

The Weekly

HLASELA TRANSFORMS JAGERSFONTEIN

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In a drive to change the lives of the people of Jagersfontein, Operation Hlasela has delivered houses, roads and jobs to the unemployed.

There was a palpable atmosphere of excitement and gratification when the SABC, the Department of Communication, signal provider Sentech, and the Free State provincial government descended on the small town of Jagersfontein in the Xhariep district to switch on a low-power transmitter to enable the community to access SABC 1, 2, and 3 as well as Lesedi FM for the first time.

The switching on of the transmitter is just one of the many infrastructure projects delivered to Jagersfontein and the surrounding areas under the auspices of Operation Hlasela, the Free State government's flagship service delivery project driven by Premier Ace Magashule. Three new transmitters were also erected at Memel, Hobhouse, and Paul Roux. In 2009, the SABC also provided the Philippolis community with full radio and television services for the first time. The switching on ceremony was held at the Jagersfontein town hall in late December. It was attended by acting SABC Chief Operations Officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng, Magashule, Lesedi FM station manager Pula Pula Mothibi, and presenter Thuso Motaung, SABC regional manager Vincent Tswenyane, and the head of stakeholder management at Sentech, Angie Maseko.

Addressing the community, Motsoeneng said full access to the services was only scheduled to take place in January 2012 but owing to the commitment of the SABC board and leadership of the Free State government under Premier Magashule "the decision was taken to give an early Christmas and New Year's gift to these four communities, thus putting the principle of Batho Pele into practice". According to Motsoeneng, the low-powered transmitters were funded through the payment of television licenses by the South African public.

The total infrastructure investment of the radio and three television services amounts to about R150 000 and approximately 2 000 households are set to benefit.

"Apart from these switch-ons, I am proud to announce that the SABC will soon be establishing quality recording studios in the Free State so that our artists do not need to go to Gauteng for this service," said Motsoeneng.

Project DTT, an initiative that will see region specific content broadcast, was also launched at the event.

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In line with its mandate of providing universal access, the SABC committed itself to rolling out similar transmitters where there is no accessibility to broadcasting services throughout the country. Maseko announced that the Jagersfontein switch-on was one of 300 Sentech has “started implementing in earnest”. “As part of the Sentech’s social responsibility programme we will be giving one laboratory to the School of Ipetleng High in Petrusburg fully equipped with computers and access to the Internet.” In his keynote address, Magashule said the government made good on its promise to ensure that Philippolis received access to full SABC services, and now the same was true of Jagersfontein. “

In 2009, working together with the GCIS in the province, we made sure Philippolis got access to the full SABC services. We said then that moving forward other areas such as Jagersfontein, QwaQwa, and Harrismith should get universal access as well, hence the Jagersfontein switch-on today. “We were able to achieve so much in Jagersfontein for the past two years through Operation Hlasela because we worked together, and together we can do more. It was my intention to go on December leave but it was decided that people should get services. A good early Christmas and New Year’s present to the people of Jagersfontein,” Magashule added.

Jagersfontein, an previously impoverished rural area 110km south of Bloemfontein, is one of the model towns in the Free State where Hlasela has brought change.

The world’s leading diamond company, De Beers, recently made headlines after selling the Jagersfontein mine that was unused for 40 years to a black economic empowerment holding company, the Superkolong Consortium.

The community is the sole beneficiary of a trust and will hold a 10% equity interest. The trust will receive R20-million for investment in projects benefitting the community and deferred an amount of R30-million which would accrue interest over time and contribute to the future financial position of the company. The consortium also made the commitment to facilitate skills transfer to members of the community with a view to ultimately source skilled labour from the area. The mine, which has operated in the area for more than 100 years, has reportedly left behind 13 million tons of mineral resources in tailings with an average 12.8 carats per hundred tons.

On the housing front, 120 families have benefitted from proper human settlement development projects underway in the area. A new multi-purpose sport field with tennis and basketball courts has been built. An arts and culture centre also has been opened and 2.5km roads have been paved. Local contractors were used in all these projects. According to the Kopanong Municipality, over 300 people, mainly the youth, have been employed in the area. Many are also currently completing learnerships. The community has a deep appreciation for these initiatives.

One beneficiary, Ronnels Strauss, said to The Weekly:

“I am happy with the Free State government under Magashule. I used to stay in a shack and now I am the proud owner of one of the Hlasela houses. I was unemployed for years but now I am working at a local mine. Just last month Hlasela donated blankets and money to victims of floods in the neighbourhood. And roads are being repaired all over the area. Today, I will have access to all SABC TV stations and I no longer have to pay R100 per month for a rented decoder in town. I am overwhelmed and want to thank the Free State government for all these. Things are happening. I am 100% behind the Free State government under the leadership of Magashule.”

The same sentiment was expressed by the mayor of the Xhariep District Municipality, Mongi Gideon Ntwanambi.

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"We are humbled as the leadership of the Xhariep District Municipality that the Free State government has also thought about us by giving the gift of education, news, and youth programmes through this switch-on. This is an indication that the premier cares. He has proven that under his leadership Xhariep shall overcome poverty." Magashule had this message of hope for 2012. "Those still without food, jobs, and houses – your day will come. Do not lose hope".

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