

Community development workers

At the heart of participatory democracy and developmental local government

In his 2003 State of the Nation Address, President Thabo Mbeki announced that “government will create a public service echelon of multi-skilled community development workers”. The community development worker (CDW) programme is an effort to deepen democracy at the local level and is intended to give citizens direct access to government in a people-centred way. It is hoped that this people-centred approach will bring government to the doorsteps of individual citizens in keeping with the principles of *Batho Pele* (people first). In this regard, it is not a separate initiative but is designed to support initiatives at the local, provincial and national spheres of government.

Purpose of CDWs

The CDW programme is a strategic government initiative aimed at bridging the gap between government and the communities it serves.

It aims to bring public services closer to the people and to ensure that information on services and development opportunities are accessible so that they may be more effectively used, especially by poor and disadvantaged communities.

The CDW programme therefore strives to give a voice to vulnerable communities and social groups to address inequities of access to services.

Structure

The Offices of the Premiers in all the provinces are responsible for the programme’s co-ordination, while provincial local government departments provide the administrative and logistical support.

For actual workplace experience, CDWs will be deployed to municipalities and, in each one, a workplace mentor will guide and support them.

The national, provincial and local spheres of government (are expected to) work in close collaboration to effectively implement the CDW programme.

The Local Government SETA is managing and implementing the learnership programme.

CDW Handbook

The CDW Handbook and National Policy Framework provide guidelines on the attributes, identification, selection and appointment of CDWs and seek to ensure uniformity in the implementation of the programme across all nine provinces.

Funding

The National Skills Fund allocated R70 million for the implementation of the learnership programme based on 10 CDWs per municipality. The Local Government and Water SETA committed a further R4 million to be used for materials development, project management fees, assessment, certification and accommodation of CDWs.

CDW-Gateway

The CDW-Gateway portal is equipped with the latest mobile technology to enable CDWs to log on to the internet and download a range of information.

The Gateway portal is an important tool that will enable CDWs to provide a value-added service. It will provide CDWs with full access to government information without needing to carry the information with them. It will be there at the 'click of a mouse'.

This will enable CDWs to answer a range of questions and requests for information from citizens at any given time, covering all spheres of government.

Role of municipalities

The role of local government includes, among others:

key points

- The CDW programme is a strategic government initiative aimed at bridging the gap between government and the communities it serves.
 - The Offices of the Premiers in all the provinces are responsible for the programme's co-ordination, while provincial local government departments provide the administrative and logistical support.
- supporting the provincial monitoring and evaluation of the activities of CDWs;
 - creating an enabling environment for CDWs;
 - ensuring that CDWs are effectively integrated into the work ethos of municipalities;
 - mobilising stakeholders at municipal and ward level to understand and support the role of CDWs; as well as
 - repositioning local government to support, engage and respond to the issues raised by CDWs.

Reuben Baatjies

Local Government Project
Community Law Centre
and

Zelda Hintsa
Community Development Worker (Trainee)
Western Cape

For up-to-date information on the CDWs programme in your area, see the *CDWs @ Work* monthly bulletin in your province.