

Inhlabamkhosi



Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane delivers her State of the Province Address

Premier Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane delivered her State of the Province Address at the August House. The address was preceded by a candle lighting ceremony and a moment of silence to pay tribute to those who died as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

To-date Mpumalanga has lost 1271 people to COVID-19, from 71525 infections and a total of 69 073 recoveries.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that she delivered the state of the province address at a time exactly a year since the first positive covid-19 case in the country was reported on the 5th of March 2020. She said that it was a time when the whole world is holding its breath and pinning its hope on the success of one of the largest global vaccination programmes that has been undertaken in history.

"We have made significant strides to counter

the devastating effect of the pandemic. Our unique approach to managing the surge of the virus in the Province has encompassed," she said.

She said that this happened through the establishment of Ward based containment teams under the leadership of Ward Councillors and thus deploying a "wall to wall" strategy across all wards in the Province.

She also extended her gratitude to the frontline workers, stating that they have worked tirelessly in the face of great adversity and in difficult circumstances to save the lives of the people of Mpumalanga.

"Their efforts will not be in vain. The Provincial Government will, in due course, honour and celebrate our frontline workers," she said.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the Mpumalanga Province has begun rolling out

the COVID-19 vaccination programme and part of the first phase which entailed the vaccination of health workers at two provincial health facilities, which are Rob Ferreira and Witbank hospitals has been completed.

"Once the next batch of vaccines arrive, we will complete the first phase of our programme, that of vaccinating all our health and emergency workers and move to the next phase," she said.

"In the second and third phases of our vaccination programme, we will vaccinate police, teachers, taxi drivers and those that are 60 years and above as well as those that are 18 years and older but with comorbidities.

This will be followed by the entire population of Mpumalanga who are above 18 years.

We shall have achieved herd immunity once we vaccinate at least more than 67% of our population," she added.

CORONAVIRUS

#COVID-19

Hotline: 0800 029 999

Precautions:

-  1 Wash your hands with soap for 20 seconds
-  2 Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow
-  3 Avoid close contact with people who are sick

The Socio Economic Impact of Covid-19 in the Province

According to Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane, predictions are that the Provincial economy will record a negative growth rate of between minus 6% and minus 7% for 2020 due to the adverse effects of COVID-19.

She reported that the most affected provincial economic sectors and industries are trade which include tourism, construction, manufacturing, as well as transport and communication.

"When compared with the anticipated global negative growth rate of minus 4% in 2020, we can conclude that our country would be among the hardest hit," she said.

However, she stated that agriculture was the least affected industry in 2020 due to the demand for agricultural products, proving once more that the Province is an important contributor to the food basket of South Africa.

"This sector even experienced job gains during the hard lockdown period, as it recorded growth of more than 11% in the first 9 months of 2020. As a result of the adverse effects of the pandemic South Africa's GDP contracted by 16.6% in the second quarter of 2020, however it rebounded in the third quarter after the economy opened up again," she said.

With regard to job losses, Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the Province projected a loss of 100 000 jobs in 2020.

"These job losses were expected to be experienced in industries such as construction, trade, including tourism and manufacturing. To this end, the 2020 quarter 2 figures from Statistics SA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey indicated the worst job losses at 134 000," she said.

However, when the economy re-opened in the third quarter, she said that Mpumalanga recorded 49 000 job gains which eventually led to net job losses of around 85 000 during the period under review.

"What this means is that job losses impact negatively on consumer spending, and eventually increase poverty and inequality. We are concerned that the youth and women become the most affected by the high unemployment rate," she commented.



She said that the latest unemployment result figures which were released by STATS SA recently show that unemployment in this province, jumped to 33% in the fourth quarter, the highest since 2008.

"If one uses the expanded definition of unemployment which includes those who are discouraged from seeking employment the figure jumps even further to 42.4% slightly better than the national figure of 42.6%," she commented.

2020/2021 financial year commitments

In her speech, Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane stated that a number of commitments and promises made to the people of Mpumalanga had to be changed because of the major challenges encountered due to the sudden emergence and rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to change our plans, resources were redirected to urgent and pressing issues aimed at curbing the spread of the pandemic.

Every national department, provincial department and our municipalities were asked to reprioritize and focus on COVID-19 response measures," she said.

She added that the situation in the Province was exacerbated by the recent floods which destroyed roads and bridges, schools and clinics and blew away homes of the most vulnerable people in the province.

