

“This country has never seen such intense engagement with municipalities.”

More than 100 municipalities by December this year – that is the number of municipalities touched by the Municipal Imbizo Programme since it started.

President Thabo Mbeki kicked off the programme in May in Rustenburg. As *Vuk'uzenzele* reported in October, the Cabinet decided that ministers and deputy ministers should join the programme.

■ Interaction

By now 36 Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers have

been part of this interaction with municipalities. Together with provincial and local government representatives they have focused on challenges municipalities are facing and programmes of national and municipal government that can deal with them.

■ Making a difference

“This country has never seen such intense engagement with municipalities,” said Elroy Afrika, a Deputy Director General in the Department of Provincial and Local Government. “We have got municipalities thinking quite frankly about the problems they have experienced – deliv-

ery problems, social problems, internal problems.”

Has it made a difference? “We have seen municipalities and the other two spheres of government, provincial and national, make important commitments on how they are going to deal with these problems”, he said.

■ Bucket system

One example is the bucket system. “Quite a few municipalities have recognised this is an emergency, and we have got them to redirect money to eradicate it. Some of them have now committed from next year to redirect money from the Municipal Infrastructure Grant to deal

with sanitation backlogs.”

Another issue is vacancies. A big reason for poor service delivery is shortage of well-trained managers. Yet during some izimbizo lots of vacancies in posts for senior managers were discovered. Afrika said some of the municipalities explained they were waiting for the local government election before filling them. “But the President and Ministers told them that this is unacceptable and that the vacancies must be filled as a matter of urgency.



Since then we have seen some of them advertised in newspapers.”

■ Opened doors

Imbizo has proved a trusted platform where ordinary people can raise concerns directly with government and talk about ways of dealing with them.

Project Consolidate is a two-year programme to help 136 municipalities that need assistance to improve service-delivery.

r communities to take part in improving their lives. It opened the doors for discussion of the real challenges faced by some municipalities.

INTENSE ENGAGEMENT

There are 136 municipalities which Project Consolidate is helping deal with service delivery problems.

By December over 100 of these Municipalities were involved in the Municipal Imbizo Programme. Some were covered by District Municipality izimbizo with the President and Deputy President, others by local izimbizo with Ministers and Deputy Ministers

36 Ministers and Deputy Ministers have engaged with municipalities

The functioning of Ward Committees and contact with residents have also been a focus of imbizo interactions and the issue of corruption. The President condemned those who use abused their positions: “It is critically important

to root out corruption. As you act on that matter you may then get instability that arises. But I think that all of us agree that it is better to have the instability rather than to continue with corruption in a municipality.”

■ Solve problems

To make sure that commitments made during imbizo are implemented, Premiers will be reporting to the President’s Coordinating Council where they meet two or three times a year with the President.

We asked Elroy Afrika if the

Municipal Imbizo Programme will continue. He said it would: “We will review what happened this year and refine the programme. And we will give it even stronger focus on practical action to solve problems.”

- by Staff Reporter

What are Izimbizo?

The imbizo programme draws on traditional forms of consultation in communities as well as the Masakhane Campaign of the first years of democratic government, and provincial government programmes.

Each year there are two National Imbizo Focus Weeks, in April and October. Cabinet Ministers, Premiers and MECs, Mayors and Councillors take part in hundreds of izimbizo across the country to discuss community concerns and how government programmes can be implemented to deal with them.

