

Address by Local Government and Housing MEC Maite Nkoana-Mashabane at the Official Launch of the Departmental Website, Intranet and Municipal ICT Form

14 February 2006

(Meropa, Polokwane)

Programme Director;
Members of the EXCO;
HoD of the Department of Local Government and Housing, Mr Leshabe Rampedi;
Representative of SALGA;
Honourable Mayors and District Mayors here present;
Representatives of the IT and Communications sector;
IT officials from various Departments – both provincial and national;
GITO Managers at District Municipality level;
Members of the Media;
Officials from my Department here gathered:
Good morning.

It is an honour to be the first political head of this Department to be given the opportunity to launch, simultaneously, the three Information and Communication Technology projects we are officially launching today.

I have little doubt that this day will go down as one of the main highlights of the Department in the next few years to come. I can safely say that in the years to come, future generations of officials in the Department will look with appreciation at this day. They will look with awe and admiration at this day not because it is St Valentines Day, but rather because it is the day that the Department took significant and strategic decisions to change the way it communicates with the people of this Province – and indeed the rest of the world.

Programme Director

We are gathered here today to launch the Department of Local Government and Housing's intranet, our newly-redesigned website and the Municipal ICT Forum – a forum that is definitely a first for our Province.

Programme Director

We are launching these programmes today mindful of the words of President Thabo Mbeki when he said in the 2006 State of the Nation Address:
"...(T)o meet our developmental objectives, which must respond to the high expectations of our people, (and to do that) we will pay special attention to the critical task of strengthening local government."
For us, as a Department charged with the vital role of providing support to our municipalities, the words of the President mean that we need to undertake more such programmes as the ones we are launching today so that the lives of our people are improved. It means we must strive to ensure that our Department works better to support our municipalities discharge their Constitutional mandate to our people.

And by launching these projects today, I believe we will be making the President's words a reality for our people.

Programme Director

In any organization that takes itself seriously, seamless internal communication is always given the priority and attention that it deserves. The reason for this is simple: by ensuring that your staff is always aware the programmes you as an organization are undertaking, these officials can become your organisation's most effective and inexpensive advertising platform. It is your officials who will tell their neighbours, their spouses, the church groups and all other people about where your organization is headed. Thus, in this manner, having a functional tool to support your internal communication, one will already be taking a step forward in disseminating information about one's organization. The intranet will help us play this part of informing our staff about our programmes more effectively.

This, Programme Director, is an example of development communications, that is, communications which can empower the development of communities. Considering that our Department is responsible for two mandates, local government and housing, which our people are always hungry for information about, it is imperative that we empower our officials with the latest and most credible information so that they can spread the message of our good efforts and challenges to the broader community. Again, the intranet will greatly assist us in this regard.

Programme Director

Our Minister for Public Service and Administration, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi is a big supporter of e-governance and the dramatic impact this can have on government's service delivery standards. Having lived in India and the Far East, I truly understand her enthusiasm about e-governance. For instance, much redtape could be minimized and many more citizens could receive their services sooner, rather than later, if e-governance was implemented effectively within most government Departments. Through e-governance, managers and officials could meet and update each other on progress on key projects without having to physically meet in the same space. Officials could apply for leave, submit monthly reports and book for government vehicles online – all without leaving their offices. In reality, the intranet provides staff members with a one-stop centre for all documents and policies about the Department. This step is certainly a good one for improving services we render to our people because redtape will certainly be reduced if we can have fewer officials taking unnecessarily long to do non-core work such as filling leave forms and the like.

Programme Director

Three years ago we set up our Department's website. Other than being slow to update, the site did not have the necessary content that the public and our stakeholders required from such a strategic Department. Noting the importance of this platform, especially in informing the public and stakeholders about our Department and its work, the Department this year undertook a review of the website. This was meant to make the Department more responsive to the needs of our stakeholders and "and pay attention" to what our people said they needed from us. After getting inputs from many people from both within and outside the

Department, including SITA, we all finally agreed on the new-look and feel which will help make it simpler for public and our stakeholders to be kept abreast of the Department's programmes.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, I can tell you that our Department's website is more interactive, flexible and engaging. More importantly, it allows for the public and stakeholders to access information that they require from us. Issues such as information on how to access housing subsidies; housing and local government laws and important telephone lines are all listed in the revamped website. We will also be ensuring that this website is constantly updated so that its content remains topical and interactive as opposed to being an archival website with outdated news.

Programme Director

All strategic sectors which have intentions of being efficient and productive have fora where all their best brains can share ideas and exchanges experiences and best practice. There is the Government Communicators Forum for communicators, MINMECs for MECs and many others. These strategic bodies help provide an opportunity for peer review and setting standards which will help the sector grow.

I am very excited that our District Municipalities will, as of today, have its own Municipality ICT Forum. This organization is a step in the right direction in terms of the Inter-Governmental Framework (IGR) and other progressive policies which will ensure that our municipalities are better able to deliver. This Forum will in the meantime only be inclusive of IT officials from the Province and the District Municipalities. However, I am told that District will, at some point, be expected to be running their own ICT Forums for their local municipalities. Through DM Municipal ICT Forum, officials will be able to receive support from their peers and also find common solutions to the common challenges that District Municipalities encounter on a daily basis. Issues about which systems to implement for accounting or human resources needs of DMs will be placed on the table and officials will share experiences and ultimately come up with creative solutions for their problems.

The Forum will be one of the most important places where municipalities could source new ways of implementing programmes and discussing which strategies to implement in order to accelerate delivery. It will go a long way in assisting Project Consolidate improve the work of the municipalities by offering a platform where Project Consolidate can strategise for IT capacity and capability.

Indeed, this day will be remembered long after we are gone.

Ke lebogile.