

WORKING ON FIRE

Rises to the occasion

AT 20 YEARS OF EPWP CELEBRATIONS

Established over two decades ago, the Working on Fire (WOF) Programme, implemented by the Working on Fire-Kishugu Joint Venture, has emerged as a formidable force in combating wildland fires across South Africa and the world.



It was only fitting that WOF, one of the South African government's most successful Expanded Public Works Programmes (EPWP) funded by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment, participated in the EPWP Phase 5 Launch, on Wednesday, 24 April 2024, at the Buffalo City Stadium in East London, Eastern Cape.

WOF PARTICIPATION

WOF firefighters from the Dontsa team held a guard of honour and proudly escorted President Cyril Ramaphosa, the Eastern Cape Premier - Oscar Mabuyane - and Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Sihle Zikalala in East London.

President Ramaphosa also got to meet the WOF management team at the WOF exhibition stand, and conversed with one of our female firefighter Nomaphelo Mdayi, who was part of our Canada 2023 deployment.



forestry, fisheries
& the environment

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



WOF SUCCESSFULLY FULFILLS EPWP MANDATE

The Expanded Public Works Programme is one of the South African Government's short-to-medium term programmes aimed at the provision of additional work opportunities, coupled with training. It is a national programme covering all spheres of government and state-owned enterprises. The EPWP involves interventions in four sectors, namely, Infrastructure, Economic, Social, Environmental, and Cultural.

With over 14 million work opportunities created since its inception in 2003, the EPWP has not only provided much-needed employment but has also facilitated skills development and socio-economic upliftment for its participants.



WOF has and continues to fulfill this EPWP mandate. Over its 20-year history, it has developed a comprehensive model that goes beyond simply creating job opportunities. It focuses on providing development pathways out of poverty for participants through a suite of social development and training initiatives.



WOF offers more than just temporary employment, it serves as a stepping stone for participants' employment careers, equipping them with valuable skills and experience for broader market opportunities or advancement within the programme itself. Unlike short-term EPWP initiatives, WOF's year-round employment ensures stability and consistent development for participants, fostering long-term positive outcomes.



PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA HEAPS PRAISE ON WOF

During his keynote address, President Ramaphosa hailed our global footprint for battling wildland fires and praised WOF teams as the best in the world. His acknowledgment validates the significant contributions of the Working on Fire Programme to its much sought-after integrated wildland fire management and community resilience.

"Just very recently, we saw the great work done by the teams of Working on Fire in battling fires in the Western Cape. This is an EPWP environmental sector programme that has become so renowned across the world that the teams are called on by other countries to assist them with firefighting," said President Ramaphosa.



Ramaphosa's anecdote about the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, expressing gratitude for South Africa's assistance in fighting fires further highlights WOF's global reputation and the esteem in which South Africa's firefighting teams are held on the global stage.

"The Prime Minister of Canada, when I met him at the United Nations said to me, Mr President, we want to thank you as South Africa for giving us the best firefighting teams in the world to help us fight our fires in Canada."

Ramaphosa further praised our young men and women for exemplifying the intended objectives of the EPWP.

"In the Public Employment Programme, these firefighting teams are fit, young men and women, who are the best in the world and who have put South Africa on a global map. Some of the young men and women of this programme have gone on to be trained as emergency response personnel, as members of the South African Police Force, and even qualified as pilots."



BOLSTERING WOF'S FIREFIGHTING FORCE IS IMPERATIVE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

At the EPWP 20-year celebrations, President Cyril Ramaphosa believes and noted that the EPWP remains a critical policy instrument to tackle unemployment and reduce poverty as the government grapples with high levels of joblessness. He has since pledged on behalf of the government to improve the EPWP and to deliver five million work opportunities in the next five years.

In the face of escalating climate change impacts, South Africa is experiencing a surge in extreme weather events, including floods, droughts, and raging wildfires, mirroring global trends driven by this burning issue. The South African Government must intensify its efforts to bolster resilience and mitigate the threats posed by extreme weather events, including wildland fires.



The WOF Programme is at the forefront of this battle, a pioneering initiative that has not only become a global leader in integrated wildland fire management but also a beacon of hope for communities grappling with the consequences of an ever-changing climate. The importance of wildland fire management cannot be overstated. To confront this challenge head-on, WOF estimates that South Africa needs around 17,000 wildland firefighters to adequately cover the country's wildland fire threat.

With the support of the South African government, WOF will ensure the objectives of the EPWP are fulfilled, including the alleviation of poverty and arming youth with specialised skills that will usher in new Climate Change Warriors to save lives, and property and protect the environment.

