

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HON MEC Mr. SAM KWELITA AT THE INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S DAY IN MATATIELE, 01 JUNE, 2008

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

COUNCILLOR MPUMZA

MAYORS FROM MZIMVUBU AND MATATIELE MUNICIPALITIES

COUNCILLORS

RELIGIOUS LEADERS

TRADITIONAL LEADERS

STAKEHOLDERS

MEDIA FRATERNITY

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

I greet you all

We are here to say children have rights too. As government we agreed in 1997 to preserve the last week of May to be marked and honored as the Child Protection Week. Our noble objective behind this week is to strengthen, uphold and mobilise families and communities towards a greater responsibility regarding the care, protection and development of children. This week also serves as a build up to the 1st of June which is honoured and celebrated globally as the International Children's Day.

The International Children's Day seeks to promote the rights of children as well as mobilising across all sectors towards the perspective of a holistic development of a child. Eastern Cape has the second largest number of children with more than 3.1 million children after Kwazulu – Natal. 77% of its children live in rural parts of the province. 53% of its children live in traditional dwellings and 7% live in informal housing. Also the Eastern Cape has the highest rate death among children younger than five years in the country. These statistics reflect the negative effects of underdevelopment especially amongst African children population.

ALFRED NZO ORPHANED AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN STATISTICS

- MZIMVUBU = 536
- MATATIELE = 1529
- ALFRED NZO DISTRICT = 2065

Furthermore, in the Eastern Cape Macro social analysis report of 2006, Alfred Nzo and O.R. Tambo were found to be the poverty hot spots in the Province which then affect the

development, protection and care of children hence the need to commemorate this day in this area.

Children are faced with a multiplicity of social challenges like poverty, domestic violence, abuse, neglect, living without parents as a result of divorce or death, crime and as well as living on the streets. But poverty remains the greatest challenge because a majority of children in South Africa and in the Province are living in poor households who cannot afford to buy basic necessities. It is also evident that most children live in under developed areas where there is a lack of access to services, infrastructure and opportunities hence the need to understand poverty as multi dimensional, not only determined by income.

Other challenges affecting the growth of children in the Eastern Cape and SA society:

- Most children live in inadequate or overcrowded housing
- Lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation to more than half of the country's children
- Lack of access to electricity
- Long walk to school on empty stomachs.

Even though the country has seen drastic increases in the public expenditure on health, education and the social grant system, there are still challenges that need to be addressed like access to quality education, health care services, basic infrastructure and social welfare programmes for the population of which more than a third are children. Hence the importance of Inter-departmental collaboration and the organs of civil society in dealing with the issues of children, it can not be a Social Development matter alone.

Moreover, the social welfare system has not coped with the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS, which left a large and increasing number of children in individual households either living with sick parents; orphaned and in need of family care or alternative care. For children made vulnerable by poverty and HIV and AIDS, access to early childhood development and other social services is still low. While enrolment in grade 1 is high, far less children actually pass matric which indicates that many children fall out of the education system along the way due to amongst other issues the mentioned social ills of our society.

Inter related challenges facing the delivery of services to children:

- Shortage of social services practitioners.
- Inappropriate use of the child protection system
- Marginalisation of prevention and early intervention services
- Inadequate funding for NPO's and community based initiatives
- Poor inter departmental collaboration which puts a heavy burden on Social Development

Government has made tremendous progress despite the above-mentioned challenges in an attempt to meet the United Nations declaration on children.

Child Care and Protection services:

- In addressing these social ills that face children, our government provides a variety of services like: foster care, Early Childhood Development, Children's Homes, adoption, shelters, Home Community Based Care and Secure Care Facilities.
- The President highlighted the Early Childhood Development as one of the Apex Priorities. In 2006, the Eastern Cape government embarked on profiling 11 poorest municipalities in the Eastern Cape which called for Provincial Poverty Reduction interventions tailored to a family unit by all departments and local municipalities in these areas. This year, we have committed to fund additional 100 ECD centres in these 11 municipalities. Also, we have increased the tariffs from R9 to R12 to improve nutrition, recreation and administration of ECD centres.
- In addition, we have also increased subsidies for children's homes from R1500 to R1700 per month per child. The department has moved from a traditional way of giving care and protection to the vulnerable and orphaned children by implementing transformation programmes targeting the de-institutionalization of children from institutions to safe homes within their communities. This programme bears testimony to the successful implementation of cluster foster care homes in the areas of Cala, Willowvale, Cofimvaba, Mbizana, Motherwell and other areas within which orphaned and vulnerable children reside.
- Also, as government we support orphaned and vulnerable children by funding Home Community Based Care projects which is part of the HIV and Aids Programme at a rate of R557.000 a year per HCBC. One of the responsibilities of the HCBC's is to identify the orphaned and vulnerable children who are heading households. Once they have identified these children, they provide an aftercare service and they serve as drop in centres by providing material support like school uniform, clothes, nutritious meals, counselling services and monitoring of these child headed households. These children are then assisted with foster care placement and grants. Presently, the Province has established 57 HCBC's and this financial year it intends to increase them to 114 and has even allocated a budget of R64 million to fund 114 HCBC's at a rate of R557.000 per year from R37 million last year. Each HCBC has about 34 community care workers and targets 1000 families per year.

N.B. This week we have seen the tragic loss of life of 28 people in a bus accident here in Matatiele. What hurts us the most is that amongst these casualties, three were children. This means we have lost future leaders of this historic Province. Also, we have lost fathers and mothers in this terrible accident which further adds to the increasing number of orphaned and vulnerable children.

As government, we say, it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that we fight for the safety of every citizen on our roads. We have the right to report any mode of transport which we see is not conducive for public transportation. I would really like to extend words of condolences to all the grieving families. I say to you, you should not lose hope, be strong and courageous. The Bible says, "Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning."

As a Province we are moving forward in tackling issues of poverty. We are fostering our inter – departmental collaboration towards the integration of our systems so that we can share information around issues that require coordinated interventions. When a child is born in a hospital, we want the Department of Health information system to be able to link the child's resource requirements with other departments like Home affairs, SASSA and Social Development.

I thank you