

Video Message: Opening of the 6th EPWP Summit, November 2018

TW Nxesi MP, Minister of Public Works

- Programme Director
- Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Officials of the Lead Implementation Departments for EPWP sector programmes
- Deputy Minister of Public Works, officials of the Department and the EPWP Branch
- Premiers, MECs, Mayors, Councillors and representatives of Provinces and Municipalities where much of the implementation takes place
- Representatives of the non-state sector
- Ladies and gentlemen

By the time this video message reaches you I will be in Egypt to attend the 14th UN Conference of Parties on Biodiversity – at the invitation of the Egyptian

Government - as well as the Acting Minister of Environmental Affairs, Honourable Derick Hanekom.

I can tell you it was a tough decision to make. The Expanded Public Works Programme is a lead programme not only of Public Works – but of government – designed to help mitigate some of the effects of poverty and unemployment and contribute to plugging a major gap in the social security net. The decision to forego the EPWP Summit was not taken lightly.

But I must mention that there are very real synergies between the UN Conference on Biodiversity and EPWP programmes back home: most importantly, the Environmental projects: Working on Water, Working on Fire, Working on Wetlands and the Coastal programme – all designed to preserve or restore eco-systems. This speaks to the heart of what the UN Conference and the prior Pan-African Biodiversity Conference are addressing.

We can go further: the Working on Water Programme:

- Is essential for the long-term availability of water in South Africa;
- Invasive alien plants exacerbate wild fires;
- They cause soil erosion; and
- They constitute the greatest threat to biodiversity.

The Working on Water Programme:

- Creates thousands of jobs;
- It has given rise to a secondary industry, as the wood from alien trees is made into coffins, furniture and other products;
- As well as used for firewood and charcoal;
- The savings in terms of water retention runs into billions of rands per annum.

I will share with global colleagues our experience in EPWP with programmes that:

- Not only provide work opportunities and training, but also
- Work tirelessly to conserve water in a water-challenged country,
- Conserve and restore delicate ecosystems – fauna and flora,
- All of which contributes to the health and well-being of our people and the planet.

From the standpoint of Public Works one of the themes of the UN Conference is the mainstreaming of Biodiversity and conservation in areas such as infrastructure, processing, mining and energy. So it is not just a question of wildlife and vegetation, but making sure that, in everything we do – including in the built environment – greening and conservation of energy and resources is at the forefront of our endeavours.

Again this is an area that, increasingly, EPWP, will need to focus on – whether it be fitting solar panels, retro-

fitting buildings or replacing energy-intensive activities with labour intensive methods.

Background history

Since 2010, DPW has hosted five (5) EPWP Summits. The common objective of these Summits is to advance Public Employment Programmes (P.E.P.s) by:

- Creating a strategic platform to engage more than 355 public bodies and implementers that co-ordinate and/or implement EPWP programmes, and
- In order to share ideas and best practices on the implementation of the Programme.

Let me remind you that the mandate of the EPWP is to provide work opportunities and income support to poor and unemployed people, through the labour-intensive delivery of public and community assets and services, thereby contributing to development.

Consequently the programme provides poverty and income relief, through temporary work for the unemployed in socially useful activities across four sectors – infrastructure, environment & culture, non-state and social.

The 6th Summit provides an opportunity to reflect on the EPWP, which is currently in its 15th year of implementation. Hence, the theme is aptly titled, “*PEPs – the past, current and future.*”

The programme was conceived at the 2003 Growth and Development Summit, in which government agreed to grow public employment programmes (PEPs).

In 2004, the government launched the first five-year phase of EPWP, with a target of one million work opportunities. The first phase of the programme was designed to bridge the gap between the so-called ‘first’ and ‘second’ economies - to ensure that EPWP

participants graduated into the mainstream economy. The EPWP reached its 1 million target, one year early.

However, Phase 2 was developed with the realisation that unemployment in South Africa is fundamentally structural and that the EPWP as a temporary work creation tool is insufficient. The EPWP was then integrated into strategies to address the systemic nature of unemployment and poverty in South Africa.

Phase 3 has focused on improving coherence, coordination, monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, the EPWP is positioned to contribute to Government's goals of alleviating poverty, developing local communities, providing work opportunities and enhancing social protection, as emphasized in the National Development Plan's Vision 2030.

Looking back over the last year, highlights we must mention include:

- Clear and transparent guidelines and processes to ensure fair and equitable recruitment systems;
- Increased recruitment of women, youth and people with disabilities;
- Most recently, the MTBPS (Mid-Term Budget Policy Statement) increased the MTF Budget to the EPWP non-state sector by over R400 million. In a period of cost containment this represents a real vote of confidence in the EPWP non-state sector. I trust these resources will be put to good use.

This 2018 EPWP Summit, comes at an opportune time, as we position the programme to respond appropriately to the unemployment challenges through its 4th Phase, starting from 1 April 2019. Much of this year was spent engaging many of the stakeholders in the room, with the aim of developing a proposal that is inclusive of the contributions of key stakeholders.

At this Summit, we will share and engage on the draft proposal for EPWP Phase 4, which will shortly be tabled

in Cabinet. Once again, the focus of Phase 4 is to improve the developmental outcomes by:

- Improving the evaluation of the programme to measure the impact on broader developmental indicators through the introduction of Social Audits.
- Ensuring greater synergy between a wide range of PEPs and other poverty alleviation programmes.
- Improving the targeting of youth-focused programmes and increasing the participation of women.
- Ensuring participation of the poorest of the poor through fair recruitment procedures as outlined in the EPWP Recruitment Guidelines that we launched a few months ago.

Lastly, let me remind you that the EPWP Summits are not meant to be talk shops. Each Summit concludes with resolutions relating to performance, protocols and policies, which include targets that have to be achieved by public bodies.

There is a need to ensure that dedicated officials are appointed by public bodies to coordinate the EPWP at national, provincial and local levels and to improve compliance. The report on the 2016 Summit resolutions, which will be tabled at this Summit, will provide an opportunity for all to reflect on the achievements to date.

A sincere thanks to all stakeholders that have found the time to attend this Summit. Your attendance is a sign of your continued commitment to the Programme. Let us continue to make a difference in the lives of poor and unemployed persons and build a society that future generations can be proud of.

I wish you well for a productive and successful Summit and look forward to receiving a report of the outcomes and resolutions of the Summit.

Thank you.