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Title: Community to benefit from Lethabong ECD centre

Pretoria - A community in Qwa Qwa in the Free State were the eager beneficiaries on Wednesday of an Early Childhood Development Centre.

Government launched Social Development month today with the opening of the centre - a subsidised facility.

"More than R1 million was spent in the construction of this facility and an additional amount of R190 000 was donated by the Free State Department of Social Development for paving, fencing, lawns and equipment," said the Minister of Social Development Bathabile Dlamini.

She said the department had embarked on the project in line with its "desire to care and improve the lives of rural communities, with the needs of our children at heart".

The minister thanked the Department of Correctional Services which had volunteered to assist with the building of the facility.

The Lethabong centre has employed a manager and four ECD practitioners, including the staff who will be responsible for cooking and cleaning the facility.

"The Free State Department of Social Development, in partnership with the NDA (National Development Agency), allocated an amount of R7.5 million for the reconstruction of seven facilities and the renovation of four facilities. We are proud to announce that nine of these facilities were completed," said the minister.

She said a second facility - a drop-in centre which will cater for children in need of care and protection in Slovo Park - was still under construction in collaboration with the NDA. "The Free State Department of Social Development allocated R1.9 million for this project which should be completed in the next four weeks."

The facility has been named after Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, who has been appointed Chairperson of the African Union Commission. The minister said this was done to honour and congratulate her and as a gesture of gratitude for her contribution.

Social Development Month seeks to create greater public awareness of the department's programmes and services to tackle socio-economic challenges. These include amongst others, poverty, HIV and AIDS, social exclusion, child protection and substance abuse.

The campaign has proved to be fruitful in strengthening and mobilising communities to be part of service delivery partnerships, and is rolled out in conjunction with the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) and NDA, who will also highlight the services available for communities from their entities and how these can be accessed.

This year's Social Development Month is being held under the theme: "Working together to enhance community

capacity to fight poverty, unemployment and Inequality".

"The department has identified October month as a period during which we reach out to meet and interact with the citizens of South Africa. The purpose is to improve communication with the people we are here to serve, and to assess the ways in which we can improve the manner in which government contributes to improving the well-being of all South Africans," said Dlamini.

In her address, she reflected on the progress the department has made in the last year.

"Between October last year and March this year, 118 backyard gardens were established to assist with malnutrition in Mookgophong [in Limpopo]. In addition, 67 household food gardens were established at Phomolong during Mandela Day celebrations. Other interventions included the allocation of dry seeds for planting for identified malnutrition cases and others received food parcels."

She said almost 100 older persons had benefitted from the establishment of the Mookgophong Service Centre where people can undertake laundry, knitting and gardening services to generate income.

"In reducing Mookgophong's levels of unemployment, there are 300 vulnerable households which benefit from poverty reduction programmes initiated by Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP). They are responsible for bush clearing and receiving a monthly stipend," said Dlamini.

In Mpumalanga, the department conducted a Social Crime Prevention campaign and reached about 650 community members of the Tjakastad area. "Since the launch of the campaign, crimes such as gangsterism have decreased because of improved working relations between the community and the Community Policing Forum (CPF)."

In Devon in Gauteng, a bakery project is operating under the management of eight women. The NDA allocated an amount of R1 million to fund Hlwayela Project and Poultry Farming.

In the Eastern Cape the Esigwalini Food Production project serves as one of the means to alleviate the effects of poverty and unemployment in the Eastern Cape Province.

"Three villages benefitted from this project and it makes vegetable and maize crops accessible. Located next to Umtata river, which serves as a source for water, Esigwalini has rich soil suitable for farming," said the minister. - SAnews.gov.za