"I have directed the Department of Public Works Roads and Transport to evaluate the extent of flood damage to the infrastructure. Preliminary

assessments indicate an estimated amount of R1,3 billion will be required to commence with the reconstruction and repairs to the damaged infrastructure," she said.

"We are also exploring establishing a partnership with the Department of Correctional Services to tap into the skills of inmates as part of the societal re-integration programme," she said.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that another important commitment undertaken in the last SOPA address was the launching and operationalization of the youth development fund.

According to her, R50 million was budgeted for the first phase of this programme.

"We called for the expression of interest from young people of Mpumalanga province. Thousands of them responded positively. This multiyear programme invites numerous youth owned SMMEs to submit proposals outlining the growth and funding needs of their businesses," she said.

"These enterprises are then provided with

training and funding to grow the operational footprint," she said.

"We have heard the cries of the youth and as a result, we will open the application process for more youth owned businesses to submit their proposals. We urge our young people to continue to grab this opportunity with both hands," she commented.

She added that government also committed to expanding the infrastructure programmes throughout the province.

"Some of our multiyear infrastructure programmes were progressing, albeit slowly, like the construction of new hospitals and the renovation of the old ones, other projects could not be undertaken as resources were diverted to mitigate against the COVID-19 pandemic," she said.

"We were however, able to start and complete a number of other infrastructure projects. I will elaborate more on these projects during the course of this address," she added.



Fulfilling the Mandate in the Midst of a Pandemic

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the core elements of the economic reconstruction and recovery roadmap are aligned with the government's Medium Term Strategic Framework, which is a reflection of the ruling party's manifesto and the commitment to implement the National Development Plan. "Government's MTSF 2019-2024 is the planned implementation of the NDP Vision 2030, and the implementation of the electoral mandate of the Sixth Administration of government. It lays out the package of interventions and

programmes that will achieve outcomes to ensure success in realising the ideals of vision 2030," she said.

The plan focuses on the seven priorities of the sixth administration of government.

These seven priorities are;

Building a capable, ethical developmental state;

Focusing on economic transformation and job creation;

Expanding and improving education, skills and health outcomes

Consolidating the social wage through reliable and quality basic services;

Spatial integration, human settlements and strong local government;

Social cohesion and safer communities; and lastly

"We are almost half way through the five year period of our MTSF and a lot has been accomplished. Our government has a huge responsibility to galvanize society towards a common vision as articulated in the NDP," she said.

Towards a fully integrated District Development Model

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that government has introduced the District Development Model, a new integrated district based approach to address service delivery challenges, prioritize localization of procurement and job creation within the communities.

"A capable ethical and developmental state is not achievable as long as the government continues to function in a disjointed and uncoordinated manner.

Embedded within the implementation of the District Development Model are individualised Economic Recovery Plans per district which will direct the economic potential of the

Districts by leveraging local resources-across the three spheres of government, business and communities in order to address the economic challenges confronting each District.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the public private partnership component within the District Development Model is beginning to bear fruits. She said the Steve Tshwete local municipality will be working together with private sector partners to build a R350 million four star hotel.

"This public private partnership project has Akani Properties, a black owned property development company as a partner along

with the internationally renowned Raddison Hotel Group," she explained.

She explained that the hotel will have a capacity of 150 beds and a convention centre of 1000 seats. She said that part of the conditions of the award is that 10% ownership should be local and 30% of the construction work should be subcontracted to local businesses.

"This project will create hundreds of jobs during the construction phase and permanent jobs once operational. For us to succeed in this approach, we must ensure that local wealth is not extracted out of our communities but is generated and recirculated locally," she said.

Focus on economic transformation and job creation, through Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan during the Pandemic times. Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the province is also aligning the Mpumalanga Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (MEERP) with the Presidential pronouncement and is currently in the process of engaging different stakeholders to obtain their input, buy-in and support.

"We will focus on areas where the province has a competitive advantage, a clearly defined and sustainable economic growth path. Top of our priorities is economic transformation and mass job creation," she said.

Premier said that government is committed to intensifying the roll out of the Mpumalanga Industrial Development Plan; Nkomazi Special Economic Zone (SEZ); and the Mpumalanga International Fresh Produce Market.

"These initiatives will open opportunities for value chains development, agro-processing, trade and export, including the agricultural development of the SADC region.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said the Nkomazi SEZ has received a boost following a very ambitious investment proposal by an Mpumalanga based property development company.

