

Muden-Ngome Imbizo
Speech by Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Greytown, KwaZulu-Natal
10 April 2005

Programme Director
Honourable Guests
Members of KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Legislature
Mayor Yengwa of the District Municipality
Mayor Ngubane of Umvoti Local Municipality
All Councillors present
INkosi Mchunu and iNkosi Zondi
Members of the Community including members of Zibambeleni Community Development Organisation
Officials from all levels of government present here.

I greet you all. I wish to thank you for taking time out to attend this important gathering that is taking place during Government Izimbizo focus week (from the 7 - 13 April). It is also an important Imbizo gathering as it is happening in close proximity of a new water project that, once completed, will improve the quality of life of the people in the area.

We will remember that we spent the past ten years laying the foundation for reconstructing and developing the horrible legacy we have inherited from the past regimes, both apartheid and colonialism. The past where we were denied our basic rights and dignity – with no access to houses, jobs, to water, etc.

When the ANC took over the reigns of political power in 1994 our Government inherited a backlog of between 14-16 million people without access to clean water, while 20 million people had no access to safe sanitation.

We have already ensured that 10 million people have access to clean water. According to the Government Programme of Action, we will ensure that all South Africans have access to water by 2008 and that all South Africans have access to adequate and safe sanitation by 2010.

However, we still face challenges - not everyone has benefited from houses, access to water, electricity and other such services. We still have people exposed to ill health because they lack clean water and adequate sanitation. The backlog is mostly in our rural communities where for example, our people still have to carry water from rivers and streams to their houses.

Government will not rest until the tide is completely turned for all South Africans to have full access to all services including clean water and safe sanitation.

The Mudén-Ngome Water Project has already benefited 170 households and I am told that by the end of this year 20 240 people (2 530 households) will have access to safe drinking water. I am also told that a R23 million is planned for the Ophathe Water Scheme to be implemented in the coming few years.

I would like to say to the Umzinyathi District Municipality, who is the Water Services Authority in the area and responsible for the provision of water and sanitation – the provision of water and sanitation services must be linked to the development of our people.

We must ensure the optimal empowerment of local communities at all times through their involvement in the planning, implementation of projects as well as the maintenance of the infrastructure.

The call of government is to implement all projects in the contexts of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) with a labour intensive approach. Projects should not only provide employment, but should also ensure the transfer of skills, with the aim to create wealth and promote local economic development of communities.

The development of small business opportunities and the transfer of skills and experience are an investment in our people – an investment that ensures a better life.

This is the approach that is consistent with the programme of the second decade of our democracy as we consolidate our political power and building local economies – the second economy.

As we do this, our aim is to build sustainable communities where the challenge is for all to ensure the sustainability of this water project we are celebrating today. This we will do, among other things, by taking seriously our responsibility to ensure that pumps, pipes and taps continue to work without interruption - that such pipes, pumps and taps are not broken, vandalised or destroyed. We need to guarantee the future of our children and their children.

The challenge for the leaders and officials of the District Municipality is also to ensure that these projects provide services as soon as possible, our people have waited for too long.

The Government *Imbizo Focus Week* is about providing you the opportunity to talk to Government about your challenges and whether you are happy with the service you receive. I am here to listen to you and ensure a strengthened partnership between this community and Government.

We need to strengthen the partnership and cooperative governance for us all together to build a South Africa that truly belongs to all who live in it, black and white.

In this area of Muden-Ngome our Department works together with the Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs, the provincial Department of Local Government, Traditional Affairs and Housing, as well as the Umzinyathi District and Umvoti local Municipalities. I want to believe that we also have the honour to be supported by the Chiefs and that we have a strategic partnership with non-governmental organisations that are playing a meaningful role in improving the lives of the people of this area through their involvement in the Muden-Ngome Water Scheme. Let us all continue to fight poverty and we need all of you.

Today is not the day for us to give long speeches, my duty is to listen carefully and take back to government your concerns and suggestions about your situation and what government should do together with the community to provide solutions.

I now give over to you to ask questions to all of us representing government here at all levels.

I THANK YOU.