

SPEECH BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF THE AMATHOLE DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, CLLR SAKHUMZI SOMYO, AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE ADDRESSING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM SA ON 11 JULY 2007

All protocols observed

I would like to quote from a little book by Paul Hanna called “The Success Motivator”. He writes as follows: *“Pain is good. It’s tough but it’s true. The amount of pain that you welcome in your life will determine how much success you attract. The bottom line is this : when you deal with pain you grow at an amazing rate. When things are going well we are really introspective, but when things turn sour we begin to ask that magic question, “What’s life all about?” And this is when we begin to find answers.”*

The above quote serves to highlight that in life nothing worthwhile comes easy – it needs hard work and the effort we put into it. And that goes for our studies, our jobs, our marriages and relationships.

Since 1994, local government in South Africa has undergone a radical transformation. Where previously municipalities were mainly urban cities and towns, leaving vast stretches of the rural hinterland unserved, now we have 248 wall to wall municipalities throughout the country. The local government elections in December 2000 set the stage for developmental local government. Municipalities were disestablished and new ones established, amalgamating many cities and towns into local municipal areas, districts and metros and this also brought its own set of challenges. One of the main things we

struggle with today is the lack of capacity and skills, especially in engineering, and other technical skills to help build our country.

The Amathole District Municipality is one of the largest district municipalities in the country. We have eight local municipalities under our area of jurisdiction. We find that it is difficult to attract and retain trained and skilled people in the rural areas of our district. Many of them prefer to live in urban cities where the infrastructure, recreational and other facilities are generally much better. There is a big demand today for trained, dedicated and committed public servants in local government.

Because of these shortages, the Amathole District Municipality, and other government department have put in place measures to address the shortages.

Because the ADM is the water services authority for the district with the exception of one of our local municipalities, and because of the shortage of skills in our water operations and maintenance unit, we have created 50 learnerships for Wastewater Process Operations and Water Purification Process Operators at NQF 2 level during the 2006/07 financial year. Thirty two learners are unemployed and 18 are employed candidates. Both programmes commenced in January 2007 and will run over a 12 month period.

Similarly, we have also developed Municipal Finance and Administration Learnerships at NQF 4 level for 25 candidates, 15 of

whom are unemployed and 10 are employed. This programme started in November 2006 and will be completed in December this year. Recruitment was done through advertisements in the local media and prospective candidates were interviewed and selected.

In February this year, we also initiated a Construction Contractor learnership at NQF2 level for 10 candidates and Construction Supervisor learnerships at NQF 4 level for 20 candidates. The duration of the training is 24 months. But we haven't stopped there. The ADM entered into a partnership with ABSA Bank, the Department of Public Works and the Construction SETA in order to coordinate this unique learnership programme. In order to make these initiatives sustainable, we have ensured that the contractors will be able to establish and manage their own construction businesses and will be awarded increasingly larger contracts from the ADM where they will get practical hands on experience through their trainers and mentors. This is to ensure that industry quality standards are maintained.

Last year, the Office of the Premier allocated the sum of R60 million to the six district municipalities in the province for skills development. This funding comes from the National Skills Fund and the ADM was allocated R11,3 million. We intend to appoint 234 candidates from the district that are currently involved in community projects in the area of agriculture, infrastructure, tourism and manufacturing. For example the infrastructure learnerships will include masonry, bricklaying, plastering, flooring, roofing, paving etc. The agriculture

learnerships will include plant and animal production; the tourism learnerships will include new venture creation and craft enterprise, whilst the manufacturing sector will include vehicle maintenance. These learnerships are all aligned to our Integrated Development Plan.

The ADM also supports two students each year with bursaries for their studies in rare skills such as engineering for example. These bursaries are awarded to historically disadvantaged individuals and to date four students have been enrolled for civil engineering qualifications at Wits, Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu Universities. One female student graduated in May this year in Civil Engineering at the Walter Sisulu University.

We also provide support and practical training for experiential trainees within our institution who have been approved by their respective learning institutions to commence with experiential training and currently the ADM has nine students who are engaged in the Experiential Training Programme.

And lastly, in order to address the issue of illiteracy within our organization, the ADM also has an ABET programme. Twenty candidates were enrolled for the programme in different levels during 2005. In 2006 there were a few drop outs and 16 employees were enrolled. In 2007 processes are being put into place to enrol 34 employees for the programme.

Those who remain committed to the ABET programme have nothing but praise for it, as they experience fulfillment in being able to read and write for the first time in their lives.

I have outlined some of the possibilities to you within our own organization and I'm sure that there are many opportunities at other organizations, some of whom you will be hearing about during the course of the next couple of days.

I wish you every success in your endeavours. In closing I would like to quote Albert Einstein, who said, "*In the midst of difficulty lies opportunity*". My advice for the youth today is that they should grab every opportunity that comes their way and use these to advance their cause and career path in life.

I thank you.