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Department of Public Works
North West Provincial Government
Republic of South Africa

Modiri Molema Road
DPW Provincial Head Office
Mmabatho, 2735
Private Bag X 2037, Mmabatho, 2735
Tel.: +27 (18) 387 2002
Fax.: +27 (18) 387 2868

**Address by North West Public Works MEC, Jerry Dimotana Thibedi,
during the Certification Ceremony of 146 Expanded Public Works
Programme (EPWP) and National Youth Service (NYS) graduates in the Dr
Kenneth Kaunda District held at Potchefstroom Banquet Hall.**

Date: Thursday, July 31, 2008

- Programme Director:
- Head of Department: Rre Obakeng Mongale
- Senior Managers of the Department
- Our honoured guests – the EPWP and NYS beneficiaries
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Greetings and a warm welcome to you.

This is indeed a very happy occasion, because it allows us to do two things at once:

The first is obviously to celebrate and reward your participation in two of our most noble programmes: EPWP and NYS during the past 12 months.

The second is for me to say Thank You very much, for seizing that opportunity which I believe offered you some form of ammunition you need to help us as Government, to fight against poverty and joblessness.

We cannot win the war on poverty and unemployment alone as Government. We are all in this together.

It is only "The Lord", who had a wonderful advantage of being able to work alone.

I am indeed delighted to be here today to lend my personal support on your achievements. Take a stand against poverty. Learn how we can end it.

Today, we bear witness as one hundred and forty six (146) EPWP and NYS graduates earn their well deserved stripes.

Programme Director:

These are men and women, young and old, who rose to the occasion when my department called on the unemployed, to swell the ranks of the two programmes I have just mentioned.

Launched in May 2004, EPWP sought to attract the unemployed into productive work. This was informed by high levels of poverty and unemployment in our communities.

This we did, in the past 12 months. We have afforded these beneficiaries theoretical and practical on-site training to equip them with skills, which we believe can change their lives and lives of others.

NYS, on the other hand, was only launched in April 2007.

The objective of this programme was to involve our youth in public infrastructure maintenance projects encompassed by EPWP.

Why do we put special emphasis on the youth?

It is from this generation that leaders and architects of the future will have to emerge, when the curtain falls on some of us.

You, the youth of our country and province, have to carry the baton at some stage, in defence our history, our country, our democracy and our constitution.

As Mao Tse-Tung, the legendary leader of the then Chinese Communist Party, once put it:

“The world is yours as well as ours, but in the last analysis, is it yours. You young people, full of vigour and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you”.

Programme Director:

Some critics have tried to rubbish EPWP and NYS, saying these programmes fail to address unemployment because they do not offer permanent jobs to the beneficiaries.

But these notions, in our view, come down to lack of proper understanding of issues.

EPWP and NYS in Building Maintenance were not established to create permanent employment.

The principle behind the formation of these programmes is that you “do not give people fish but you show them how to catch fish”.

We take the unemployed and unskilled men and women from society, give them the necessary training, equip them with skills and expose them to the real work for a short term period.

Over and above that, we also give beneficiaries a R1 000 stipend. We are fully aware that this cannot translate into a wage or a salary to sustain the kind of life envisaged under the current economic climate.

This stipend is only meant to keep the wolf at bay for the duration of your contract.

Yes we acknowledge that:

Nowadays, we seem to put the price on everything. You work or do something to be get paid.

For us, it is not how much you did or earned during your stint at these projects, but how much love you put in the doing and what you have achieved.

At the end of the programme, the beneficiaries are skilled in various fields of construction.

They are also issued with accredited certificates endorsed by the Construction Education Training Authority (CETA), which by the way is highly credible body.

To this end, beneficiaries are considered marketable and are therefore qualified to either find jobs or start their own companies so that they can make the much needed contributions to the growth of our economy.

Programme Director, in this District, fifty-six beneficiaries comprising twenty-six (26) males and thirty (30) females participated in the EPWP projects.

After receiving a comprehensive training on tiling and painting for 20 and 45 days respectively, the group started work on the following projects:

- Witrand Hospital;
- Ventersdorp State Houses number 61 and 62; and
- Kaalfontein State House

Regarding NYS, a total of ninety (90) beneficiaries were recruited. This group was made up of thirty three (33) males, fifty seven (57) females.

They were trained in bricklaying, carpentry, painting and paving for 15 to 45 days before proceeding to work on the sites of the following projects:

- Potchefstroom Agricultural College Administration Block
- Alex Holm Building at Potchefstroom Agricultural College
- Selbourne Building
- Bloemhof Hospital Extension

I am informed that a group of NYS beneficiaries at Alex Holm have already formed a company, NYS Construction and that the second company by another group is about to take off.

This is indeed a huge milestone and such initiatives should be encouraged.

Because the contractor is still awaiting permission to work on the Selbourne Building – which is a heritage building- we have moved 20 NYS beneficiaries to the renovation project at Phaladi Primary School.

The reason being, they too ought to have on site practical training which will last approximately six months.

This group would therefore start practical on-site training from September 01.

As we recount our successes regarding the implementation of these programmes, we must also state that, just like in other Districts, NYS projects in this District have not been immune to challenges.

Regarding EPWP, I am informed no challenges were reported in this district.

I am informed about strained relations that often occurred between beneficiaries and a contractor at the Potchefstroom Agricultural College Administration Block project.

The same at Bloemhof Hospital Extension because stipends were not paid out on time allegedly because the contractor had cash flow problems.

These and other similar challenges, I believe can be addressed speedily if there is constant and physical monitoring at all EPWP-NYS projects.

Monitoring should also take the form of interactions with beneficiaries as well as contractors.

The approach will ensure that budding challenges are dealt with instantly before they even blossom.

NYS beneficiaries whose training was disrupted due to shortage of material at Bloemhof Hospital will resume their on-site training from tomorrow (August 01). I am informed that two residential properties have been identified for this purpose.

In conclusion:

Congratulations to all our graduates for their priceless achievements.

I urge them not sit with their knowledge, skills and certificates.

They must go out there to create employment for themselves and launch an onslaught against poverty and joblessness.

We must be seen as the architects of the future not its victims.

Ke a leboga

Issued by Communication Directorate
Contact Person: **Matshube Mfoloe**
Contact Number: (018) 387 2447 / 0823054594
E-mail: mmfoloe@nwpg.gov.za

