

2003/2004 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT BUDGET SPEECH BY MEC FB MARSHOFF

15 April 2003

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Premier
Members of the Legislature
Members of the Public present here

The tide has indeed changed. The challenge we are faced with is to ensure that we sustain the momentum of this change. We can only achieve this if we remain focused and united in our belief that widespread poverty in the midst of global prosperity is both unsustainable and morally unacceptable. As we are progressively moving forward, the message that we want to send to our fellow Free Staters is one of care and commitment. An analysis of these budgetary allocation will prove to you that this is indeed a "people's budget" geared towards service delivery to enhance the quality of life of the people we serve.

The 2003/4 budget I am presenting to you today provides an opportunity for the Department of Social Development to consolidate the progress and efficiency gains achieved during the first ten years of democratic government. We have laid the foundation for the next decade and in the words of President Thabo Mbeki "the tide has turned"

The Department of Social Development's core functions are poverty alleviation and the development, care and protection of the vulnerable. To achieve this objective the department provides Developmental Social Welfare Services and Social Security to the people of the Free State through five programmes NI:

Programme 1: Administration (Provincial Management and Services)
Programme 2: Social Assistance Grants
Programme 3: Social Welfare Services
Programme 4: Development and Support Services
Programme 5: Population Development and Demographic trends

Through this allocation we will indicate to this Legislature what our objectives are and how we will utilize the funds allocated.

The Department sees this budget as a people's budget and through this allocation of R2, 441,910,000 we will seek to implement programmes geared towards the accelerated change of people's lives towards a brighter tomorrow.

Honourable Speaker, let me now concentrate on the various programmes and their allocations.

The objective of Programme 1 is the provision of overall strategic management and support services for the Department as well as the office of the MEC. It also provides policy interpretation and strategic direction for the Department.

With regard to the above-mentioned the following achievements can be highlighted:

The promotion of equity, the advancement of women and people with disabilities, which is one of the major objectives set for this financial year, is being attended to through the approval of the new macro structure of the Department. Although the objective has been partly achieved we also realise that there are shortcomings at middle management level. We will concentrate on women and people with disabilities during this financial year.

The department awarded tenders amounting to R3 247 831 to SMMEs and HDIs during the year under review.

The payment of creditors and accounts is being effected within 30 days as prescribed by the Public Finance Management Act, Act No. 1 of 1999.

The LOGIS (Logistical Information System) is now functional and all orders are issued within 48 hours.

In order to curb transport cost as well as the abuse of Departmental vehicles, speed limiters as well as tracking devices were installed in all Departmental vehicles.

The Department held its first public auction of redundant vehicles on 6 March 2003, which was a major achievement. An income of R475 000 was realised although reserve values indicated a possible income of only R170 000.

The department has made available an amount of R324 150 for bursaries awarded to 32 needy and best achievers in the Province. The major fields of study for which the awards have been made are Finance, Information Technology, Social Work, Child and Youth Care and Communication.

For the year 2003/2004 Program 1 was allocated R51 million to continue rendering an efficient, effective support service to the Department.

In compliance with the requirements of the PFMA and strengthening our internal control systems and procedures, the department has set aside R2, 14 m for the establishment of the Internal Audit Unit and the Audit Committee. The Head of the Internal Audit resumed duty on 1 April 2003. Recruitment of the support staff will run concurrently with the development of the audit charter and plans for the unit.

As a department we have recently adopted a Fraud Prevention Policy, which is going to assist us in maintaining our zero tolerance towards fraud and corruption within the department. The establishment of the Audit Unit comes at a time, when members of the community and some staff members are beginning to expose the extent of fraud and corruption that has entrenched itself within the public sector. The existence of this unit will assist us greatly in our investigations and in putting out preventative measures for dealing with this problem, which prevails at all, levels in our organisation. In line with our commitment to moral regeneration within the public service, we will be mobilizing our personnel to act as one in support of this initiative. We will be announcing a toll-free number very soon where our staff members and members of the community can freely report on fraudulent activities taking place within the department.

In this respect we cannot but emphasize the critical role the unions will have to play in instilling a work ethic among their members. That we should all put our shoulders to the wheel to ensure that we maintain the momentum of turning the tide towards a better tomorrow.

