

**KEY NOTE ADDRESS BY MEC SPD SKHOSANA AT THE OFFICIAL HAND
OVER AND OPENING OF MASHISHING THUSONG SERVICE CENTRE;
17 MAY 2013**

Honourable MEC's present here

The Executive Mayor of Thaba Chweu, Cllr Micheal Ncongwane

The Executive Mayor of Ehlanzeni District Cllr Lettah Shongwe

Executive Mayors, Councillors and leaders of SALGA

Chairperson of the Provincial House of Traditional Leaders, Kgoshi

LM Mokoena and our revered Traditional Leaders;

The CEO of Xtrata Alloys and team

**Representatives of labour, business, religious and other community-
based organisations;**

Distinguished Guests and all dignitaries present here today;

Compatriots;

Comrades and Friends;

Ladies and gentlemen.

Allow me to start by quoting our Premier DD Mabuza in his 2012 SoPA when he said "Step by step, brick by brick, the African National Congress (ANC) led government, together with the people of this country, is busy at work, building a future democratic society as envisioned by our forebears in 1912 and guided by our blue print – the Freedom Charter."

On behalf of the people gathered here and the government, I would like to send my profound gratitude and appreciation to Xtrata Alloys for the wonderful job you are doing in Thaba Chweu particularly in Mashishing. We appreciate your commitment in assisting government to create a better life for the people and to deal with the political imbalances of the past which includes amongst others: socio-economic problems such as high poverty levels, high unemployment, low standard of living, poor access to basic services, lack of access to technology, lack of information, high prevalence of HIV and AIDS.

As government we are pleased to have companies that are still able to honour their social responsibilities. Government alone cannot be able to address all the imbalances and the backlogs of the past that still exist in our communities. We need to work with all stakeholders to create Public Private Partnerships that will be vehicles for addressing the challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality in our communities. Working together no matter how small the input we can make a difference in the lives of our communities. If all companies can behave like Xtrata Alloys, South Africa will be a different place.

As the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, we would like to say, on behalf of Ehlanzeni District Municipality and Thabachweu Local Municipality, your august and earnest involvement in community development is warmly accepted.

This morning we visited some of the projects where you have invested millions of rands in improving the lives of the communities around you. These projects are bringing a positive impact in the lives of the ordinary people of Mashishing and the surrounding areas. It is encouraging to note that your concern is not only in exploiting the mineral resources of the community whilst they remain in poverty, but also to ensure that they benefit from these resources.

We have seen the wellness clinic in Lydenburg Hospital – this clinic has brought relief to the department of health in Mpumalanga because it is a necessity. This clinic is today catering for both our out patients and the chronic patients. It has lessened the overcrowding in the hospital. We have also visited Estralita School of the mentally impaired – and we are impressed with the four additional classrooms that you have built. This school has a special place in my heart because it shows a society that cares for it's vulnerable.

The community hall that you built in Kellysville is remarkable. As government we are aware of other projects worth millions that you invested in Mashishing and we want to say thank you very much and do not stop here, continue with this marvelous work.

Programme Director, today we are gathered here for another project that was built by Xtrata Alloys at an amount exceeding R 8 million. This building is a Thusong Service Centre that we are going to officially launch today. The Thusong Service Centre programme of government was initiated in 1999 as one of the primary vehicles for the implementation of development communication and information and to integrate government services into primarily rural communities. Our government saw a need that we must make sure that our communities have access to information. This was done to address historical, social and economic factors, which limited access to information, services and participation by citizens, as they had to travel long distances to access these services.

The Thusong Service Centres were initiated after a study done by government in 1996 to see how communication can be improved with communities. The Task Group on Government Communication (Comtask) found that there are a number of impediments to the dissemination of government documentation and information. One of the recommendations of Comtask was that departments and statutory bodies must make all government documents available to libraries and community information centres and other places of public information. This will enable our communities not only to be empowered but also to make sure that we are able to deliver information, services and government messages directly to communities, open dialogue with the broader public as well as deliver information in a way that is versatile and takes account of illiteracy and poverty levels.

Thusong Service Centres are **one-stop, integrated community development centres**, with community participation and services relevant to people's needs.

Government's vision for Thusong Service Centres is to provide every South African citizen with access to information and services within their place of residence with the purpose of improving the quality of their lives through integrated service delivery. People must not be expected to travel long distances using the little resources that they have, to access government information and services.

