

Zuma rolls up his sleeves, promises better service

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MTHATHA: President Jacob Zuma wrapped up his two-day Eastern Cape visit on Thursday, 29 September 2011, by telling the residents of Mthatha in the King Sabata Dalindyebo (KSD) Municipality that government was working hard to address their challenges, but that they needed to be patient.



Jacob Zuma, president of South Africa

Zuma visited the province as part of government's service delivery monitoring campaign.

On Wednesday, he visited the automotive sector in Port Elizabeth where his focus was on job creation and economic growth. Government sees the sector as important in its plans to create five million jobs in the next 10 years.

There are three car manufactures in the Eastern Cape, including luxury vehicle makers Mercedes-Benz South Africa.

There, Zuma urged the industry to continue to contribute to skills development and promotion of locally produced products. With employment figures running into the thousands, the automotive sector has over the years developed a manufacturing base in the Eastern Cape and has shown potential to compete in global markets.

In Mthatha, anxious faces of people including pensioners, school children and unemployed youth packed the local Ngangelizwe sports grounds, with their eyes glimmering with hope in anticipation of the president's address. For people here, it is not every day that a head of state comes to listen to their problems and offer immediate responses to their questions.

Flanked by his ministers and top provincial government officials, Zuma looked eager to speak to the people of Ngangelizwe, who at this stage were battling with a contingent of body guards to get a glimpse of the man many only see on TV.

Some travelled from remote villages with the intention of informing Zuma of their problems, which ranged from health needs to unemployment, access to grant and IDs.

Last year, government established an inter-ministerial committee to assist in revitalisation of the KSD Municipality, which governs the greater Mthatha area.

Residents of Mthatha, Libode and surroundings had complained to Zuma about what they saw as a decline of the KSD area, an area which is also home to former President Nelson Mandela.

Local Government MEC Mlibo Qoboshiyane, who formed part of the inter-ministerial committee, cited more than R64 million spent on various road projects, including paving of the inner roads and building of bridges as among development projects that have been completed.

"There will also be an upgrade of bulk water and sanitation systems to address the problem of water challenges in the province," he said.

Authorities conceded that untreated sewer discharge, which drains into the Mthatha River and in some cases, connected to the storm water drainage system, was posing serious health risks for the people of the area.

Also, more than 90% of the Mthatha road network had deteriorated beyond pothole repair requirements, rendering economic development in the town ineffective.

During their interaction with Zuma, the community laid bare their frustration with local authorities on issues ranging from poor provision of municipal services, electricity and houses.

While some pledged their support for various development initiatives, they expressed concerns about the slow pace of service delivery and alleged corruption, nepotism and maladministration.

"We do not feel that the government people are taking the plight of the people seriously. What we see is nepotism, favoritism and corruption, and while things are going right in some aspects, we think the bad people are tainting all the good work that is being done in this district," said resident Sipho Kundani.

He asked Zuma to institute an investigation into alleged cases of tender rigging and corruption in government departments.

"We have knowledge that we ordinary people are being sidelined when it comes to projects and only friends benefit. It has to end," he said to loud applause from the packed white marquee set up for the meeting.

Sixty-year old Welekazi Qina, who has been a Mthatha resident for 40 years, told Zuma she had been waiting for a house for years now due to complications that have arisen in her application. She said she was told, after three years of waiting for a house that her application had gone missing.

"I want the president to tell me how does an application for a house go missing and I want the president to please ask the officials on my behalf where is my application (sic)," she said.

But there were those who were less critical, like Fezeka Mki, who said her community had been thriving, thanks to funds pumped into a local farming initiative by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform.

"Mr President, we cannot criticise without praising because there are good things that have been done for us and we need to give credit where it is due. I am one of the people who have benefited from the opportunities presented by this government," Mki said.

Her community farming project, which she is running together with other women in the area, had received much needed

funding and support from the department. As a result, they were ready to recruit more people to be part of the initiative.

Meanwhile, Zuma assured the locals that his administration took the issue of unemployment, poverty and corruption very seriously.

"We have your concerns and as a responsive government, my officials here will endeavor to tackle the issues. They have been writing everything down," he said.

He explained that he was visiting the various provinces to get a firsthand account of how people felt about service delivery in their areas "because we don't rely on reports, we want to hear it from you."

While he promised to address most of the problems, Zuma also explained to the people that government was confronted with other pressing needs such as alleviating poverty and ensuring the country's economy was growing.

He encouraged community leaders to work with local authorities and be part of the governing process and development in their areas.

"We need to work together to address the pressing problems that confront us. Working, together we can do more," said Zuma.

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