Social assistance grants

The central domain of social security is poverty alleviation. The higher the incidence of poverty, the greater the role that social security must play in providing an effective safety net for the most poor and vulnerable.

The Free State is the second poorest province and therefore the social security programme has been at the very forefront of pushing back the frontiers of poverty.

In response to President Mbeki's call last year to register all people who are eligible for social grants, the Free State officially launched its campaign to increase the uptake of social pensions and grants at Roadside farm in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district in August 2002. At the launch, I appealed to all Free Staters to put our heads and hands together in crafting a viable and winning strategy that would ensure maximum access to the social security system. The response to my call has been very positive and I express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to all Government Departments, NGOs, Social Partners as well as the trade union, NEHAWU for their invaluable contributions and support.

Honourable Speaker

I am proud to announce that together with these stakeholders we have managed to increase the number of social grant beneficiaries by more than 20% and the total now stands at 357 799. The biggest increases have been in the following grant types:

Child support grant from 80 000 to 144 482
Disability grant from 45 000 to 74 712

The current uptake of per grant type is as follows:

Old age: 121 841
War veterans: 137
Disability: 74 712
Foster Care: 14 238
Care dependency: 2 389
Child Support: 144 482

An amount of approximately R170 million is paid out to our social pensioners each month.

Other achievements that I can mention here today include the following:

The measures that were put in place to ensure the speedy processing of new social grant applications, have proved successful with the bulk of applications now being finalised within 35 days. Honourable members, I must however add that in certain districts we are still experiencing some problems especially in Lejweleputswa where we have had two major interventions during the past year. These interventions are beginning to show positive results.

The two pilot disability assessment panels that were launched in partnership with the Department of Health in the Xhariep and Motheo districts have been a major success. These pilot projects have demonstrated that the present medically focussed

approach to disability can be broadened to include socio-economic factors and at the same time to improve accessibility for people with disabilities to the social security programme. I wish to thank the Honourable MEC for Health, Ms Ouma Tsopo, for the support that she and her Department have given to ensure the success of this project.

Honourable Speaker, we all are aware of the cabinet decision to set aside R2 billion to pay beneficiaries who were affected by the changes to regulation 11 of the Social Assistance Act. Before these changes beneficiaries who applied for social grants were paid from the date of approval rather than the date of application, with the result that many were only paid for a maximum of 3 months, irrespective of the period that they waited for their grants. I can report that of the R162m allocated to the Free State, we have already paid back 109 336 beneficiaries, an amount of R73 061 305. The programme will be continued into the next financial year.

The upgrading of pension pay points in partnership with all stakeholders, has continued to receive attention with an amount of R 5,3 million being spent on providing security, seating, water, toilets and shelter. Upgrading of pay points in Qwa-Qwa received focussed attention in this regard.

30 officials have successfully completed a one-year social security certificate course presented by the Centre for International and Comparative Labour and Social Security Law as part of our policy to professionalise social security staff. These officials received their certificates accredited by RAU on 8 March 2003 at a graduation ceremony held in Johannesburg.

Honourable Speaker

I will now discuss the funds allocated to the Social Security Programme and the challenges posed by the budget for the Department of Social Development.

The budget reflects an increased spending on social security, which once again demonstrates the Provinces' commitment to broaden the social safety net for the most poor and vulnerable. An amount of R2.2 billion has been allocated for social security, which is an increase of 8,83% on the previous budget.

These funds will once again be used to push back the frontiers of poverty and create a better life for all in the Province. We will continue to intensify our efforts to register all people who are eligible for social grants.

Child support grant

Honourable Speaker

In his State of the Nation Address, President Mbeki made a very important pronouncement. He called upon all of us to rededicate ourselves to the First Call for Children. In this province we have through the Premier's address accepted the challenge to adhere to the policy change to progressively extend the child support grant to children up to the age of 14 years. We already have our systems in place to ensure that the rollout for the first year will be effected on 1 April 2003.

The rollout of this age extension on the Child Support grant will be phased in over a period of three years as follows:

1 April 2003: 7-8 years
1 April 2004: 9,10,and 11 years
1 April 2005 12 - 13 years

By extending the qualifying age for child support grants together with the increase of R20 on the child support grant which was announced by the Minister of Finance in his budget speech, we can assure the people of the Free State that we are on track with regard to service delivery that will have a major impact on alleviating poverty and providing care and protection for our children. Our target for the new financial year is to have 265 000 children registered on the system for the child support grant.

