

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, MS. NKAKARENG RAKGOALE, AT THE EVENT OF INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING, SASKO HALL KGAPANE, GREATER LETABA MUNICIPALITY, MOPANI DISTRICT.

30th July 2019

Programme Director;

The Executive Mayor of Mopani District Municipality, Cllr. Pule Shai;

The Mayor of Greater Letaba Municipality, Cllr. Peter Matlou;

Councillors Here present;

Kgoši Modjadji and the members of the traditional council;

The Head of Department, Ms. Daphne Ramokgopa and management of the Department;

The SAPS Tzaneen Cluster Commander, Genl. K.M Mathebula;

Members of the Central Drug Authority;

Representatives from SASSA and NDA;

Representatives from various NPOs;

Our Anti-Substance Abuse ambassadors;

Members of the media;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good morning! Thobela! Avuxeni! Goeie more!

We gather here today to address a very serious issue that is affecting our Province, our country and indeed the whole world. It is also a problem that is particularly affecting our youth. Although this day is annual commemorated on 26th June, it is just a symbolic gesture to heighten awareness. The urgency of the scourge of substance abuse continues and it therefore needs to be addressed 365 days of the year.

Programme Director

To understand today's activities, we need to first know what this day is all about. It was on 7 December 1987 when the United Nations General Assembly took a resolution to declare June 26 of each year as International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. Our country as a member of the International Community joins nations of the world on this day to heighten awareness on the negative effects of substance abuse to the economy, social institutions and our geopolitical infrastructure and to galvanise communities and institutions to jointly take steps to combat substance abuse in a coordinated manner.

Hence, this year's theme is: **“Health for Justice. Justice for Health”**. The theme highlights that justice and health are two sides of the same coin when it comes to addressing drug problems. Effective responses to the world drug problem require inclusive and accountable institutions of criminal justice, health and social services, to work hand in hand in providing integrated solutions.

Indeed, drug abuse poses a serious threat to sustainable human development. Drugs destroy lives and generate crime that - if left unchecked - threatens to reverse democratic and developmental gains achieved through the sacrifices of so many.

Substance abuse is a complex health and social problem. In the light of this new paradigm shift in understanding and treating substance abuse, a policy shift has been adopted, based on new evidence that describes drug addiction as a disease that affects both the brain and behavior. The new policy shift defines addiction as a chronic, relapsing brain disease that is characterised by compulsive substance seeking and use, despite harmful consequences on the body, mind and soul.

Programme Director;

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2008 report indicates that substance abuse is worsened by complex socio economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty, peer pressure and crime in general. The youth, as I alluded to earlier, are the hardest hit by the scourge of drugs due to increases in the amount and availability of different forms of illicit and also the abuse of licit substances. That is – over the counter and prescription drugs that are easily obtainable.

Substance abuse is therefore a highly complex phenomenon that affects all communities and it cannot be addressed by any individual, organ or structure in isolation.

It needs integrated and coordinated efforts from different stakeholders. Each stakeholder both in government, civil society, and business, has a distinct role to play in the fight against substance abuse.

Programme Director;

To fight the enemy, we first have to know it.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime World Drug Report 2019, states that in 2017, an estimated two hundred and seventy one million (271 million) people or five comma five per cent (5.5%) of the global population aged 15-64, had used drugs in the previous year.

According to SACENDU – The South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use - alcohol is the most widely used substance in the Province and country at large. It is reported that that as much as 58% of deaths on South African roads can be attributed to alcohol consumption.

Cannabis and alcohol are the substances most likely to be abused. Males over the age of 20 are the biggest abusers of alcohol while male youths are the main abusers of cannabis.

It's estimated that up to 60% of crimes committed, involve the use of substances and 80% of male youth deaths are alcohol-related. South Africa also has a rate of foetal alcohol syndrome which is 5 times that of the United States.

Nyaope – a mixture of heroin and cannabis - and methamphetamine or “tik” is gaining popularity among adolescents with far reaching effects on users, families and communities.

According to the South African Medical Research Council report, there is a liquor outlet for every 190 persons in South Africa. The latest United Nations survey found that 12 million people worldwide injected drugs and that 14% of those who injected drugs are HIV positive and more than half of those are infected with the Hepatitis virus.

How then, do we approach this fight against substance abuse? The National Drug Master Plan is defined by the United Nations Drug Control Programme as a single document covering all national concerns regarding drug control. The Master Plan has identified the following strategies for a balanced approach to combat substance abuse in an integrated and holistic manner:

1. Demand Reduction:

This refers to policies and programmes directed at reducing the demand for drugs. It refers to prevention initiatives that includes educating potential users and preventing first time use or continued use of substances.

