

Address to the Community Development Indaba

Gallagher Estate, Midrand, 14 March 2008

Programme Director, Ms B Watson,
Minister of Public Service and Administration, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi,
Minister of Minerals and Energy, Buyelwa Sonjica,
Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry, Elizabeth Thabethe,
Chairperson of SALGA, Amos Masondo,
Directors-General,
Distinguished Delegates and Guests,

Ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this important Community Development Workers (CDW) Inaugural Indaba.

By definition, Community Development Workers work with and in communities, seeking to all times to address the problems and challenges facing these communities. CDWs are an all-important link between the people and the programmes of government designed to address poverty and access to essential social services.

To illustrate this crucial point, let me relate a story of how one of our Community Development Workers addressed a set of typical problems facing our people, especially in the rural areas.

This is the story of Maria Legogola, a CDW deployed in a village that is part of Makhuduthamaga Municipality in Limpopo Province. The village Maria works in is largely rural and incorporates a number of former homelands.

During her work in the village she came across a father and his five children living in desperate conditions. They lived in a dilapidated house, had no blankets, no food and their clothes were worn out. Because of their grinding poverty, the children were no longer attending school and even though some of them qualified for social grants, they were not receiving them because they did not know of these grants.

The difficult circumstances of this family touched Maria deeply and she embarked on a course of action that would bring relief to this family as quickly as possible. Firstly, she assisted them to move to an unoccupied RDP house. Then she requested the district disaster manager to donate blankets.

Maria also approached the provincial South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) to apply for Child Support Grants for the children. She then visited the district offices of the provincial Department of Education to facilitate the registration of the children at nearby schools. She also approached the local office of the Department of Social Development for assistance with food, clothes and other domestic necessities.

Maria is the kind of person who defines what a community development worker is. The community development worker, should, like Maria, have empathy with the community he or she serves. He or she should regard the problems facing communities as his or her own and assist these communities in the most conscientious, diligent and thorough manner, as demonstrated by Maria Legogola.

As Community Development Workers, we should not leave any problem unattended. We should not abandon people and communities with their problems not fully addressed. We should be the first to raise the alarm about bureaucratic delays and corrupt practices that deny our people the services due to them.

I was truly inspired to read in the Grass Roots Innovation booklet about Maria's success and the success of many other committed CDWs. I hope Maria's story will spur everybody here to emulate the example she has set. I would also like to encourage you to tell your stories in the next booklet. It is of vital importance that we document our work and share our successes.

Chairperson,

Government has a Constitutional obligation to take all reasonable legislative and other measures, taking into account available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of adequate health care, housing, social development, education and so on.

In 2003 we decided to introduce Community Development Workers because as Government we knew that although there has been good progress with regard to the delivery of these basic services, however many of our people were not accessing them.

We also introduced this layer of public servants because we needed further to bring government closer to the people, to enable communities to use government services as a base to stimulate and accelerate community development.

Accordingly, it is very important that we attract the most committed people to this cadre of public servants. As Government we should ensure their proper training as well as effective supervision.

As Community Development Workers, you should live by the letter and spirit of Batho Pele. In this way, among others, you will help to increase the effectiveness of our system of local government, strengthen its awareness of, and capacity to respond to, the needs of the people at the local level.

The creation of the CDW Programme was further motivated by the result of research into poverty levels in our country as contained in the 1997 Poverty Inequality Report and the 1998 Participatory Poverty Assessment.

Both studies showed that the poorest 70% of the population were unable to access the socio-economic programmes of government which could benefit them. The consolidated report of the Presidential Izimbizo also supported this finding. This report indicated that many people were either not aware of government services or those that knew did not know how to access them.

Five years into the CDW Programme, I am pleased to note that this programme has made significant strides in addressing the issue of access to services and will continue to bring government closer to the people as part of our continuing effort to ensure a better life for all.

The Grass Roots Innovation booklet provides excellent examples of the innovative manner in which CDWs operate and can operate.

Clearly, it is always important that the Community Development Workers are linked to municipal wards and to Ward Councillors and Committees.

It is therefore pleasing to note that during the past year, Mpumalanga, North West, Limpopo, Northern Cape, Free State, Gauteng and Eastern Cape have made efforts to increase the number of Community Development Workers in their wards.

Chairperson,

I am also happy to see that there have been numerous innovations in the CDW Programme, including the Excellence Awards, Innovation Awards, the launches of the Grass Roots Innovation booklet, a Handbook for Community Development Workers and the CDW Programme Master Plan.

It is critically important for all Community Development Workers consistently to ask themselves the question: "Have I have been able to deliver on the mandate of the CDW Programme?"

The answer to that question would depend, among other things, on whether, through your work, people no longer have to travel long distances to access government services, and whether people know about the services from which they could benefit.

As the example of Maria aptly demonstrates, you, the CDWs, are unique community-based resource persons, who collaborate with local government and other spheres of government to help community members to obtain information and resources from service providers.

You exemplify what we mean when we speak of agents of change. But you should also serve as catalysts who activate communities themselves to be their own liberators, consistent with the vision of a people-driven process of development.

Your mandate is clear. It is:

- to assist in the removal of development and service delivery bottlenecks;
- to strengthen the democratic social contract between government and the communities;
- to link communities you live and work in with government services and relay community concerns and problems back to government;
- to support, nurture and advocate for an organised voice for the poor; and,
- to improve government-community networks.