Honourable members, it should be stated that the department does not only care for children through the provision of grants, but that our safety net for children also includes the provision of a range of other services which will be discussed later.

Disability grants

Honourable Speaker

Due to the success of our two pilot disability assessment panels, provision has been made in the budget for an additional 7 panels, which will be rolled out as from 1 April 2003. These panels will improve accessibility for people with disabilities to the social security programme and we aim to increase the coverage to 80 000 beneficiaries by the end of the financial year.

The grants for older persons as well as persons with disabilities have increased by 9.37% from R640 to R700 per month with effect from 1 April 2003. These substantive grant increases announced by the Minister of Finance are definitely going to provide critical additional support to our most vulnerable citizens in the Free State.

Paypoints

The Province in partnership with all stakeholders intends continuing with the improvement of pension paypoints and an amount of R3 million has been budgeted for this purpose in the 2003/04 financial year. The purpose of these improvements is to ensure that pensioners receive their grants under humane conditions and I would like to appeal to communities and their leaders to assist in ensuring that pensioners are not made to queue outside any hall to receive their benefits.

Professionalisation of social security staff

Honourable Speaker

The professionalisation of social security staff through multi skilled training that includes computer literacy, customer care and the one-year social security course, remains a high priority for the Department and therefore sufficient funds have been made available in the budget for this purpose.

National social security agency

Honourable Speaker, in concluding Programme 2, I need to inform this House that Government has taken a very important decision to establish a National Security

Agency, which will be a specialist and focused institution for the management, administration and payment of social grants. Indications are that Parliament will pass Legislation for the establishment of this Agency during the present financial year. The establishment of this Agency will have a major impact on the procurement of a new service provider for the payment of social grants in the Province. Processes have however already been put in place to address these challenges and the transition period.

Social Welfare Services

Honourable Speaker, let me now move to Programme 3. This programme provides a range of services to our communities from cradle to the grave. These services are provided by our personnel in the districts, our institutions as well as Not for Profit Organisations in line with the new budget structure. However I must confess that transfer payments by the department did not achieve the desired shift from the more urban organisations to the rural and previously disadvantaged organisations and communities. To address this the department will be consulting widely including our NPO partners to establish how we can improve the situation in the next 2 years.

In the interim all additional budgetary allocations have been directed mainly to historically under resourced areas such as Thabo Mofutsanyana, Thaba Nchu and other rural and deprived communities. The department is also looking at other innovative ways to increase the redistribution of resources to where the needs are greatest.

True to the call by the State President for us to be practical about service delivery issues, we are proud to announce that our allocation to the NPO sector has increased by 30% in the current financial year and this is informed by our Draft Policy on Transfer Payments, which will help accelerate the process of transformation and redistribution. And we are assured that this is the right thing to do.

As alluded to earlier on prioritising the safety, protection and care of children will ensure that the tide turns not only for today, but also that a good foundation is laid for a better society. This is a society in which children are safe and free from abuse and the poverty trap.

During 2002/3 we were confronted with many reported incidents of abuse of children in our province. Although no scientific assessment was conducted to date, our reports suggest a decrease of this problem and the department will continue to make the necessary interventions that will contribute to making the Free State "a safe haven for children".

The Department of Social Development is putting the needs of children first on the agenda. During 2002/3 the following was achieved:

The department funded early childhood development centres and provided a developmental service to crèches committees and personnel.

The consultative process in five pilot sites identified by the Executive Council for the decentralization of the Plan of Action for Children has been completed. The findings are being analysed to determine an appropriate model.

The Draft Report on the State of the Free State Children has been completed. The compilation of a Provincial Resource Register on services to children has been

initiated. Compilation of this register will serve as an important resource for the Province.

In May 2002 I had an opportunity to attend the United Nations General Assembly's Special Session on Children. During this visit I was accompanied by our provincial co-ordinator for the PPA as well as a child from Rouxville, Refilwe Masamane. Refilwe was selected to be part of the official South African delegation from the Presidency. The special session had two main objectives, namely, (1) to get renewed commitment and (2) a pledge for specific actions for the new decade. This gave an indication of what we need to focus on during the next ten years to create a world and countries and provinces FIT FOR CHILDREN.