These interventions focus on community values with regard to drug abuse and aim to develop the personal and social skills of people, especially children and youth to make informed and healthy choices and to not give in to peer pressure or other temptations.

All role players, including civil society organisations, government departments and the business sector, should implement prevention programmes within their mandate and scope of responsibility. For instance, the Department of Education should infuse into their curriculum information that will empower learners to avoid substance abuse.

The Department of Social Development currently implements awareness and educational programmes in strategic areas throughout communities in general and the youth and children in particular, as they are the most vulnerable to fall into the temptation of drug abuse.

2. Supply reduction:

Another important aspect is supply reduction. Policies and programmes are aimed at stopping the production, distribution and use of drugs, especially law enforcement activities aimed at reducing the supply of illicit drugs.

3. Harm Reduction

Finally, harm reduction, referring to the treatment of people who are already dependent on substances. The aim is to manage the harm already caused by this dependency and abuse on both individuals and families. In many cases, an individual's dependency and the effects thereof, has led to the disintegration of the family unit.

We are currently, in cooperation with SANCA, offering outpatient treatment for those who can benefit from substance abuse treatment whilst remaining in their communities, where they can still be productive in the labour force. This partnership has also resulted in the activation of at least one outpatient service site in each district of the Province.

The Department is also currently funding 29 community based organisations to provide substance prevention services in various communities in the five districts. The Department has further placed social workers in all municipalities to provide substance abuse prevention, early intervention, aftercare and reintegration services.

The Seshego Treatment Centre, which was officially opened in October last year, is the first of its kind – a government facility constructed specifically for the purpose of being a treatment centre. In November 2018, it had its first intake of service users.

Programme Director;

As a build-up towards today's event, the Department facilitated dialogues in five schools namely Khubudi School in Rapitsi, Sekhukhumele School in Mapaana Village, Maolwe High School, Tshweni Secondary School and Kgapane High School.

The dialogues were aimed at educating young people on the dangers as well as the prevention of substance abuse. Herewith a summary of their opinions:

The following were substances known or recognised by the learners:

- Alcohol
- Dagga
- Nyaope
- Glue
- Space cookies
- Pain Killers and
- Cocaine

The most shocking is that they identified their peers between the ages of 12 and 15 years as those who abuse substances. The majority of learners identified the following as reasons for drug use:

- Peer Pressure
- Coping with stress
- Low self esteem
- Experimentation
- And some cultural and religious practices encouraging the use of substances, like alcohol after initiation.

When asked what they should do when faced with a substance abuse problem, they answered the following:

- Consult a social worker or health professional
- Consult your priest
- Tell a school counsellor
- Stay away from bad company

They further believed that intensifying education and awareness campaigns; building treatment centres; decisive action by law enforcement against drug dealers; community involvement in reporting of drug abuse; and the cooperation of stakeholders, will address the problem.

A joint programme was also carried out by the SAPS and the Liquor Authority on 13th July 2019 in the area where shebeens were raided and monitored for compliance.

Two liquor workshops were further facilitated by the Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism at Mokwakwaila Community Hall and Kgapanne Police Station on the 9th and 11th July.

The Department of Social Development and civil society were also involved in media campaigns on various radio stations between 25th June and 5th July 2019 where communities were given information on the negative effects of drug abuse.

In closure, it is encouraging to see how citizens join hands in this fight against substance abuse. I am proud to introduce a group of exemplary young men and women, qualified Auxiliary Social Workers who in this period of economic downslide and youth unemployment, could not find jobs. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, they showed determination and commitment by not only changing their own situation for the better, but taking steps to improve the quality of life of their fellow human beings, by establishing an organisation to work in partnership with the Department and like-minded stakeholders in addressing substance abuse and gender based violence.

The group is called “**Phaphama Mzansi**”. They have acquired mascots to use in their awareness campaigns, which I have the pleasure of officially launching today.

In closure, Programme Director;

I wish to encourage our young people gathered here today to just say no when it comes to drug abuse. You are fine without drugs. Ke Moja!

We also call on all stakeholders present to keep up the fight against drug abuse and drug trafficking. Let us assist the authorities and especially the SAPS by reporting any dealing of drugs in our communities. We cannot stand by and see our communities pulled apart by this evil. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to keep Limpopo drug-free!

It is in within our reach to fight drug abuse and build a caring society, together.

I thank you!

Ke a leboga!

Ndzi khensile!

Baie dankie!