

BENEFICIARIES GRATEFUL FOR ANTI-POVERTY CAMPAIGN

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In the small and dusty town of Donkerhoek in Jacobsdal, just outside Bloemfontein, poverty and unemployment have ravaged the close knit community for years, writes Edwin Tshivhidzo.

For unemployed 45-year-old mother of two, Sinah Dike, the war on poverty has made a marked difference in her life. Dike, a beneficiary of government's anti-poverty campaign, says her life has changed drastically in the past year. She now owns her own home and she can grow lush vegetables for her family in her backyard.

In 2008, the then Deputy President Baleka Mbete, drove government's anti-poverty campaign aimed at reducing poverty among the country's poorest citizens. The nationwide campaign was adopted by Cabinet as part of government's Apex priorities.

"Before the campaign was launched, I did not have an identity document. I was unable to access government services. But now, I have a house of my own and I can also produce food for my family, thanks to government," Dike said with excitement.

"Before the programme was launched, I was staying in a shack with my children. Times were tough. I was unemployed, depending on the kindness of neighbours and strangers. But since I started growing vegetables, I am not only able to provide food for my family, but I am also able to sell them and make extra money," she said proudly.

The campaign does not only focus on ensuring that people have food on their plates, but also teaches them to produce their own food and also ensures that they have identity documents to enable them to access government grants and other essential services.

In a recent visit to households in Donkerhoek and Generations in Jacobsdal, to monitor progress made since the campaign was launched in the area last year, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe said he was happy with the progress made.

"As government, we are here to support communities that are struggling, there must be no child who goes to bed hungry and all children must be encouraged to go to school," he said.

"Communities must send poverty to prison for many many years and ensure that it does not come back."

Motlanthe said the idea behind the campaign was to uplift communities and encourage them to lead a better life. He again reiterated the importance of going to school, saying that government would assist school going children where possible.

Most households in Donkerhoek and in Generations depend on child support grants; only a handful of people are employed in the nearby small town of Jacobsdal.

Unemployed Lizbeth Dwadwa (66) gushed with pride when the Deputy President got his hands dirty and helped in building her new house.

Motlanthe was not shy to push a wheelbarrow, trudge through mud and help in laying the foundation of Dwadwa's house.

Asked how she felt that the Deputy President himself had helped in building her new house, she simply said, "I'm very happy!"

"Since I'm unemployed and I'm staying with my four grand children, life was difficult and I depended on hand outs from neighbours. I am now receiving a foster care grant," Dwadwa explained.

The anti-poverty campaign has so far been launched in Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, Gauteng, Eastern Cape, North West and Mpumalanga.

Through the campaign, the most deprived households identified in the poorest wards are visited periodically by a team of professionals and community workers who identify their specific needs and accelerate their access to government services. Although the poor are taken care of by government, communities are encouraged to forge partnerships with government in eradicating poverty.

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