

PUBLIC WORKS MINISTERS MEET IN KIMBERLEY, NORTHERN CAPE AS PART OF THEIR MINMEC ROTATING SCHEDULE.

Kimberley – the forum of Public Works Ministers (MinMec) convened and chaired by the National Minister of Public Works, Mr. T.W. Nxesi, and attended by the relevant MECs in the country, met in the Northern Cape for 2 days from 09 to 10 October 2014 as part of the regular MinMec programme. Thursday 09 October was set aside as day one for projects visits and this is the integral part of the two-day MinMec programme.

As part of the clean audit priority for the sector in this current administration, the MinMec noted that there was a significant improvement to the audit outcomes for 2013/14 as presented to the meeting by the Office of the Auditor-General. The meeting emphasised that there were no short-cuts to dealing with this matter. Departments were therefore urged to prioritise the issues of capacity building particularly in planning, implementation and monitoring, and to ensure that the right people with the right skills were recruited and employed and that the culture of accountability was encouraged and enforced.

As the host, the Northern Cape MEC for Roads and Public Works, Mr Dawid Rooi, had led the delegation on day one on a visit to the sites of public infrastructure and other job creating projects in and around the city.

At the Phakamile Mabija Artisan Development Centre, the principals learnt first-hand about the partnership between the government and the private sector to build technical skills so critical to a growing province. Scores of youngsters were being taken through the theoretical and practical training modules in fields ranging from fitting and turning to welding and electricity in order to ready them for the competitive world of employment.

According to MEC Rooi, “About 17 youngsters were at various stages of technical careers thanks largely to the funding by the Northern Cape government.” So successful was the venture that most youth were recruited into permanent employment by partner companies and that more established private sector entities were actually joining the partnership.

In echoing the support for the work carried out by the likes of the Phakamile Mabija project above, the MinMec at its meeting reiterated commitment in the next 5 years to the transformation of both the property and the built environment sectors, ensuring that they reflect the demographics of the country as opposed to the status quo in the built environment of only 25% black and 9% female. Nothing short of concrete and comprehensive action plans to remedy the situation, would be accepted, according to the MinMec. The effort would go a long way towards contributing to National Skills Development and the sector’s skills pipeline. Also, the MinMec remained receptive to the proposal to import the second phase of the Cuban Technical Advisors mainly for skills transfers and service delivery improvement, subject of course to the needs assessments and budgets considerations of the MinMec members.

At Greenpoint township outside Kimberly, exactly 55 youths were employed under the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) to labour intensively construct the 2.5 km long storm water drainage canal to mitigate the effects of occasional flooding that brought hardship to this community during the rainy seasons.

Of interest was that this project, funded by the provincial government and implemented by

the Sol Plaatjie local municipality, was completely free from the external consultants and other service providers, instead relying on government officials to monitor and oversee the programme, at a huge saving to the government as funds were retained in the programme to be ploughed back into the project to create more jobs. “To date the turn-over at the site has been more than 200 of work opportunities created, indicating the popularity and usefulness of the programme,” explained the Mr. Rooi.

MinMec also learnt that the EPWP was over-achieving in its 2014/15 targets, judging by the creation of more than 400 000 (423 387) work opportunities just in the first quarter of the new financial year against the annual target of one million, re-affirming the President’s assertion during the national launch of the EPWP Phase 3 on 03 October 2014 that 6 million such opportunities will be attained by 2019.

The Public Works Sector through the EPWP would play an even more “Integrative role” in the coordination of the Public Employment Programmes (PEPs) following the Cabinet’s endorsement recently for the establishment of the Inter Ministerial Commission (IMC) on the PEPs. Among others the IMC PEP would create a cadre of public employment practitioners. The IMC was yet to be established.

As provinces were preparing to stage their launches of EPWP 3, the matters of best-practices across the various sectors of the Programme as well as integrated reporting systems were emphasised by the MinMec to stream-line the implementation of the programme and enhance the accuracy of the data at the implementing agent level thereby reducing the suspicion of under-reporting on the targets and impact of the EPWP.

Regarding the delays at the construction site of the mental health hospital undertaken by the Province, Mr. Rooi explained how chiefly the poor performance by the contractor and the intervention by the government led to a protracted legal stand-off after the contractor was kicked off the site for non-delivery. This together with the procurement processes to replace the non-performing contractor led to costly delays. The project was however, back on track and in full swing at almost 50% completion.

In support of the Northern Cape, the MinMec concluded that going forward it would be essential for the Sector to tackle non-delivery and poor performance by contractors head-on and in a transparent manner, hence the decision by the MinMec to open their visit to the media scrutiny. Part of dealing with service delivery improvement included strengthening own construction project management capacity, adopting integrated infrastructure delivery management systems and critically, forming joint technical teams with the clients to make the latter integral to solution finding.

Another beneficiary of the prolific building programme implemented by Public Works Department in the Northern Cape was the Sport and Recreation Department which already occupied the completed Kgotso Flatela government archives and repository centre which will house the records of the Northern Cape government including the history of the struggle for freedom and justice, with focus on the heroes and heroines of the Province.

Built on the land owned by the national government, Kgotso Flatela was a provincial asset and this was characteristic of the sector efforts to enhance the state’s immovable asset register by firstly physically verifying these assets ahead of their final vesting in 2016. This Asset Register Enhancement Project exercise has been undertaken since 2011 as a cornerstone to the turn-around plan particularly the road to the clean audit. MinMec noted

that just like in the case of the irregular expenditure, nothing short of full disclosure for our immovable assets – their locations, values and conditions assessments, would be acceptable for audit purposes. This was fundamental to an enhanced state asset register in compliance with the Generally Recognized Accounting Practices.

The meeting noted the progress by the National Department to drive the Green Building Programme in the public sector and encouraged members to continue networking (sharing ideas) and benchmarking (sharing best practices) to establish shared norms and standards to enable the sector to productively engage with the private sector considering the extent of the state's immovable assets portfolio.

Same collaboration was urged among the members to deal with the crippling debt that was owed by both the provincial and national departments, not necessarily Public Works Sector alone, to the municipalities estimated at over R4.5 billion much of which was made up of property rates, bulk services, waste management and rental debtors. The MinMec was assured that the figure above was a total debt of provinces and national governments owed to local government and did not imply the debt by the Public Works sector alone. Plans were in place to disaggregate and delineate this debt in terms of who owed how much to whom.

THE END

Issued on behalf of the Public Works MinMec

For enquiries, contact:

Mr. Lucky Mochalibane

Department of Public Works – Communications & Marketing

Cell: 082 899 9775

Tel: 012 406 1840/1/2

Email: lucky.mochalibane@dpw.gov.za