The approval by EXCO of the Protocol on the management of child abuse is indicative of the special place enjoyed by children in this Province. In addition to the provisions of this protocol, a comprehensive range of services, including therapeutic and statutory services are provided to ensure that the safety and best interests of abused children are protected.

A 24-hour crisis service is also available in all the districts, which promotes a prompt response to all reported cases of abuse, with a view to limiting the risks to children.

Community awareness and education programmes on child abuse continue unabated in all the districts. The primary aim is to sensitise communities about the symptoms, effects and remedies available to fight this phenomenon.

The opening of the One-Stop Child Justice Centre in Bloemfontein during June 2002 constitutes a critical milestone in our efforts to make the Free State a safe, caring and child - friendly community. The existence of this centre symbolises our firm belief that whatever the background and family circumstances that influence the behaviour of children, they are still destined for great achievements in life, and should therefore not be exposed to situations that are detrimental to their well-being, e.g. prison.

Honourable Speaker, it would not have been possible for the Department of Social Development to register these achievements in child justice services without the support and dedication of the Departments of Justice, SAPS and NICRO. The unwavering commitment of our partners is a great source of encouragement for us in the department. We are indeed very grateful to them.

Our objective as the Department of Social Development is to provide all children who are in conflict with the law in the Free State, with similar opportunities and support systems that would assist them to re-collect, reflect and start afresh. This will be achieved through the implementation of the Probation Services Amendment Act No. 35 of 2002.

More children are getting involved in serious crime. Information obtained from our records indicates that girl-children are particularly at risk. The influence of syndicates on this kind of behaviour cannot be ruled-out entirely.

The intention of the Probation Services Amendment Act No 35 of 2002 is to protect the rights of children in conflict with the law and to promote the principle of restorative justice and crime prevention. It implies the active involvement of social workers in the assessment of arrested children, within 48-hours after the arrest, with a view to diverting them away from the criminal justice system.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is in the interest of children that they are kept out of prisons. Our experience confirms that this approach contributes significantly to crime-prevention since 90% of these children do not re-offend. Moreover the availability of diversion programmes that involve parents also strengthens support systems for families all of which contribute in reducing other social problems.

In preparation for the successful implementation of the Probation Services Amendment Act, this Department will increase its human resources by appointing Senior Social Workers as Probation Officers to focus on assessments and diversion of arrested children away from the criminal justice system.

For the 2003/2004 financial year R10, 8 million is set aside for child justice services. This will go a long way in crime prevention, reintegration of children in the community and ensuring a safe social environment for them. This will take us closer to our dream of making these services accessible to children irrespective of their location in the Province.

For the next two years, the Department of Social Development has set aside R2m for the establishment of a second One-Stop Child Justice Centre in Matjhabeng. In addition, the Department of Social Development allocated R5m for building an additional Secure Care Centre in Bloemfontein for children who have committed serious offences.

Thousands of children under the age of 6 years who come from poor households benefit emotionally, socially and intellectually from our ECD programmes. Heeding to the first call to children through interventions such as Early Childhood Development the department is making a big difference in the lives of children in the Free State.

Honourable Speaker, this Province has achieved a major coup by hosting the most significant event on the calendar for children. An event of this international stature occurs but once in a lifetime and for the children in the Free State Christmas will come in September. The Department of Social Development in conjunction with the Premier's Office will be hosting Madiba's Birthday Bash with the children on 27 September 2003 in the Province at a venue to be announced. This event is organised in partnership with the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and other NPOs. This serves to celebrate Madiba's affinity with all children, to strengthen the foundation for Madiba's legacy with children, to allow the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund to celebrate with all children and to communicate its work to a wide range of audience. In addition to this the event will assist to boost the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund public philanthropic initiatives as well as pay tribute to individuals that make a difference in children's lives.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Social Development has always been a torchbearer in the empowerment and protection of women. Through our successful victim empowerment programme the Department is proud to report the following achievements:

Shelters for abused women were established and supported in all districts including remote communities. This was complemented by recruitment and training of more community volunteers to make victim support services accessible to women.

Awareness and education programmes on the Domestic Violence Act as well as more community support structures were established to promote reporting and the proper management of cases of abuse.

