

Address by the Limpopo MEC for Local Government and Housing Maite Nkoana-Mashabane at the Vhembe District Municipality launch of the 2006/07 Free Basic Services campaign

27 July 2006

Maheni Village, Mutale Municipality
Programme Director; Councillor Susan Sibiya;
Honourable Executive Mayor of the Vhembe District Municipality, Councillor Irene Mutsila;
His worship, the Mayor of the Mutale Municipality; Councillor Lucas Manyuha;
All Councillors in attendance today;
Representatives of our partners in empowering our communities through electricity:
Eskom;
Officials from the municipalities with us today;
Our Community Development Workers and Ward Committee Members;
Our partners in the media;
Thobela!

Madam Programme Director

On June 16 2006, our country gathered together and took a collective moment of silence to remember the sacrifices of the heroic Soweto youth who protested against Bantu education years 30 years ago. Those young men and women made selfless sacrifices so that the generations which would come after them would live in a better country and be governed by a government which would listen to them and act on their needs.

On the 9 August 2006, our people would be commemorating the 50th anniversary of yet another group of brave South Africans. All of us are in one or another aware of the brevity and heroics of the 20 000 women who descended onto Pretoria on that fateful day of 09 August 1956.

All of us are also aware, Madam Programme Director, that the year 2006 has been declared the Year of South African Women in order to recognise the contributions which were made by those stalwarts.

Madam Programme Director

I am certain that if we are aware of these pivotal dates and their significance to our history; then we would also be aware that the many heroes and heroines of the 1956 Women's March and 1976 Youth Uprisings were laying down their lives and livelihoods because they wanted future generations to live the South African dream. They were not fearful of the might of the apartheid machinery and risked all so that we can build a government which would be responsive, caring and developmental. They sacrificed their lives and limbs so that we can build a country where the most vulnerable are taken care of; where the rich and the poor can live side by side; where the disabled are treated with dignity and where the government treats all its citizens equally.

Madam Programme Director

I believe that through this Free Basic Services campaign that we are promoting today; we will be living up to the dreams and aspirations of those who came before us. It is with certainty that I can say that all the stalwarts who gathered in Kliptown more than 50 years ago to write the Freedom Charter; all the gallant women who defied all and drove hundreds of kilometres to Pretoria to march against the unjust pass laws; and all the children who were but young adults in 1976 who were forced to face the monster called the apartheid security agencies; all of them were calling for a country where people were treated like human beings. All of them were calling for a government which is responsive. That is why I believe that those cadres who unfortunately are no longer with us today would be supportive of the campaign we are embarking upon today. It must be in their memory that we, as government, serve our people and provide good, quality services for our communities.

Madam Programme Director

The programme of Free Basic Services is intended, like the Social Grant system, to provide a safety net for the most vulnerable families in our Province. It is a sign that this government is a government of the people by the people. By April this year, we had extended this safety net to more than 167 000 households in Limpopo who qualified. The services are made available to South African families which have monthly household income of around R1 100. However, the collection rate by beneficiaries has been very disappointing as only 36% of those who qualify are making use of these services. In the Mutale Municipality, there are 197 households who have been identified to benefit. Nonetheless, the collection of the FBS tokens remains low – even in a municipality with so few beneficiaries. Therefore, Madam Programme Director, it is highly necessary that all stakeholders work hand-in-hand to encourage qualifying households to make use of this system.

We are informed that there are many challenges which have led to this low collection rate of FBS tokens. One of the those is that beneficiaries are often unaware of this benefit. This vacuum in information about these services has forced many of those families who qualify to lose out on a service that could be making a real difference in their lives. As a Department, we have committed ourselves to working with the Ward Committees; the Councillors; the Community Development Workers; the Municipalities; Eskom; and others in ensuring that information about the FBS is made more widely-available. We are even going as far as saying that there should be communication in the vernaculars so that the poorest of the poor – who are usually not literate – can understand about where and how to get these services. We also believe that our friends in the media could help us a lot in this regard – especially our community radio stations and newspapers. We are thus urging all municipalities to develop stringer relations with this grassroots media in order to promote the collection of these FBS tokens.

Another difficulty that people have brought to our attention on the low collection of token is that the vending points are not easily accessible. We have spoken to Eskom on the matter and indicated areas where additional vending stations are required. This will, we believe, assist in improving the collection of tokens.

Above this, Madam Programme Director, there have been problems that the list of beneficiaries that has been submitted to Eskom does not match the Eskom

beneficiary database. It has been noted that sometimes municipalities provide lists of household which are not even connected to any power line – thus, that family is automatically unable to access their free token. To deal with this, it has been suggested that a used electricity token be attached to the application form for FBS when the application is submitted.

Madam Programme Director

We are made to understand that Eskom has rolled out an automatic vending software. This software will automatically load the free 50 units of electricity once the beneficiary goes to buy their electricity. This will do away with multiple processes that are currently discouraging beneficiaries from accessing these services.

Madam Programme Director

We believe that this is the correct timing for us to embark on this FBS collection drive as we near Women's Month. This is because when electricity is not available in the household; it is usually the work of the women to collect firewood for cooking and other purposes. When water is not available; it is the mothers in the families who suffer and have an extra burden on their shoulders. Therefore our campaign is, in a way, our humble contribution to ensuring that Limpopo women experience the Age of Hope that we often speak about. We are certain that this is the role that the marchers of 1956 would have wanted to play in developing our country and building a better South Africa.

I thank you.