

**SPEECH BY MEC FOR PUBLIC WORKS KZN MRS LYDIA  
JOHNSON AT THE LAUNCH OF AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME  
HELD AT ASCOT INN, PIETERMARITBURG**

**14 August 2007**

Programme Director

Members of Portfolio Committee

Head of Department: Dr. FB Madlopha

Senior Members of the department

Consulting Firms present

Members of the media present

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor for me to be part of this important launch of our Internship Programme aimed at advancing skills development of the future of our country, the youth. We thank Corporate Services for organizing this gathering.

The South African Construction Industry is coming out of a significant phase of decline that shows limited investment in human capital development, and the migration of available skills, leading to shortages of skills in the industry. The large government infrastructure spending programme, such as the construction of stadiums, airports and railway lines as well as the provision of infrastructure for the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup, have highlighted the skills shortages, and necessitated timely

interventions to ensure the delivery of a number of infrastructure development projects in the country and the province.

*According to The Civil Engineering Contractor Bulletin dated 16 October 2006* “South African consulting engineering firms are trying to employ skilled engineers, technologists and technicians but finding it hard to identify prospective candidates.” This is the challenge to all of us particularly the department of Public Works whose mandate is to deliver on large infrastructure requirements of the country.

These scarce skills shortages may slow progress in the design and construction of specific projects, and are also likely to impact on the maintenance of existing infrastructure as well as on the delivery of basic services.

The strong focus of the Expanded Public Works Programme on labour intensive construction also places extra demands for qualified supervisors and managers.

The skills shortage is considered so serious that it could sabotage the Accelerated and Shared Growth for SA initiative. Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, who is driving the initiative, has said that “government's R372m infrastructure investment between now and 2009 is expected to stretch the country's skills pool to the limit”, *Business Day* of 13 June 2006

A comprehensive challenge exists to restore the skills pipeline that produces the wide range of skills required by the construction and engineering industries, in order that the department's longer-term infrastructure delivery objectives can be met timeously, through the use of skilled and qualified professionals.

In the light of this, our department has taken this giant initiative to redress, and follow up on the commitment I made during the 2007 budget speech, that we aim to intensify our internship initiatives to provide for the skills that our country needs most. We are also aware that in the process of addressing the skills problem, we are at the same time addressing the hidden transformation problem in the construction industry.

Programme Director, the Internship programme aims to address the following, to name a few critical areas:

(1) The shortage of skilled, qualified and committed professional candidates for positions within the department of Public Works.

(2) Poor access to work experience from students, and unemployed youth.

(3) Low level of practical work experience, discipline and understanding of the needs and realities of the Public service workplace amongst graduates.

The programme is based on the specific guidelines from the Professionals Councils and a template for the training programme is used, making it easier

down the line for the Intern to compile a Portfolio of Evidence based on the relevant experience he/she has obtained.

Each Intern will have a Mentor assigned to ensure that advice and guidance is being given in all aspects of the work-life of the Intern.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at this stage I wish to thank the Internship students who made use of the opportunity presented to them by this department. Indeed the skills you will have attained after this programme are lifelong and will have positive effects even in your families. We are giving you the opportunity to make important contributions to this province, particularly to this department and the industry while at the same time participating in a challenging and rewarding work experience programme.

Not only will this experience contribute to your personal and professional growth, but we as a sponsor organization will lend a helping hand in your search for employment once your internship ends. You must know we rely on you, as a department, and we look forward to your positive contribution to make us meet our infrastructure delivery needs.

To our partners: the Contractors and the Consultants, the long term poverty eradication cannot happen without sustained economic growth, which requires a strong business sector. While we acknowledge as government that we have a responsibility to lay foundation for long term economic growth, business actors like yourselves through partnerships, and other engagement with government create opportunities that can assist those who need a little leg up to set them on the course of life.

We value this important partnership, and your commitment to assist this government make a difference in the lives of each intern that passes through this programme, is highly commended. This partnership is indeed a practical manifestation of strong corporate commitment to the objectives set by all member states including SADC in the Millenium Development Goals (MDG) of halving poverty by 2014. This partnership is well on its way to achieve greater impact than action by individual entity of government. This partnership is a clear demonstration of the benefits of public private sector collaboration could play in the areas of poverty eradication. A big thank you to you and we look forward to reaping the benefits of this partnership.

To our internal staff, the professionals who are also involved in the day to day running of this programme we could not have asked for more. We thank you for displaying unwavering support for this government, and your continued support to this programme a clear indication that our department has people with capacity and a desire to serve and to serve well. It is therefore my special pleasure to extend my hearty congratulations to you all on behalf of senior management and to assure you of our appreciation for your contribution.

“Building communities through construction”

“Sithuthukisa imiphakathi ngokwakha”

I Thank you