The Department established a new partnership with the University of Free State, Trauma Centre, with a view of promoting and making counselling services more accessible to victims of abuse. This programme will be fully operational during 2003/4.

The problem of abuse of women is a nation-wide issue that is receiving attention in all the provinces. As part of this process the department hosted a consultative workshop for developing a National Victim Empowerment Policy.

In the 2003/4 there is a great need to expand these services to reach more impoverished communities. The Department will recruit and train more volunteers to improve capacity to deliver. In addition more local protection committees, shelters and facilities for overnight accommodation for abused women will be established.

Honourable Chairperson, abusing substances has featured highly in the activities of the Department of Social Development during 2002/3.

Six non-governmental organisations providing prevention services were supported financially. This funding also enhanced the establishment of community-based prevention services. A Youth Conference was also held from 21-23 March 2003 involving over 200 youth, non-governmental organisations and government departments, to develop a coordinated strategy against substance abuse.

The allocation to these services for 2003/4 will be utilised towards prevention services. The focus will be on expanding existing initiatives, support for Addicted to Life Clubs, building capacity, providing life-skills and improving coordination with other service providers. The funds are also earmarked for rehabilitation services.

In addition to this the budgetary allocation towards services to youth has been increased from R300 000 during 2002/3 to R1.7m in the 2003/4 financial year. Whilst this serves as proof of our commitment to creating a leadership core for the future, these funds will also contribute to the strategy to keep youth free from drugs. The staff complement dealing with services to youth is not fully functional yet, new personnel will be appointed by May 2003. This will improve our capacity to accelerate delivery of services to youth including substance abuse services.

Honourable Speaker, the Department of Social Development has made a significant contribution towards promoting the integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream of society.

Honourable Speaker, the Department of Social Development is also fully aware of the concerns affecting the disability sector. Recently DPSA communicated a memorandum to the Department outlining some of their concerns. The issues covered indicate that there is definite need to improve our communication and interaction with the sector and as such we have translated the highlights the budget speech into Braille. In addition to that we have provided for a sign language interpreter during the presentation of this budget speech to make our policy commitments more accessible to our partners. Earlier on today I also had a meeting with the people with disabilities where I also discussed this budget speech.

During 2002/3 the Department supported and funded various organizations dealing with disability, which include Welfare Organisations, residential facilities, Protective Workshops, day-care centres and community services.

Project Tshepo/Hope is implemented in Ladybrand and Maluti-a-Phofung. There are problems experienced by the department with regards to the implementation of this project. To address this the department is in discussion with service-providers to improve services and accountability for funds received.

For 2003/2004, provision was made to fund more day care centres and community based services for persons with disabilities. The Department is committed to making these services accessible to historically disadvantaged communities.

Honourable Speaker, next I would like to focus on perhaps the most vulnerable and exploited group of people in society, the aged.

The Inter-Ministerial Report on the Abuse, III-treatment and Neglect of Older Persons serves as a baseline for measuring our progress in improving the quality of life for the elderly. The concerns expressed in the report about the nature and quality of this services in our Province serve as a constant reminder that more effort should be dedicated to this service to maximize our impact. The tide must turn for all our people, including the elderly.

Allow me to share with you, Mr. Speaker, some of our achievements in this regard. The department has reprioritised all admissions to Old Age Homes in favour of frail and indigent people who have an income of less than R700.00 per month, promoted outreach programmes of Community Based Care and Support Services (CBCSS). 70% of old age homes are implementing CBCSS.

In addition to these achievements, during 2002/3 the department put the rights of older persons firmly on the agenda. Cases of abuse are reported, investigated and addressed. In October a Public Hearing on the abuse of older persons was held in Qwa Qwa. About 2,000 people attended the hearing where additional concerns were expressed about the treatment of older persons in the community.

Project Itireleng in Bultfontein and Thaba Nchu has been very successful in promoting integration of the elderly and frail in the community and is an excellent model for transforming old age homes. This project was also extended to Boshof, (one of the isolated and rural communities in the province) resulting in integration of home-care services, training of more volunteer-carers and improvements in the standard of the service provided. The lessons learnt from Bultfontein will be replicated.

