

Address at the launch of the Expanded Public Works Programme

Sekhunyani Village, Giyani, Limpopo, 18 May 2004

Premier of Limpopo Province, Sello Moloto,
Honourable Minister of Public Works, Stella Sigcau,
Honourable Ministers,
MEC for Public Works, Collins Chabane,
Members of the Executive Council,
Mayors and Councillors,
Tihosi,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Avuxeni!

I am delighted to launch the Expanded Public Works Programme in the Limpopo Province - the ancient African land of centuries-old baobab trees, and the equally old kingdoms of Mapungubwe and Thulamela.

But we have met here today not to celebrate our heritage but to launch an important programme intended to address some of the most negative consequences of our colonial and apartheid past.

The colonial and apartheid economy and society were based on the land dispossession of the African majority, the use of the landless as cheap and unskilled labour, and the confinement of those described as "surplus people" in the desperately poor and depressed 13% of our country once described as "native reserves".

This has changed over time. Our economy no longer needs cheap and unskilled workers. What our society and economy now need are educated and skilled workers. In addition, today these workers have to compete with workers in other countries.

They have to ensure that the goods and services they produce compete successfully both at home and the international markets in terms of price, quality and timely availability. This makes the issue of labour productivity very critical to our success in building a modern economy that can generate the wealth we need to meet the needs of all our people.

Accordingly, all of us, government, business, labour and the rest of our society have to work together to ensure that our people get the necessary education and skills so that they play their role in the process of the reconstruction and development of our country into one that is as modern as any other in the world.

The central challenge we face is that the colonial and apartheid society and economy left us with large numbers of our people with very little or no education, with no skills, and without sufficient land even to maintain a viable system of subsistence agriculture.

The social and economic changes that have taken place over time have resulted in these large numbers, who were required as cheap and unskilled workers, becoming a much larger pool of "surplus people" than was the case when the colonial and apartheid society and economy still required cheap and unskilled workers.

We have made the firm commitment to confront the challenges of poverty and joblessness. We have made the solemn pledge that we will do everything possible to achieve the goal of a better life for all our people. In our elections a month ago, you and the rest of our people gave our government a firm mandate to pursue this objective.

The realisation of this goal demands that we address the colonial and apartheid legacy of the large numbers of the uneducated and unskilled, to end the unacceptable situation that many of our people remain "surplus people", even within our democracy whose 10th anniversary we celebrated three weeks ago.

That is why we have gathered here today at Sekhunyani Village to launch the Expanded Public Works Programme.

The Expanded Public Works Programme, which we officially launch today, is a comprehensive inter-governmental, people-centred programme developed over several years. It seeks to fulfil the overwhelming trust and confidence the masses of our people have placed in government that, we should work together, in partnership, to create a better life for all.

Accordingly, our success to this end is dependent on strong partnerships between government, business and the community, working as a united people for a better South Africa and the world.

In this regard, we have agreed to strengthen cooperation among all the social partners to implement the agreements of the Growth and Development Summit, which are aimed at creating work and fighting poverty.

One of those agreements was to implement an Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) as one of the many initiatives aimed at creating work opportunities and improving the skills levels of our people.

During our campaigns for the past elections you told us that we must create work and fight poverty. You said that you appreciate the work that has been done in the past ten years, but that we must do more to improve the living conditions of our people.

It is because of the message you gave us that, today we have come to Sekhunyani village to launch the expanded public works programme. Through this programme, government will work closely with local communities to create work and fight poverty here in your village, Sekhunyani, in Mopani District, in Limpopo Province and in your country, South Africa.

The Expanded Public Works Programme is a nation-wide programme that aims to draw significant numbers of the unemployed into productive employment. Through this programme, we want workers to gain skills while they are employed, and increase their capacity to continue working elsewhere once they leave the programme.

The Programme aims to focus on workers and the unemployed, particularly those who are marginalized from the mainstream of our economy.

An important element of this programme is a large-scale expansion of the use of labour-intensive construction methods to build, upgrade and maintain the social and economic infrastructure in all the underdeveloped rural and urban areas of our country that do not have such infrastructure.

As we do this work, we will employ local people and ensure that, at the same time, they acquire basic training and skills.

