopment.

This programme is part of an overall strategy of government working in a new integrated way to produce results, a new way of operating that is work-focussed. We have learnt from the weaknesses in our system in the last six years. The whole idea of integrated governance is also to put in place a system for accountability and partnership, for the success of this programme is dependent on all stakeholders working together as one.

In this cross-boundary municipality, Segonyane and Kuruman/Mothibistad have been identified as a nodal point for the integrated sustainable rural development programme and thus as strategic focus areas for concentrated rural development.

The Kgalagadi Cross Boundary district Municipality joins 12 other nodal points for the implementation of rural development programmes and 17 more nodes will be added to these before the end of this year.

The nodal points are not privileged points, but based on strategic choices to make an impact on the region.

This rural development programme is also not a separate strategy from the urban renewal programme, but both are mobilising forces and part of one process for unity in action for change.

This programme is intended not only for the people of the Kgaladi cross-border municipality, but for the rural poor throughout our country.

This programme will mean "investment in economic and social infrastructure, human resource development, enterprise development, the enhancement of the development capacity of local government, poverty alleviation and the strengthening of the criminal justice system."

It will bring our rural communities to unprecedented higher levels of development, and also achieve progress in terms of the delivery of services and the deepening of democracy, with the new structure of local government ensuring the co-ordinated implementation of the programmes on the ground. In this way, we are strengthening the very pillars of our democracy and the systems of accountability.

It is our premise that only through co-operation between national, provincial and local government and with the full participation of rural communities and in partnership with all our people can we succeed in developing our rural areas.

Clearly, infrastructure delivery, economic development and social support require a co-ordinated and integrated effort within the overall implementation framework.

It is with this in mind that today we launch this National Programme.

The rural development strategy rests on 5 pillars, namely:

- Integration
- Co-ordination
- Partnership

- Decentralisation
- Demand-driven delivery and diversity.

We launch this programme here in the Kgalagadi municipality so that the people of this community must know that this place too is at the vanguard of development and that an end to poverty and underdevelopment requires a concerted effort from each and every one of us.

Clearly, this cannot be done by government alone and the success of this programme is dependent on full and active participation by the communities throughout the length and breadth of this country.

No longer colonised, no longer marginalised through poverty and suffering, the people of the Kgalagadi municipality must take the future into their own hands and lead productive lives.

The season of suffering and despair is transformed into the season of hope and of the realisation of our dreams of freedom, the season in which the South African people united in action for change are becoming conscious and committed agents working towards the growth of our nation and the sustained development of our country.

This change of season convinces us that we have had no choice but to take this road to our freedom and that the direction we have taken is the correct one, that an integrated approach is the only way we can replace the poverty of so many of our people with prosperity, the only way we can address inequalities and underdevelopment.

The road ahead will only take us to our destination if we have a conscious and supportive community of activists willing to work towards our development goals and only if we truly believe that together, through collective will and united action, we shall attain the sustained development of our nation.

I ask you all to be the dedicated and committed participants we require in this united effort in action for change.

I thank you.