For this financial year, community/home based care, founded on the principles of Project Itireleng, will receive priority, particularly in state institutions. The budget allocation for services to the elderly increased to R48, 7 million. This amount includes establishment and maintenance of luncheon clubs, which are aimed at providing a day care service for the elderly; supporting institutions for the frail as well promoting community based services for the elderly.

Honourable Speaker, Programme 4 of Vote 7 is about the creation of opportunities and infrastructure for communities to participate in and benefit from development initiatives. It deals with the challenges of poverty and HIV/AIDS, youth development, food relief and community and organizational development.

We cannot but over-emphasise the causal link between poverty and HIV/AIDS in our communities, which creates a vicious cycle that, threatens our dream of achieving a better life for all. More people are plunged into poverty, children are deprived of care

and protection and families are increasingly deprived and disempowered by the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in our communities. Notwithstanding these challenges, our efforts against HIV/AIDS have yielded a number of successes.

Key amongst these is our ability to mobilize communities and civil organisations to intensify efforts against the spread of the epidemic and to reduce its impact. A partnership was established with the Free State Christian Church Leaders' Forum to provide pastoral counselling, identify vulnerable children, recruit volunteers for home/community care services and assist with access to grants.

With the establishment of 6 additional Consortium structures in all the districts to provide integrated services that include information & education, support, food parcels and home/community based care, the capacities of communities to fight HIV/AIDS were strengthened. These structures constitute an important part of the coordinated plan for the care of orphans and vulnerable children.

Honourable Members, in terms of the recent report of the Human Sciences' Research Council (HSRC), youth is an important target group of our services that is more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. As part of our strategy to intensify our operations within this sector, we selected and trained 46 peer educators across the Province as part of the Ground Breaker's programme. This programme, which we are implementing in partnership with Love Life, will provide information, counselling and life-skills services to youth with a view to building self-esteem, the capacity to make decisions and accepting consequences of decisions taken.

The department has benefited significantly from having one staff member who is living with AIDS who is prepared to divulge his status without fear of stigmatisation. Not only did this put a human face to the epidemic, it also provided the department with an opportunity to review its HIV/AIDS Employee Assistance programme accordingly. We have come to appreciate the importance of support and the role it plays in enhancing inner strength and the resolve to fight.

The allocation for HIV/AIDS for 2003/4 will increase from R6.9 million to R9.228 million. These funds will be utilized towards improving efficiency in the delivery of services through employment of additional staff at district level, capacity building of our CBO partners, support to NPOs, provision of stipends to volunteers, establishment of a database and monitoring systems for funded projects, establishment of a mentoring programme to improve quality of services, as well as to initiate coordinated mechanisms for the identification of orphans and vulnerable children.

Honourable members, allow me to briefly concentrate on poverty alleviation which include a Poverty Relief Programme which is funded from the National Department over 3 years.

Honourable Speaker it is only when we no longer have to listen to an old man saying to us that he has no control over his life, when we are able to make choices of your own that we can rightly say we have made major inroads into poverty. There is no dignity to life when a mother tells you that poverty is humiliation, being forced to accept rudeness, insults and indifference when seeking help and assistance. Incidents like this implore us to attend to the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities, that is the plight of the poor.

During 2002/3 the poverty relief programme focussed on promoting food production, generating income, and enhancing acquisition of skills among rural women, youth, the elderly and the disabled. To achieve this 8 Food Cluster projects, 8 income generating Projects, and 10 Projects including the Aged with childcare were established.

A support team was appointed from March 2002- June 2002 to assist projects with business plans, operational plans and marketing. This support improved production and service delivery. Business, financial management and technical skills training was also provided to all projects beneficiaries.

All these efforts improved the sustainability of these projects.

Food Security

Honourable Speaker

In order to deal with the emergency arising from the high food prices and famine in Southern Africa, Government has developed an Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa. The vision of this strategy is to attain universal and sustainable access to a minimum daily, safe and nutritious food for a healthy active and better life for all the people of South Africa.

The approach of this strategy is two pronged, namely the distribution of food parcels for a period of three months and secondly the provision of cost effective starter packs and support services from the Department of Agriculture to promote long-term vegetable production.

This programme is implemented in Xhariep and Maluti a Phofung. Both of these areas were selected because of their high levels of poverty and vulnerability arising from many years of neglect in terms of economic and infrastructure development. This programme is a concrete expression of the government's commitment to supporting the poor and ensuring that their lives change for the better in the free and democratic South Africa.