You will of course have noted that so far I have focused on, and emphasised your role in ensuring that the people, especially the poor, gain access to government services.

This is informed by the fact that such are the structure of poverty and the level of poverty in our country that we must indeed continue to provide all the necessary Government support to the poor.

However, as you all know, we have also taken the firm position that we must work continuously to move as many of our people as possible out of dependence on social grants, on the basis of access to opportunities that enable current recipients of social grants of working age to become gainfully employed.

We emphasised this outlook in the State of the Nation Address, especially when we spoke about an integrated and accelerated offensive against poverty, coordinated by a War-room on Poverty.

You have properly been designated as Community Development Workers. Increasingly, the emphasis must therefore be on community development. We must accordingly examine critically all questions that relate to this important challenge. This includes an honest assessment of whether each one of us as Community Development Workers has received the necessary training to discharge our responsibility with regard to community development.

I hope this Indaba will give itself time to reflect on this critically important matter. In any case, you must expect that it will confront you as the Government seeks to intensify the offensive against poverty.

I must also underline the fact that together we face the common challenge consistently to cultivate the spirit of self-reliance among our people. We must at all times be alive to the danger of further cultivating

and entrenching the already prevalent notion that our people are entitled to hold out their hands to receive all manner of benefits, while the government is obliged to deliver such benefits.

Ours is a proud nation that derives satisfaction from its ability to live off the sweat of its labour. We have an obligation to sustain this pride, among other things by not acting in a manner that teaches our people that they have no obligation to contribute to their own development and the development of our country.

To return to the matter of services, last year Government adopted the Access Strategy aimed at the acceleration of access to public services over the period 2007 - 2014.

In this respect there have been many ground breaking initiatives through the development of numerous integrated service delivery and access mechanisms and channels such as the CDWs, General Service Counters (GSC), Mobile Units, the e-government Gateway (otherwise known as the Batho Pele gateway portal), Izimbizo, Intermediaries, Call Centres, Thusong Service Centres and collaboration among government departments such as Home Affairs, Social Development and Health, as well as between the spheres of government.

In this regard, the CDWs serve as a critical operational arm of government's Access Strategy. This Strategy should therefore not be seen as an isolated initiative, but rather as one of the central programmes introduced to provide better service delivery to the poor.

Chairperson,

Today heralds another milestone in this regard, through the launch of the CDW Programme Master Plan. The Master Plan embodies the true ethos of 'Business Unusual', aiming at speedy, efficient and effective implementation. This is to ensure that the lives of our people change for the better sooner rather than later.

I challenge you to breathe life into this Master Plan, giving substance to the vision - We Belong, We Care, We Serve. It is important that a common understanding about the CDWs and the space they occupy in the public service, as business unusual public servants, is infused across the delivery departments. This will give the CDW Programme an opportunity to manage departmental expectations and create a sense of coherence through improved coordination.

The Master Plan advocates that CDWs should be enablers rather than implementers. By drawing this distinction it is clear that you should facilitate, mediate, create partnerships, network, mobilise, create linkages and empower community members to exercise their rights and respond to their obligations. It will ensure flexibility and dynamism consistent with the changing context of responding to community needs, and the programmes of the developmental state.

I urge you to heed our call to our nation, always to act with a sense of urgency and always to strive to act in unity. Of great importance, you need to focus your energy on the key APEX Priority - the War against Poverty.

You are the grassroots soldiers in this war. Without you we cannot hope to defeat the scourge of poverty. Again I must emphasise the point that community development must be about community development, and not merely receipt of government hand-outs, important as these are. I am glad that our Minister of Minerals and Energy is here, and will address the Indaba as we are using this occasion to equip all CDWs with information on energy conservation. You will have to work hard to educate our communities about this critically important matter of energy conservation. I am certain that none of us wants to return to the period of power outages which we experienced especially in January. As with everything in human society, no battle is ever won without struggle and a willingness to sacrifice.

Together we must make the necessary sacrifices to ensure that we manage the current electricity emergency in a manner that enables us to protect jobs and sustain the growth and development of our economy.

This requires that all of us should act to conserve energy and not leave this matter only to the large individual consumers. Eskom and Government have already said that our communities are not contributing sufficiently to energy conservation, and warned that Eskom will have no choice but to institute a load-shedding regime.

Much has been achieved by the CDW Programme. However, much still remains to be done to empower us to succeed in the war against poverty. In this regard, you remain a vital link between the grassroots and government.

I appeal to you to re-commit yourselves to the work at hand, bearing in mind the nation's confidence in, and reliance on you.

James Yen, a pioneering CDW, dedicated his life to mass education and rural reconstruction, first in Asia and then worldwide. In 1920 he communicated this pearl of wisdom, in which he described the winning behaviour of a successful Community Development Worker:

Go to the people;

Live among the people;

Learn from the people;

Plan with the people;

Work with the people;

Start with what the people know;

Build on what the people have;

Teach them by showing; learn by doing

Not a showcase but a pattern,

Not odds and ends but a system,

Not piecemeal but an integrated approach;

Not to confirm but to transform;

Not relief but release.

I wish this Community Development Workers Inaugural Indaba success, convinced that its outcomes will help us to approach our work informed by the imperative - Business Unusual!

I thank you for your attention.