"As a Province, we have been actively engaging private sector partners who wish to work with us in creating an Agri-processing facility surrounding the Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport (KMIA)," she said.

She said that progress is beginning to manifest in the construction of the Mpumalanga International Fresh Produce Market.

"As we speak, we anticipate the finalisation of the main market by the end of the upcoming financial year," she said.

On the Nkomazi SEZ, she said that the province is working together with the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, the Nkomazi Local Municipality, the Ehlanzeni District Municipality and traditional authorities, to among other things;

- Finalise all the statutory requirements needed to ensure that the SEZ site is legally compliant;
- Conclude all the planning and design work so that the development of the site can commence in the upcoming financial year; and
- strengthening the investment pipeline.

Other Economic growth measures to mitigate against the horrific effects of COVID-19 pandemic

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that government is working on a number of measures as part of a drive to grow the economy and to create more jobs and fight the scourge of poverty and inequality. She said that these include but are not limited to:

- Ensuring that all Departments eliminate bottlenecks and pay valid invoices within 30 days;
- Providing Relief Funding to SMMEs;
- Implementing the Mpumalanga Tourism

Recovery Plan;

- Fast-tracking support to Highveld Steel in order to promote the establishment of the Mining and Metal Industrial Technology Park;
- Also fast-tracking the establishment of the Petro-chemical Industrial Technology Park; and Forestry Industrial Technology Park;

She said that another important area of work that government is paying undivided attention to is the green economy.

"Studies have shown us that the green economy also presents opportunities for inclusive growth and the creation of more green jobs for our people.

When we addressed this August House last year, we indicated that we have developed the Mpumalanga Green Economy Development Plan to guide the Province in driving the green economy, whilst at the same time, mitigating the impact of climate change," she said.

"This government is collaborating with Green Cape and the GIZ, to implement the Mpumalanga Green Economic Development Plan. These partners are currently in the process of finalising the establishment of a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) that is core in driving the implementation of the Plan," she said.

In implementing this Plan, we have mobilized industry to work closely with our government. As a result, SAPPI will commission its Biomass Plant in the Province around June this year," she added.





A roadmap to a better brighter future

Amidst the challenging economic environment, Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the following infrastructure Projects are currently in progress and some are nearing completion;

- Middelburg Hospital;
- Bethal Hospital;
- Mammethlake Hospital;
- Mapulaneng Hospital;
- Pankop clinic;
- 382 projects have been completed (including 54 sanitation projects) for the Department of Education;
- 2 clinics, in Oakley and KwaMdladla;
- 5 projects completed including Thulamahashe Children's Home, Nkangala District
- Office Phase IIB and 3 Branch Offices in Kriel, Mashishing and Agincourt;
- The Thubelihle Library was completed; and
- As many as 8 road infrastructure improvement projects were completed in Mashishing, Barberton, Matsulu, Numbi, Delmas, Driekopies and Thulamashe.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the issue of dilapidating infrastructure will continue to receive attention in the upcoming Financial Year. She said that government will prioritise infrastructure that is essential in the provision

of access to services of government.

"We have identified the Kwa Mhlanga government precinct as one of the sites that are in dire need of expedited infrastructural maintenance. Work will commence imminently and will be completed by the end of the 2021/2022 Financial Year," she said.

Premier also announced that the Emalahleni Local Municipality has apportioned land for the construction of the tertiary hospital.

"We have completed the business case development and also completed the clinical brief. Construction will commence soon," she said.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that government has introduced the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme(PESP) as part of the public investment in mass employment.

She said that last year, Mpumalanga received R645 million to improve access to services and opportunities for people in rural areas. She said that this programme supports amongst others;

- the paving of Municipal Township and rural roads;
- short term employment in the education sector such as teacher assistants, screeners

- and general workers; and
- The employment of social workers.

She said that currently, several projects are being implemented in the Bushbuckridge, Chief Albert Luthuli, Dr JS Moroka, Thembisile Hani and Nkomazi Local Municipalities.

"Going forward, Infrastructure South Africa (ISA) will be responsible for project preparation, packaging, funding pathways and providing strategic oversight over all the gazetted projects

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that channelling support through existing public employment programmes such as EPWP, Sakh'abakhi, Siyatentela and National Youth Service will allow for a more rapid response to the current economic crisis.

