

# **The Handover of Agricultural Implements and Sheds**

**By Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, MP, Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs**

**Driekoppies Dam (Matsamo Lake)**

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Programme Director

Honourable Minister, HRH, Princess T Dlamini from the Kingdom of Swaziland

Honourable Premier, David Mabuza

Honourable Members of Parliament and the Provincial Legislature

Executive Mayors and Councilors

Board Members and CEO of the Komati Basin Water Authority

Acting Director General and Head of Department of South Africa and Swaziland

Chairpersons of the agriculture projects

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to address you on this momentous occasion of the handover of agricultural implements and sheds to the communities around the Driekoppies Dam, namely Schoemansdal, Middleplaas and Schulzental. Today the Komati Basin Water Authority (KOBWA) hands over three agriculture sheds and a variety of farming implements to the custody of the beneficiaries of these projects.

I have toured the various compensation projects and have seen for myself the investment and commitment from the beneficiaries that have contributed to making the work the success that we are commemorating. It is evident that despite challenges faced by each project, the desire to succeed prevailed hence the work that we are applauding today. These agriculture projects have indeed matured to a level that they can operate and sustain themselves with minimal input from the Department.

I therefore take this opportunity to congratulate the beneficiaries for working tirelessly against all challenges and focusing on making the projects a success. You are exemplary and have demonstrated that with proper guidance and assistance, resettlement projects around large dams can be beneficial to the affected people. The Schulzental or Dwaleni community, in particular, has excelled and their operations reflect a disciplined dedicated group. From today onwards, with dedication from your side, I am hopeful that you can manage your various projects sustainably.

To give you a background of these agriculture projects, in 1992 the Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland and the Republic of South Africa signed a Treaty on the Development and Utilization of Water Resources of the Komati River Basin and in 1994 the construction of Driekoppies Dam commenced. The Dam impacted on a number of people's lives.

Then, the issue of relocation and compensation of communities was not guided by the World Commission on Dams Report but rather by the policies of the government of the day, in this case the KaNgwane Government. In the KaNgwane Government, the Department of Agriculture and Forestry was tasked to relocate and compensate the affected people. When our democratic government took over, the task was taken over by the Driekoppies Relocation Action Plan Management Committee, which was constituted of the various departments in the Mpumalanga government such as Agriculture, Land Affairs, Housing and Water Affairs.

To assist in addressing the impacts caused by the construction and filling of Driekoppies Dam, a Relocation Action Plan (RAP) was developed, By 2004 the implementation of the RAP compensation projects had largely been completed, however with a number of key outstanding issues, the main one being the issue of sustainability of the compensation projects.

In 2004, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry through the Joint Working Committee (JWC) requested KOBWA to take over from the Driekoppies Dam Relocation Action Plan Management Committee (DRMC) the responsibility of implementing the outstanding components and in addition, develop and implement a sustainability strategy in consultation with the affected communities and DWAF. The strategy was developed in wide consultation with the affected communities and approved in 2005.

Currently, the various communal compensation projects amount to over 260ha under irrigation using water from Driekoppies Dam and in excess of 2900ha of dryland farming ranging from cultivated crops to a game farm.

As government, we acknowledge the fact that these projects have not progressed this far without hurdles. To mention a few, issues of land claims affecting some of the projects, drainage problems in some fields, the lack of implements to cultivate your fields and too many beneficiaries sharing a small project. Government has already addressed a number of the challenges and today we are here to witness that implements to cultivate your fields and associated infrastructure have been provided. Furthermore, I must mention that the Department is currently addressing the land claims issue at the inter-departmental level. On the field visit, I was also glad to learn that KOBWA, the Department of Agriculture, Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks agency and even some of your neighbours (white farmers) are providing you with the necessary training to ensure that you can manage your projects in a sustainable way.

I would like to convey our government's appreciation to the Komati Basin Water Authority (KOBWA) for agreeing to inherit the projects from the DRMC and nurturing them by means of training and capacity-building to a stage where they can operate independently. I also applaud the project beneficiaries for active participation in the decision-making processes that relate to making the

projects sustainable. Clearly, this empowering gesture has contributed to the success that we are celebrating today. Many times projects have been doomed due to poor or even non involvement of the beneficiaries it is intended for. Therefore, I believe that beneficiaries have over the years learnt and developed reliable decision-making abilities.

To the beneficiaries, I hope you realize the mammoth task that lies ahead of you. Today, the ball is in your court and I challenge you to take heed of the teachings you received from your various mentors and take full responsibility of your projects. By so doing, you will ensure continued success, and your work will be hailed as one of the best of all dam relocation projects. I must emphasize that this means hard work, increased commitment and diligence. However, the rewards also mean wider and deeper economic benefits. I am confident that you are capable of taking each project to heights whereby you will not only be a beacon to the Province but to the entire country as well.

Our government encourages the empowering of people with development projects. My wish is to see more of similar projects managed and sustained by those at grassroots level. Challenges are inevitable in projects of this nature. However, your desire to succeed should encourage you to develop various ways to combat problems. Government is also happy to provide assistance to people who demonstrate dedication and devotion to their work.

With these words, I now declare that the sheds and equipment have been officially handed over. May I also emphasise that you are not alone, government shares and supports the principles on which your projects are built, therefore, I also pledge my support to your endeavours.

I thank you.