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Community Work Programme Changes the face of Erasmus

It's still early in the morning but the community of Erasmus, situated between Pretoria North and the Eastern part of Brics, bordering Gauteng and North-West provinces, is already gathering to start their day's work as participants in the Community Work Programme (CWP). The CWP is led by the Department in partnership with the Department of Public Works, Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) and other stakeholders.

Dressed in their easily recognizable orange overalls, participants transformed the entire area into a blaze of orange, as one group cut overgrown bushes next to the main road others were working on the nearby food gardens that produces food to provide needy families.

Director-General Elroy Africa, accompanied by the Deputy Director-General for Infrastructure and Economic Development, Mr Ricardo Hansby and Senior government officials, the two agencies responsible for implementing the CWP and representatives from TIPS, paid the project a visit. The purpose of the DG's visit was to hold discussions with the Reference Group and other relevant stakeholders with the aim of understanding what CWP participants feel about the programme.

While the DG and his colleagues were interacting with the Reference Group and other important role-players, it was heartening to learn that most people were happy about the existence of the



Director-General Elroy Africa interacting with some members of the Reference Group in Diepsloot

CWP. The CWP made it possible for them to look after their families by putting food on the table.

They indicated that they would be happier if the programme's working days were increased from 2 to 5 days per week as this has improved the standard of living in the area and its impact is visible and felt by the communities who are benefiting from it. They also alluded that the levels of crime in the area have gone down since the implementation of the programme. The result of the CWP is that the majority of the youth are no longer idle as they are kept busy cleaning the local cemetery and schools. One school has even received an award for the cleanest school in the area. The principal of the school said that it looked completely differ-



Before the school was renovated and painted



The school after it was renovated and painted

ent from what it looked like before the cleaning operation begun three weeks previously. Mpho Malope, CWP coordinator and chairperson of the Erasmus Youth Development said: "The programme enhances social cohesion within the community, young and old people are working together, and there is harmony amongst community members. The area has improved a lot, people are able to share their views, policies are developed and I would like to thank the Department of Cooperative Governance for bringing the programme to the people".

The programme has the potential to reduce the community's dependency on government social grants as members of the community work in many different projects on this CWP site. Projects include the renovation of the old primary school and converting it into a Thusong Centre; the establishment of the community drop-in centre (in the form of a crèche); Food gardens that provide the home-based care centre and school children with vegetables and the creation of farming cooperatives. Participants also take part in a skills development programme to acquire training in different skill sets. In his interaction with the participants, the Director-General encouraged them to work harder and take charge of their own development, he acknowledged the challenges that were raised during discussions and promised to resolve them as soon as possible.

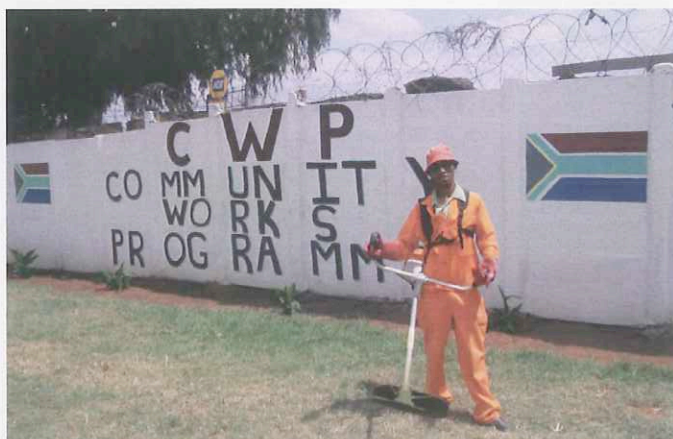
Next on the itinerary of the Director-General was a whistle-stop tour in Diepsloot, an informal settlement, situated in the Northern part of the City of Johannesburg as you travel on the N14 carriage-way towards Pretoria. The Director-General and his management team met with people charged with managing the CWP and also interacted with participants as he did in Erasmus.

ILLEGAL DUMPING AREA TURNED INTO A PARK – CWP AT WORK

The Department of Cooperative Governance team's visits to various CWP sites continued unabated as they dropped by to see progress on the Community Work Programme first hand at places such as Orange Farm, Lenasia and Kliptown.



CWP crews getting ready to start the big cleanup



A CWP worker proudly displays his gardening implement

The team was joined by colleagues from the Gauteng province as they met up with the Reference Group and visited various projects.

It was the project in Kliptown that fascinated me most; this is where we met CWP participants who were hard at work despite the fact that temperatures were as high as 30°C. They were cleaning a park that used to be an illegal dumping area. We were told how an illegal dumping area was cleaned and transformed into a beautiful park designed to look like the South African flag. Natasha Mohamed, the Site Supervisor said that women were raped and mugged in the area and that when the CWP was introduced; the community identified the place and suggested that it be turned into a park. It took participants six months to remove rocks and dirt caused by illegal dumping and to lay the grass and also plant flowers and trees.

"People feel very safe now, children are able to play and the place looks great" said Natasha. Jeanette Carpede, who lives next to the park, said that she was grateful that the dumping area is no more as it created health hazards for nine years. "Since the introduction of the CWP, the area now looks beautiful as it is clean and green. The value of our properties has gone up. We no longer experience crime like before, in this area". She said that participants drew water from her house and another three houses next to the park but they do not mind as this contributes to the clean environment and they also benefit as their surroundings are kept clean. She further praised participants for their hard work and determination to keep the area clean.

Participants thanked Government for introducing the programme to their area and promised to work hard to ensure that the project remains sustainable. City Parks had promised them dustbins, chairs and trees – officials from the province assured us that they will follow-up and ensure that these are provided in order to sustain the CWP and the good work done by participants.

It was time to say goodbye and we all left the area with big smiles on our faces knowing that CWP is changing lives for the better.