To get this programme off the ground, the Department of Social Development has assisted with the establishment of a Provincial Co-ordinating Committee as well as Provincial and District Stakeholders Forums. Food Parcels to the value of R27 million as part of an allocation by the National Department to the Independent Development Trust will be distributed to 30 000 households by the end of May 2003. An amount of R37m has been allocated to the Department for this programme for financial year 2003/2004.

Programme 6 is responsible to promote population development and monitor population trends through evaluation services that are rendered, and analysing data on population trends, so that the department can integrate this into its development planning.

The main achievements for the 2002/03 financial year are the development of the Human Development Profile, incorporating the HIV/AIDS state in the Free State. Following this, the State of South Africa's population reports 2002 was launched in Maluti a Phofung in October 2001. The report is designed to assist all planners in government to do their targeted planning appropriately, integrating population trends, HIV/AIDS and poverty into the planning.

Improving the lives of the poorest of the poor continues to be top of the Government's agenda. Building partnerships with civil society, the business sector, faith-based and community-based organisations will be the main basis for service delivery in order to promote social integration and sustainable community development.

The launch of our new corporate image will endorse this policy shift towards service delivery targeting the poorest of the poor and also a complete metamorphosis within the department. Honourable members, as I present this new logo to you, I just need to give you a brief background of what informed the rationale behind this new identity of the department. The raised open hand is for taking responsibility and the department recommitting itself towards improved service delivery to the people of the Free State. The hand also signifies the family unit and the fingers representing the different family members. This is also the AIDS ribbon inside the hand symbolises the dynamic and passionate social responsibility of the department towards those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS in the Province. We do not only see our interventions within the family unit, but also how we maintain that family unit, as well as rebuild those structures where we have experienced family disintegration as a result of the impact of the disease on our families. However the combination of the hand with the AIDS ribbon gives an indication to us that the department has a hands-on approach to all the challenges confronting us. This creates a feeling of unity, comfort, stability and nurturing. The impression of it being very naive is to encourage bonding as well as ownership with this new logo, but also to take ownership. The logo also spans the divide between issues pertaining to children as well as more serious areas of responsibility.

In conclusion Honourable Speaker, allow me to thank everyone that has been so closely associated with this department. All those that have given so selflessly and tirelessly of their time, their effort and their spirit to turn this department around to what it is now. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed and I want to give you the assurance that, we might not say it, but it is really appreciated.

To the Head of Department, affectionately known as Mamma Sempe to everyone, a special word of appreciation and gratitude for your continued support and the strategic guidance you are giving to this department. I want to please urge you not to take an early retirement package just yet, we still need you.

To Mosala and Gawie, thank you for keeping such a hawk's-eye on the finances of the department. I am convinced I am not the only that would espouse this believe but even the Department of Treasury will attest to this and in my humble opinion that is one of the reasons why they have given us a bigger and better slice of the cake this year. We have been able to prove that we are responsible and prudent when it entails spending patterns within the department and that we are responsible in how we utilise government resources to achieve our objectives.

To Mr Roberts, Social Security will not be the same without you. Your swift and energetic responses to people's needs continues to make this department the shining star in people's perceptions of the humane and caring attitude we portray.

To Wayne, I sincerely hope that you will see yourself growing from strength to strength in DSS. Your total commitment to improving people's lives and your contributions towards achieving those objectives is invaluable to us. To this effect the corridor space between your office and mine is constantly shrinking. I am sure all

the people whose lives you have touched through your intervention strategies will bear a testimony to this.

To our families your support and guidance will continue to strengthen us in our quest to continuously improve upon service delivery to our people. We might not always say it, but know that you are loved and appreciated.

To all our mothers, grandmothers, our sisters and our daughters, all the women of the Free State, the tide has indeed turned in your favour. What you do with it is up to you. No one can go back and make a brand new start, but anyone can start from now to make a brand new ending. Let this be our guiding philosophy in ensuring that we can indeed make use of the opportunities to shape our futures. The challenges confronting you are innumerable. But know as this Free State Government headed by the Premier, Me Winkie Direko, we are certain that we will continue to make this a winning Province, a safer Province and a more prosperous Province for all our citizens and our children and their children.

I thank you