

Deputy Minister Thomson Hands Over School Desks To Students From St Chad High School
29 July 2016

The Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs Ms. Barbara Thomson, has today 29 July 2016, handed over school desks as part of the continued Mandela month celebrations, at the St Chad High School in Ladysmith, Kwa Zulu-Natal.

The desks are made out of biomass from cleared Alien Invasive Plants/Trees and manufactured by the Department of Environmental Affairs' Eco-Furniture programme in partnership with the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and is implemented through the South African National Parks (SANParks).

The Eco-Furniture Programme has shown the viability of utilising alien invasive biomass to create jobs, in making value-added products relevant to Government's needs, and reducing the cost of clearing the invasive plants. The program has already created over 3000 work opportunities to previously unemployed youth. Many of the needy schools in the country have benefited from the school furniture and equipment donated by the Department.

Alien invasive plants cause an enormous damage and threat to water security, reduces the productive use of land, and affects the ecological functioning of natural systems. Moreover, such species deepen the impact of floods and fires, and increase soil erosion. It is estimated that these plants are present in 20 million hectares of the country, and they are spreading rapidly.

When these invasive plants/tress are cleared the wood is used to manufacture desks, through this initiative the backlog for school desks at disadvantaged schools is reduced, while creating jobs for the unemployed. Furthermore Eco-Factories around the country, produce other products such as walking sticks, chess tables, church benches, furniture, and eco-coffins.

Delivering her key note address the Deputy Minister spoke of the important role that such programmes play. "We are delighted to have partnered with the Department of Education in helping to change the lives of these disadvantaged young scholars. We understand the strain they feel when studying, seated on the floor or even standing during lessons, while trying to concentrate at the same time. Hence we saw the need to contribute towards making their studying less of a struggle, while investing in their future," she said.

During the day the Department's officials, also conducted a career guidance expo on Environmental Education aimed at the Grade 12 learners from the High School, in order to expose them to a variety of opportunities which are available in the field of environmental studies and careers.