Although this is a national programme, it will largely be implemented by the provinces and municipalities. Its success therefore depends on a high level of cooperative governance and hard work from the Premier, the MEC's and Members of the Provincial Parliament, Mayor, the councillors and the public servants from both the Province and local municipalities.

Today we would like to say to all these people who are going to be at the centre of the implementation of this programme that we will not accept any failures. We want to say to everybody, including those who will be coming from the private sector that we will deal harshly with any form of corruption that may surface as we implement this programme. All of us should agree that we will not see any amount of wastage of public funds either because there is negligence or maladministration.

We should also agree that the implementation of this programme must be within the given time frames and the quality of work must be of high standard.

Several years ago, the Limpopo provincial government took the initiative to implement a labour intensive provincial roads programme called Gundo Lashu (which is isiVhenda for "Our Victory"). Under the EPWP, the provincial government has now teamed up with all the municipalities in the province to expand the programme to the municipal infrastructure sector.

We have therefore decided to launch the EPWP here at Sekhunyani village at Giyani in Limpopo, because you have successfully established a programme, which exemplifies this kind of cooperative governance.

I learn that to date, the Gundo Lashu programme has involved the training of 24 local emerging contractors in labour-intensive road and bridge construction and maintenance.

These emerging contractors in turn hire local labour to carry out infrastructure improvement projects. Similarly, across the country, we plan to have 250 learner contractors.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the British Department for International Development and the International Labour Organisation for the contribution that they have made to the Gundo Lashu programme.

Assisted by one of the Sector Education and Training Authorities and the Department of Labour, the national Department of Public Works will be hiring qualified people to provide the learner contractors with mentorship. Private banks have also joined us as partners in providing learner contractors with credit and other support.

These learner contractors will form an important cadre of entrepreneurs skilled in labour intensive construction methods, able to take advantage of the public resources that will be dedicated to the improvement of the infrastructure in the poor and disadvantaged areas of our country.

The contractors are trained to carry out these projects using highly labour-intensive methods, to the required standards, and within the required time and allocated budget.

Recently, I received a letter from a woman learner contractor who has benefited from the Gundo Lashu programme. She writes:

"My name is Mokgadi Raganya, I am a Managing Director of Rola Consultants cc., one of the 24 emerging contracting companies afforded the opportunity to be trained on Gundo Lashu programme in Labour Intensive Road Construction.

"I had no experience in road construction before undergoing the training. However, due to the effectiveness of the training received, my company has been able to successfully complete its trial contract of 4.4km gravelled road and construction of a 24m long low-level bridge at a cost of R1.523 million, with some guidance and mentoring from the Gundo Lashu Project Team.

"The company employed daily an average of 120 labourers for the contract duration. My company has now been awarded an annual Contract of R 7.5 million by Roads Agency Limpopo (RAL) through a tender process to rehabilitate and seal a 14.1km road using labour intensive methods including the construction of 6 bridges and works have been on-going since November 2003."

Indeed, through this programme, we should produce more people like Mokgadi Raganya who will help create work for our people and be part of a brigade that pushes back the frontiers of poverty.

I have cited the example of the Gundo Lashu Programme because it provides us with the background for this launch. However, there are also other well-established and thriving projects under the banner of EPWP, such as the Zibambele, Vuk' uzenzele and Zivuseni Road Projects in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and Gauteng.

The EPWP also involves expanding successful programmes aimed at creating work opportunities with training through environmental, cultural and social projects. There are some examples of such tourism projects here in Giyani such as the Bolobedu and the Hatsama Dam cultural villages, which, I am told, has provided employment and training for over 600 people.

There are further planned investments on environmental programmes in this province, which will undoubtedly create more jobs and help to fight poverty.

I would like to congratulate all the municipalities, the provincial government, the various national departments, banks, and again the British Department for International Development and the International Labour Organisation for their excellent work and co-operation. I trust that this will be an on-going and durable partnership between the public and private sectors, the community and our foreign partners, so that together we can urgently build a better life for all our people.

From today, let us stretch a helping hand to one another and rollout the extended public works programme to all corners of our country. Through our practical actions, working together in a people's contract, we must make the statement that we will ensure there are no "surplus" in our country.

I thank you. Ndza khensa!