

## REVIVING MANTSOPA

*By Mathapedi Ramonotsi*



**LADYBRAND** – Efforts to speed up development in rural towns which have been sluggish owing to financial hardship got a welcome boost this year when the provincial government allocated some funds to galvanise expansion programmes.

The Mantsopa Local Municipality is one such municipality where about 1000 households have been earmarked to get Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP) houses.

Mantsopa, about 100 kilometres east of Bloemfontein, is a farming community, meaning the majority of its residents are farm workers.

The department of Human Settlement in the province has allocated R22 million for RDP houses in the Mantsopa municipal area. The houses will restore dignity to families still living in board and corrugated iron shacks. Eighteen years since the country gained its freedom, millions of people, most of them black people, still live in 2 700 informal settlements dotted around the country.

The biggest beneficiary in these small towns of Mantsopa is Excelsior which will get 417 houses, Ladybrand 383 houses while Hobhouse will get 200.

For Ladybrand and Hobhouse, the new houses will add on to the 2010 allocation which is near completion. The two towns piloted the sandstone RDP houses, the first of its kind, in an effort by government to build not only shelters for people but to build decent houses.

The Human Settlement issue is also a concerned premier Ace Magashule, who during the opening of the legislature on February 16 said: “The integration of our communities must be the starting point that drives Human Settlements, because it will inadvertently lead to sustainability in economic development and social inclusion. The government of the Free State is mindful of the legacy of Apartheid’s Spatial Development that continues to haunt the democratic South Africa and the Free State Province.”

The MEC for Human Settlement Olly Mlamleli, while tabling her budget vote for 2012\13 said the department was working hard to improve the Housing Subsidy System to ensure that houses are allocated to the correct beneficiaries.

“We are working on an improved Housing Subsidy System to ensure that the right people benefit with particular emphasis to the vulnerable social groups such as the aged, of between 70 years of age and above, child-headed households and people with disabilities,” said Mlamleli.

To qualify for a house, one must have a site registered in their name. Mlamleli emphasised, particularly in the case of farm workers who dwell on their employers’ properties.

Not only will the municipality see an increase in housing but other developmental infrastructure is on the cards for the area.

Mantsopa will share a total of R181 903 716 million with other rural based municipalities for the installation of various modes of infrastructure such as water reticulation and sanitation. Most rural based municipalities are faced with storm water hiccups due to old infrastructure. Mayor of Mantsopa Sello Ntsepe said the housing fund will address the back log faced by the municipality. “Community members who are leaving farms due to farm closures and job losses have nowhere to stay, and the town is expanding so more houses are needed to cater for our people. I am pleased that 1000 families will be assisted this financial year.”

He said this will not only reduce the housing back log but has helped the municipality build proper roads in Mahlatswane location.

The Communication Manager for provincial department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and Human Settlement, Senne Bogatsu said that huge strides have been made in providing housing for all.

“The overall number of houses built in the province since 1994 to 2011 are 188 399 (this number excludes houses build as special projects or other programmes besides the standard RDP houses and the number would amount to just under 200 000 if houses constructed through other programmes are included such as restitution houses for example,” said Bogatsu.

Local municipalities compile lists of beneficiaries and pass them onto provincial governments for allocation.

Bogatsu said: “Municipalities are entry points as they are closer to the people. The list only gets to us once approved by the municipality according to the land available for housing development.”

The United Nations Millennium Declaration recognises the dire circumstances of the world’s urban poor. It articulates the commitment of member States to improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020.

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