"As a Province, we have created 19 649 jobs through the Expanded Public Works Programme. The main beneficiary of these opportunities were 12 254 Women; 9 239 Young people; and 159 People with disabilities. "Once we have adopted our EPWP projects accordingly as well as enhanced safety measures to ensure continuous compliance with COVID-19 health regulations, we will surpass the target of 44 180 set for the 2021/2022 financial year," she said.

Health and Social Development

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane hailed the Department of Health and the frontline workers for playing a pivotal role in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

"As would be expected, this department was at the coalface in combating the spread of the virus and they did a sterling job. We applaud the work of our frontline staff and emergency services for the commitment and dedication they have shown, placing their lives at risk to

rescue ours," she said.

"Some of them have paid the ultimate price for their dedication. We extend our deepest condolences to their families friends and relatives and proudly declare that their names will remain in the indelible books of our history," she added.

To improve on emergency turn-around time, she said that the department procured 67 new ambulances to add to the existing fleet.

In continuing to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic, she said that government will continue to work within the national framework of the 90/90/90 strategy.

"Through MPAC, we will continue to vigorously implement the Mpumalanga Provincial Implementation Plan for HIV, TB and STIs," she said.



Recent Devastating Floods Disaster and our Response to it

The Mpumalanga Province was hit by devastating heavy rains with strong winds. Bridges were damaged, some dwellings were swept away, flooding posed threat to infrastructure, human life, property and personal belongings.

For this reason, Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane committed to build and reconstruct within the next 12 to 24 months;

- all major provincial roads, bridges and buildings that were affected by the recent

floods;

- support municipalities rebuild their road networks and bridges that were destroyed during the floods; and
- Assist the most vulnerable members of our society whose homes were destroyed by the floods.

"I have instructed COGTA and the Department of Human Settlements to act with speed in identifying and rebuilding houses for people who have no means to rebuild their homes,"

she said.

"As I have indicated earlier on, the Province has already conducted a preliminary assessment which suggests that we will need just over R1.3 billion to attend to all infrastructure damages that were caused by the floods. However, the costs for urgent and immediate work that needs to be undertaken within 3 to 12 months are just over R600 million," Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane commented.



Agriculture, the backbone of our economy

Agriculture is the backbone of Mpumalanga's economy in as much as the majority of the people of Mpumalanga derive their livelihood from agriculture and other related economic activities.

It provides employment and income and remains the only industry that has the potential of propelling people from abject poverty into prosperity.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the only way of growing the sector is by providing the land to the people.

She said that government has released 33 farms totalling to 8906 hectares throughout the Province. Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that these farms are available for emerging farmers to lease on unused or underutilized or vacant state land. She said that government is offering the previously disadvantaged farmers a 30 year leasehold with an option to buy.

In addition to that, she said that these farms will greatly assist in expanding the Fortune 40 programme that has a specific focus on developing young entrepreneurs in farming.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the small scale farmer assistance programme called Phezukomkhono Mlimi is providing mechanisation and input support to subsistence, emerging farmers and households which are engaged in agriculture. She said that farmers receiving support from government are expected to enrol in courses offered by the AgriSETA.

She said that other interventions include the re-commissioning of the Bushbuckridge poultry abattoir and support for soya and maize farmers to supply the Lekwa Oilseed Crushing Plant in Standerton.

In order to positively respond to the impact of Climate Change and Environmental

Degradation that is rapidly escalating globally. Premier said that her administration has stepped up its commitment in advocating and mainstreaming climate change and environmental issues for a better, cleaner and healthier environment for all in the Province and beyond.

"We have elevated our focus, amongst others, on, development of climate response tools, to respond on the negative impact of climate change, education and awareness, demonstration and job creation in the environmental sector," she said.

"The implementation of the Zonda Insila Programme also serves as a Climate Change intervention in reduction of greenhouse gases while promoting environmental protection and socio-economic upliftment is on course and will create the much needed jobs," she added.



Education and skills development

Amidst all the odds of the COVID-19 pandemic, Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the class of 2020 matriculants have defied all the fear and anxiety and produced results that were least expected.

"We were the worst and we ended up with the better than expected. The results proved once more that we are a resilient Province built on an unbreakable spirit," she said.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane stated that whilst the provincial matric pass rate dropped from 80% to 73.7%, there was an increase in the quality of results of those who wrote exams.

"The greatest achievement which we must acknowledge and cherish is the fact that our learners and teachers managed to return to class under extremely difficult circumstances," she said.