Thusong Service Centres link communities to the government's distribution network of publications and products about government programmes and activities. Community participation events, campaigns, exhibition and road shows at Thusong Service Centres provide communities with information they can use to improve their lives and develop the community.

Some specific benefits to communities include the following:

- Local economic development
- Integrated service delivery in line with requirements of the Municipal System Act
- Improvement in infrastructural development
- Education and skills development, ABET, government programmes
- Access to information and services closer to where people live
- Access to technology: Telecentres provide access to *Batho Pele* Gateway and computer training; PIT machines.
- Platform for partnerships which empower communities through, for example, sustainable projects that encourage ownership and self-employment, as well as employment of others.

The objectives of the Thusong Service Centre Programme are directly linked to the strategy of the programme:

- To bring government information and services closer to the people to promote access to opportunities as a basis for improved livelihoods
- To promote cost-effective, integrated, efficient and sustainable service provision to better serve the needs of citizens
- To build sustainable partnerships with government, business and civil society
- To create a platform for greater dialogue between citizens and government.

This service center, which will be called Mashishing Thusong Service Centre, will make sure that the people of this area will not travel or walk to town for services. As we officially open it today it will not have all the desired services but as time goes on, the Municipality will engage with other partners and departments to make it have all the desired services. The centre currently has the following services:

- Library
- Computer and internet centre
- Skills Development Centre
- Gymnasium
- Reception area
- Board room
- 9 offices
- 3 store rooms
- 4 ablution blocks
- 1 guard house at the main gate

It has already been confirmed that the South African Social Security Agency, South African Revenue Services, Small Enterprise Development Agency, Kids' Library and the Municipality will occupy space in the centre. We urge other government departments that are not operating in the Mashishing location to come and occupy space in the centre. As government we are convinced that this centre will work well because it is situated next to or not very far from the following facilities:

- The newly built health centre which is three hundred metres away
- Department of Social Development offices: four hundred metres away
- Satellite police station: three hundred and fifty metres away
- Community hall: hundred and fifty metres away

Today as we are gathered here we are continuing with the rebuilding of this community, after the destruction that was experienced during the unrests of 2009. These unrests led to a lot of destruction of property that included a clinic and library. As a community of Mashishing we all know that on this site where the new centre is built now, there was a library. Our school children used to frequent that library. That library which was optimally utilized, was burned down. Why burn the library? We must ask ourselves what society destroys a center of knowledge from which our children need to benefit from? These are our future leaders but how do we expect them to do so if we destroy the tools that they need to use to empower themselves. We should at all times make sure that we make it possible for our kids to attain much greater heights than we as parents were able to. As our former President Nelson Mandela said "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

We need not be reminded what this destruction of public property has meant to our communities, especially the elderly, children and the most vulnerable. This destruction of property has been very detrimental to our people.

Programme Director, perhaps it's important for me to remind the communities that the government of the African National Congress is a government chosen by the people and it is at all times willing to listen and engage with communities and therefore there is no need for violence and destruction of property to raise concerns. Why destroy a clinic or a school if you want to raise a concern about water? We must at all times remember that governments resources are limited and they need to be spread amongst all areas, so if you destroy a school or a clinic that has been built, government cannot come back to rebuild these when there are many areas that are still waiting for the same service.

Let us remember that South Africa is a democratic country and in a democratic country people have the right to protest. However we must always remember that in exercising our rights we must not infringe on the rights of other people. Let us make sure that in our protests we do not vandalize anything because we will need them in future. Let us remember that freedom also places responsibilities on each one of us. As President Nelson Mandela said "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

Today our school children are travelling to town to access a library that we burnt down when we were angry. That is not what we fought for. We fought for the liberation of our people and a better life for all. I am confident that we can correct the situation.

Let us remember that we paid a very high price for this democracy and some of our brothers and sisters paid with their lives. This beautiful centre that we will be officially opening today should stay here for future generations to use.

I urge you people of Mashishing, take ownership of this center. It is yours. Look after it very carefully and if you notice any acts criminality or vandalism being conducted on it, report these to the law enforcement agents. Guard this building as you would your own house. To the children of the area, your library has been restored, make good use of it. You are the future of this country.

I thank you.