

**SPEECH NOTES BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT,
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON MR WILLIES MCHUNU AT THE
LEARNERSHIP GRADUATION OF THE EXTENDED PUBLIC WORKS
PROGRAMME ON 12 NOVEMBER 2010**

Programme Director;
Head of Transport Mr Chris Hlabisa;
CEO of CETA Mr Sam Ngcongo;
Manco members and all DOT staff present;
Representatives of other government departments;
Members of the Zibambebe Provincial Council;
Relatives of learners;
All our learners;
Members of the media;
Ladies and gentlemen.

We have come here today to celebrate collectively the achievements of our government in supporting disadvantaged communities of KwaZulu-Natal to lead self-sufficient lives and be a part of the growing economy of our province as fellow South Africans. The graduation of the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) learnership participants, which combines the Zibambebe Contractors and EPWP learners, therefore marks a historic event in the development of the emerging contractor sector in KwaZulu-Natal.

I know that I have been in this Department for over a year now and have not had enough time or opportunity to engage with Zibambebe contractors as a collective. So far we have only been meeting on the road as my Department launches road infrastructure projects all over the province. However, I know very well that we have come a long way together over the past years. It therefore gives me great pleasure that today I talk to you directly as we celebrate with graduate contractors.

The Department has invested millions of rands in the Zibambele programme. This year alone the Department is investing over R225 million on salaries and tools alone and to date a total of 40,000 contractors have been employed. It is no doubt that Zibambele is one of the poverty alleviation which has created a substantial number of jobs, mostly in rural areas where unemployment is high.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the various stakeholders who have always ensured that as we go forward we are building on very solid foundations as we pursue the objectives of social and economic justice.

We know that many have been swayed by negative perceptions that, given the advances of modern technology, labour-intensive methods are inferior in terms of time, cost and quality. In South Africa, we have been determined to prove the opposite. We have deliberately chosen to infuse the principles of labour-intensity and poverty-alleviation based on the recognition that our people are our best assets - and labour-based methods enable us to train and develop our people for the modern world.

Now, all of us agree that this EPWP Zibambele Programme is indeed a benchmark against which we can judge the progress we make in the empowerment of rural women, in particular. In the context of a province previously torn apart by political wars as well as faction fights, and now HIV and AIDS, surely we all know the plight of rural women, and single mothers in particular. In fact, the poorest of the poor are to be found mainly amongst women-headed households.

The above circumstances and the past legacy where women were not allowed to go to school and get an education have posed serious challenges in our country. Hence, the levels of literacy amongst the Zibambele contractors needed some serious and urgent attention.

You can imagine how painful this is because contractors are forced to operate in a modern world where they have to be able to read, write and work with figures. For example, a certain degree of literacy is required in order to perform a basic transaction at the bank.

All this calls upon us as government to come up with strategies such as this learnership programme to narrow the gap between the haves and have nots. To that end, we are proud today that as part of our Zibambele innovation which is a trendsetter in our country when it comes to empowering, training and developing the poor, the Department is practically assisting Zibambele contractors who comprise mainly the youth, in acquiring the necessary skills.

Today we congratulate 130 learners from Zibambele and 33 from other construction projects who have had an opportunity to undergo training in the Construction Contractor Learnerships for NQF Level 2 and NQF Level 4. The Department had entered into 135 learnerships for Zibambele and 33 from other construction projects but unfortunately five of those have since passed on, hence the 163 graduates today. We realize that this is too big a loss of young talent who were going to be change agents in their households.

Comment [A1]:

In 2005 the Department did an audit on Zibambele programme, and discovered that 15% of the contractors employed was youth. A further investigation indicated that some of them had passed grade 12 and had science and maths as their main subjects. Now these youth were forced to go to Zibambele programme because of their home circumstances where in some instances they had no parents or parents had no means of taking them to tertiary. In other words these youth had no hope of bettering their lives other than being employed as Zibambele contractors.

Comment [A2]: n

Now as a department we had to ask ourselves a question of how long will an 18 or 20 year old who has passed grade 12 with maths and science be Zibambele contractor, what can be done. The learnership programme then was an answer to this challenge. This learnership was implemented primarily to provide the required skills to youth within the Construction Industry and individuals who are currently in the Zibambele programme and hold matriculation.

It is mainly geared towards developing contractors' management skills, and focuses on the following key Unit Standards, namely:-

- Establish and apply health and safety measures in a work area or site;
- Describe the construction industry and its composition, procurement systems, etc.;
- Apply basic business concepts;
- Understand the workings of construction tender contract processes in the construction industry;
- Be able to implement construction site management procedures;
- Set up and manage a construction contract business;
- Demonstrate the ability to start and run a business.

It is very encouraging therefore that as a result of this programme, learners will now have a full accredited qualification; the skills and competencies to be utilized and applied in their employment.

It is important, Ladies and Gentlemen, that I express my appreciation at this stage to the CETA and EPWP's Zibambele Contractors who have partnered with my Department to make this possible. It is partnerships like this that as government bodies, we need to encourage so as to implement the integrated development strategy.

My officials tell me that the Department spent an average of R24, 000 per learner on this programme. This is not a small investment and many children would like to have this opportunity. Reports received from other learnership programmes indicate that some learners misuse this golden opportunity, some drop out some due to pregnancy, others due to delinquency and so on.

I would thus like to thank the learners for their commitment as I said this is not a small investment. Through this learnership you have acquired skills and knowledge that will enable you to take charge of your destiny and hopefully be an integral part of the national economy in your future careers.

Let us all support this ongoing skills development revolution. Let us spread the word so that no government official, potential partner, media representative or future learner, is ignorant of Zibambele, its learnerships and its capacity to bring about meaningful change in people's lives.

And as I conclude, I want to assure all Zibambele contractors that as Government, we will never allow the programme to be neglected by anyone, either within or outside government. The Zibambele programme has been recognized as "best practice" in South Africa and it is now part of the country's Expanded Public Works Programme.

We have set the standards for the rest of South Africa and we therefore need to take our leadership responsibilities seriously.

Finally, we were very much pleased to learn that our Zibambele contractors now have a collective saving of R12 million in their savings clubs. In an effort to promote economic sustainability among our contractors, we support them as they establish co-operatives as we are busy looking at other ways for them to use this money.

I am also pleased to announce that as a department we have reviewed the salaries for Zibambele and as of the month of December an increase of R40 will be implemented which will take the salary of Zibambele to R510

We are presently developing an exit strategy where contractors will be able to say, "Thanks to the Department now, I can generate income without depending on a Zibambele salary." They must be able to say to the Department that they have had enough to survive on their own and let others have a chance.

I thank you