As part of the campaign of improving reading and learning capabilities at an early stage for children, Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that government will put more resources and emphasis on early childhood development as well as early grade reading for comprehension. She said that government will also increase the number of high schools that provide technical subjects to cater for learners who are more interested in skills development. She said that

31 circuits out of 70 will now have schools that cater for technical subjects.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane also announced that the Mpumalanga Province has 370 students on full government bursaries furthering their studies in Russia. She said that 20 of them have graduated in medicine and in engineering.

"Government has absorbed all engineering students whilst medicine graduates have registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa," she said.

She said that this year, the government will resume with the piloting robotic coding programme which was postponed last year due to the pandemic.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the Province will continue to work tirelessly to among others;

- Eradicate substandard school infrastructure and including adding more classrooms in
- overcrowded urban areas that are experiencing influx of learners like Mbombela,
- Mashishing, Emalahleni, Govan Mbeki and Steve Tshwete;
- Award more bursaries to students who

attend universities throughout South Africa.

- Currently we have 2203 students at different universities funded by government;
- Strengthen the National Nutrition Feeding Scheme programme which has yielded extremely positive results by reducing absenteeism and early dropout of schools whilst
- at the same time fighting malnutrition and reducing hunger and poverty;
- Supply dignity packs to all needy learners;
- Provide learners and educators with a safe school environment by working with SAPS, police forums, school governing bodies, teachers, learners and other civil society organizations to fight crime and the substance abuse;
- Prepare plans and budgets to build a school for the deaf and blind in eMalahleni;
- As part of enhancing requisite skills that match the industry expectations and requirements working with the private sector, build the skills hub at eMalahleni;
- Finalise the e-learning strategy in the first quarter of the upcoming financial year.
- Over this MTEF, roll out the distribution of tablets to all learners across the Province.



Social Services

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane stated that research by pundits revealed that many people are experiencing COVID-19 related stress. She said that the rampant job losses have led to financial strain and stay-at-home orders have exacerbated toxic relationships and have increased the risk of gender based violence (GBV).

In addition to this burden, she said that separation from others has led to feelings of isolation, and individuals who have lost loved ones have been left to grieve without traditional mourning and burial practices.

"The unpredictable circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to intertwined emotional experiences of anxiety, depression, grief, and trauma. Working with non-profit, non-governmental organizations and civil society, we must step in and provide assistance," she said.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the number of orphans and children who need foster care will increase, and so will the number of women and children who are survivors of gender based violence who will need shelter.



Integrated Human Settlements

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that government will continue to provide top structures for the most vulnerable members of the society including the elderly, child headed homes, people living with disabilities, Gender Based Violence survivors who have no means to provide for themselves and other vulnerable groups.

"We will continue with our preparations for integrated Human Settlement mega projects by pushing forward with township developments, opening township registers and general plans for Inkosi City in Dantjie, and Dingweli in the City of Mbombela, Smart City in Nkomazi, Retiefville

in Mkhondo, Secunda West in Govan Mbeki, and Rondebosch in Steve Tshwete Local Municipalities.

For the 2021/2022 financial year, she said that government is planning to service more than 5000 sites for different categories of housing programmes, complete more than 3000 units again under different programmes including People's Housing Programme, Low costs programme, Military Veterans, Rural Housing and Integrated Residential Housing Programme.



Local Government Access to basic services

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane stated that a positive report of some progress was recorded during the year under review, where Local Governments in the Province were able to implement infrastructure projects for the delivery of basic services, despite the serious Covid-19 pandemic challenges that stood as a negative deterrent.

She said that a total of 21 Water Infrastructure Projects were completed benefiting 45470 households to the value of R592 million.

She also reported that an additional 22 Sanitation Infrastructure projects, which benefited additional 2 342 households were also completed and a further 46 sanitation projects to the amount of R246 million are under construction to improve access to decent sanitation services that will add to the total number of 622 398 households with decent sanitation.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane stated that the Department of Water and Sanitation continues with supporting critical municipalities such as Bushbuckridge where the upgrading of the Malvajan Waste Water Treatment Works is under construction, as well as the upgrading of the Embalenhle Bulk Sewer line, using the Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant.

She said that the Hoxane regional bulk water scheme is now being shared between the City of Mbombela and Bushbuckridge Local Municipalities, whilst further interventions are envisaged through the RBIG support to augment water supply from the Rus De Winter dam to Weltevreden Water Treatment Plant in the Dr JS Moroka Local Municipality as well as the acceleration of the Regional Bulk Water Supply from the Loskop Dam to the communities of Thembisile Hani Local Municipality.

