

Woolworths Trust Eduplant 2006 Awards Ceremony
Speech by Mrs Lindiwe Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Crown Mines, Johannesburg
28 September 2006

Programme Director
Award Winners
Colleagues
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Introduction

It is an honour for me to be part of this prestigious event. This evening, I stand before you with pride, because I see how much these young people are striving to make a better life for themselves whilst caring for the environment.

I am pleased that the Eduplant Programme, which has been important to the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, has attracted other organisations as partners - Woolworths Trust, SABC Education and the Department of Agriculture through LandCare. My Department has been involved from the beginning of this Programme and we have seen it grow into a national programme and we welcome the involvement of these other partners to help improve the reach and impact of this programme.

Earlier this month we celebrated Arbor Week, and the theme for this year was ***Plant a tree – grow our future***, this theme is very relevant to the work of Eduplant.

2. Arbour Issues

When I launched Arbour Week at the Zoo on 1 September this year, more than 3 500 learners attended and on the day they responded by planting trees at the Zoo and at their respective schools. This was done as these learners, and many others recognised that trees plays a major role in their lives and that by planting trees they can ensure that the South Africa they live in now and in the future has the forest resources to provide for their social, economical and environmental needs.

It was good interacting with the learners and one of the key lessons is that forestry and trees offers an important way to restore peoples' dignity. To this end I will intensify my focus on urban greening, especially in townships. This will be achieved by working closely with our current partners, which include NGO and municipalities, and we look forward to establishing new partnerships.

3. Education

In addition to programmes like Eduplant my Department is embarking on a process of working with the Department of Education so that issues relating to the Water and Forestry Sectors are included into the school curriculum. Forestry has been classified as a scarce-skill sector, and the sector – together with my Department – is looking for ways to ensure that more students study in the field of Forestry. In the past two years, my Department – together with the Forestry Industrial Education and Training Authority (FIETA) – has been offering bursaries to students who choose to study in the forestry field, and we will continue to offer bursaries through institutions that offer courses in this field and many of the children here have a wonderful advantage from the early experiential learning that they have gained through Eduplant.

We have been actively participating in the SABC Career Fares, and I would like to encourage Educators to take the Learners to such fares – to ensure exposure of the Learners to the Forestry Sector. So far, we have received great feedback from our stakeholders regarding these Fares. At the beginning of this year, we also collaborated with Keith Kirsten to inform Educators and Learners about the different initiatives. A thirteen part TV series was produced with Keith Kirsten which showcased the importance of trees and forestry in South Africa.

I urge Educators to contact my Department, using its toll-free number, to get more information on these programmes. The number is 0800 200 200.

For next year, we are planning to introduce a learnership programme for our staff and for learners with a Senior Certificate. This will ensure that we are able to transfer skills to young people who are not in a position to go to university or a university of technology.

We have also been running an internship programme providing opportunities for new graduates to gain experience in forestry and the possibility of a longer term career with my department. These skills are needed to support the growth and development of the forestry sector which has been identified as a national priority by the President and is reflected in ASGI-SA. For those who are not aware ASGI-SA is the government's accelerated and shared growth initiative and identifies all the priority sectors which need to be developed urgently in support of the growth targets that government has set.

Forestry offers so many benefits and future opportunities to the economy and to individuals, with various disciplines such as our world-leading breeding and growing of trees, manufacturing of paper and sawn timber and many other products which we obtain from forestry and which form a central part of our everyday lives and the country's growth and development. Annually the sector contributes in the order of R16 billion to the economy. It employs 170 000 people mainly in rural areas where poverty is particularly severe and aside from these massive economic benefits there are millions more people whose livelihoods depend on the goods and services they derive from forests.

We have identified the most appropriate areas for new afforestation which will make a massive contribution to Broad Based BEE, job creation and poverty eradication and we are working closely with the departments' of Agriculture, Land Affairs and Environmental Affairs as well as the private sector to overcome the challenges which face the actual planting of trees in these areas.

4. Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment

Education and skills development are also key elements of our strategy for Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment. We are in the process of finalising the draft charter; and to ensure that this charter is indeed broad based we have included the availability of forestry skills as a fundamental requirement for achieving the objectives of the charter, which is closely linked to the future growth and development of the sector. It is very important for the department that our forestry sector charter facilitates growth of the sector and creates the opportunity for new players to enter the forestry sector.

Another critical aspect of developing the forestry sector and ensuring competitiveness of the South Africa in the international economy is for us to have greater levels of research and development. We are currently developing a strategy in consultation with all forestry research institutions in South Africa, which will identify priority research areas and resources, and will be aligning it to our Broad Based BEE Charter.

5. Awareness Raising and Profiling of Forestry

Within my department the forestry function has been restructured to make sure that it receives the attention and support which it requires. To this end I am in the process of appointing a Deputy Director-General to be responsible for the forestry function and who will champion the function both within Government and the sector generally.

As part of our approach to creating awareness of the forestry industry, my Department has for the past two and a half days been offering information sessions to all the Learners here. We informed them of the role of the Forestry Sector in poverty alleviation and also looked at careers in Forestry.

I hope the materials that have been produced will offer Educators enough information for them to be able to teach children the importance of trees and the way in which different forestry products are made.

I also urge all of you that have access to the internet to visit the forestry website which has a massive wealth of further information on all aspects of forestry and for those who don't have access to the internet, please contact our regional offices who can make this information available to you. Our internet website is: www.dwaf.gov.za

Specifically for reaching out to youth and women who were previously marginalised in forestry as with many other sectors, we are also appointing a youth and gender specialist for forestry who will be a key player in programs such as Eduplant and other interactions with schools.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, I would like to encourage all the entrants and the winners of this competition to use the skills learned through this process; and to apply them both at school and in their communities. I would like to see this Programme grow – especially to benefit the schools which need the gardens most. I would like to see more NGOs involved in *what Food and Trees for Africa* are doing and I am confident that they would be willing to share their skills for a better life for all.

To the partners, I say congratulations – you have done it once again. Let us keep this partnership growing. I would like to thank the Department of Education for allowing the Educators and Learners to attend the workshops and to take part in this competition. I wish to praise your active participation, as this Programme would never succeed without your commitment. To the schools that have entered, thank you for entering because, through this, you are sharing your knowledge and your efforts with the program facilitators. For those who did not enter this year, we have to make an effort to ensure they do so that they can also be expose to the wonders of the Eduplant program and in so doing reap the benefits from information sharing and skills development.

To all the sponsors that have made this day possible – thank you very much. Your contribution is noted and highly appreciated. To Food and Trees for Africa – keep up the good work. Your management of this Programme is appreciated and I am sure all the partners feel the same.

I thank you.