

## Blow for Operation Hlasela

Jan 20 2011

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Premier Ace Magashules' brainchild and pet project, Operation Hlasela, received a major blow this week when the Department of Human Settlements withdrew millions of rand meant for low cost houses, owing to the province's inability to spend it.

Minister Tokyo Sexwale announced that a total of R263m in housing grants would be taken from the province, while KZN will lose R200m for lagging behind in the delivery of houses. The money will be re-assigned to other provinces.

Operation Hlasela is a service delivery project and one of its pillars was building low-cost houses. The programme had opposition parties up in arms as they alleged it allowed Magashule to build his image as "Father Christmas".

But the premier countered by saying it was meant to fast-track delivery while allowing prompt intervention where bottlenecks existed.

President Jacob Zuma and members of the National Council of Provinces have previously praised the initiative, saying other provinces could learn from the Free State about how to ensure service delivery.

According to the statement released by Sexwale's office, the Western Cape and Eastern Cape, which were earlier in the group of under-performers would be closely watched.

"We still expect that, by the end of the administration's term, all provinces will, by and large, have met their targets," said department.

Observers, including opposition parties, said the Free State appeared to lack the capacity for major projects like low-cost housing, including inadequate project management experience.

Life Mokone, spokesperson for cooperative governance MEC Msebenzi Zwane, said that despite the loss of housing funding, under-spending was now a thing of the past.

"We can safely say, contrary to the 18% expenditure we found ourselves in at the beginning of November, we are today standing at 60% expenditure," he said.