"We are also pleased to receive some

progress from the Department of Water and Sanitation regarding the identified site for the construction of the City of Mbombela Dam as we had announced in our previous SOPA," she said.

According to Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane, preliminary studies have shown that of the three possible sites identified within the City of Mbombela, the Mountain View area has been strongly recommended as a possible catchment area for the dam.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane also announced the establishment of the DBSA sponsored Provincial Programme Management Unit (PPMU) within CoGTA. She said that Programmes such as Town Planning, Asset Care, Revenue Enhancement, Master Planning and interventions on Operations and Maintenance planning are but some of the programmes being rolled out to support municipalities.

In a bid to fight corruption and maladministration in the municipalities, Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that investigations have been completed in terms of section 106 of the Municipal Systems Act in Dr JS Moroka, Dr Pixley Ka Isaka Seme and Govan Mbeki local municipalities, with the recommendations provided to municipalities for implementation. In order to stabilize our municipalities, she said that the Provincial government through CoGTA will continue to administer the provisions of section 139(1)(b) of the Constitution in Dr JS Moroka local municipality and any other municipality that fails to operate optimally with clear measurable performance areas to turn around the municipalities for the better.

Whilst some milestones in improving the efficiency of the Municipalities have been recorded, she said that there are still significant challenges in the areas of

financial management, institutional capacity, governance and technical engineering capabilities.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that Traditional Leaders are of the utmost importance right throughout the landscape. She said that the current leadership posture by all traditional leaders in the fight against GBVF, illegal invasion of open land and advocacy work against substance abuse are all indicative of a good relationship that should always be nurtured.

She added that the involvement of Amakhosikati structure further showcase these noble programmes to restore good societal values and humanity. She urged both councillors and traditional leaders to work together and be a part of key local government development decisions taken in Municipal Councils.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that the Mpumalanga Province is experiencing exponential population growth in particular among 4 local municipalities. She reported that the Provincial population increased from 4.04 million in 2011 to 4.68 million in 2020, an increase of 640 000 people in the 9 year period. Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that municipalities that are attracting large numbers of new residents and growing at 2.5% per annum and more are; Steve Tshwete, Emalaheni, Victor Khanye & Govan Mbeki. These municipalities are projected to grow from around 1.16 million in 2016 to 1.87 million by 2030.

She said that the City of Mbombela's population is projected to grow up to 800000 people by 2030. She said believes that this will undoubtedly put pressure on basic service delivery, infrastructure, job and economic opportunities in these municipalities.



Crime, Corruption and Safer Communities

According to Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane, the latest crime statistics paint a disturbing picture that suggests that whilst there has been a decrease in all other forms of crime, contact crime which includes murder, sexual assault, property crime and other serious crimes are on the increase.

"Unfortunately Mpumalanga was amongst the worst affected provinces in the country. A significant part of this crime involves Gender Based Violence. Criminals live amongst us, socialize with us and commit some of these crimes in our full view," she said.

She urged people to report criminals to the police.

She said government, working with police forums and community based organizations will aggressively launch and monitor crime prevention campaigns and introduce anti-crime workshops in schools as a form of

awareness and deterrent to young people.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that road safety is one of the key challenges that needs everyone to confront.

Due to the rise in fatalities that affects everyone, Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that government will continue to increase visibility across all roads in the Province.

"We will take harsh action against negligent and irresponsible drivers," she said.

In fighting corruption in government, she said that she has instructed Provincial Treasury, to collaborate with the Office of the Auditor General to vigorously implement the provisions of the Audit Amendment Act to ensure that perpetrators of financial misconduct not only incur criminal prosecution but are also held personally liable for the mismanagement of public resources.

"We will continue to petition the Special

Investigating Unit to probe instances of prima-facie financial mismanagement," she said.

Premier Mtshweni-Tsipane said that it was prudent that people remain vigilant and not drop their guards against the monstrous COVID-19 pandemic.

She urged people to wear their masks all the time, wash hands thoroughly, sanitize and keep a required safety distance.

"We have been warned against a possible corona virus third wave which could be more severe than the two previous waves. The vaccination campaign will take time to reach every citizen of this province who needs it. We therefore are appealing to our people to continue observing safety protocols. We must also remain positive. We believe that once the dark cloud is gone, we will see the sun shining again and it will still be rising from Mpumalanga," she concluded.