

**Honourable Speaker and Madam Deputy Speaker of the Mpumalanga Legislature,
Members of the Executive Council**

Honourable Members of the Mpumalanga Legislature

Honourable Members of Parliament

Honourable Chairperson of National Council of Provinces, Mr Mahlangu

His Excellency, Consul Artur Verissimo of Mozambique

Honourable Mayors, Councillors and leaders of SALGA,

**Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Provincial House of Traditional
Leaders, and our revered Traditional leaders, Amakhosi/Magoshi,**

The Provincial Commissioner of SAPS, Major General P.T. Phahla

The Director General of the Province and Heads of Departments

The Executive Heads of our parastatals and Board Chairpersons

Leadership of all sectors – labour, business, sports, and religious leaders,

Distinguished guests and all dignitaries present

Compatriots

Comrades and Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen

Honourable Speaker, in his analysis of the writings of Karl Marx, Giddens has this to say about one of Marx's early essays that survived his adolescent pen, titled '*Reflections of a young man on choosing a career*' wherein he discusses the moral obligations and the range of freedoms open to an individual who is choosing which vocation to follow in his life.

***"Marx concludes,
...which must guide us in the selection of a vocation is the welfare of
humanity, our perfection..."***

man's nature makes it possible for him to reach his fulfillment only by working for the perfection and welfare of his society... History call those the greatest men who ennobled themselves by working for the universal".

Honorable Speaker and Members, the mission of the ANC-led government is not far from what Marx is advocating. We are also a government that strives for perfection and welfare of our society, including welfare of the global society. We are working for perfection and welfare of a society that is united and anchored on the principles of democracy, non-sexism, non-racial and a world embraced by peace and prosperity.

It is a society whose ideals are expressed in the Freedom Charter – our road map to the future.

The recent ***January 8 statement*** of the ruling Party reminded us about this society that we seek to create.

Indeed, it reminds us that, as an ANC-led government, together with the people, we are striving to realize:

- ***“a united state based on the will of all people, without regard to race, sex, belief, language, ethnicity or geographic location.***
- ***a dignified and improving quality of life among all the people by providing equal rights and opportunities to all citizens, and***
- ***the restoration of the birthright of all South Africans regarding access to land and other sources”***

Our Mandate

Therefore, as we work for this perfection and welfare of our society, we need to remain steadfast in our quest of addressing the legacy of our unpleasant history while accelerating our march to the future society envisage by the Freedom Charter.

Honourable Speaker, the ANC-led government has always been the product of the people. All our Manifestos have been a product of our people.

In the 2009 Manifesto, our people gave us a clear mandate.

They demand of us to forge ahead with our endeavours to eradicate abject poverty, unemployment and inequalities – ills that continue to devastate their lives on daily basis.

Together, we agreed that, if we have to make an impact on these challenges, we must focus on:

- **Creating decent work and sustainable livelihood;**
- **Improving the quality of education and health of our people;**
- **Enhancing the standard of living of the rural poor; and**
- **Fighting crime and corruption that is so pervasive within our society.**

In addition, we agreed to foster rapid economic growth so that we could be able to realize these priorities.

Honourable Speaker, like in the past two years, today one has, once more, come to ascertain our people that the five priorities that we have agreed upon as key areas of focus during the period of President Zuma's administration, are definitely on course.

Although we had a slow start at the beginning of our term due to the unprecedented world economic meltdown since the Great Depression, the recent signs of gradual economic improvement are quite encouraging in that such developments provide us with a window of opportunity to add momentum in our quest of realizing the priorities that we have set for ourselves.

Economic outlook

According to analysts, our economy seems to be gradually coming out from the recession. They argue that the base laid by the 2010 World Cup, global recovery and the continuation of the fiscal stimulus will help return the country to growth.

It is projected that private consumption will grow moderately, helped by rising income but still constrained by high unemployment. Exports are expected to grow moderately and will also boost private investment, although higher energy costs will hamper business activity.

In essence, the timid resumption of external demand, coupled with a partial relaxation of credit conditions, is expected to progressively bolster economic activity in 2011.

Progress on 2010 priorities and priorities for 2011

Creating decent work and sustainable livelihood

Honourable Speaker, this positive broad economic outlook is definitely welcomed. Undoubtedly, we need to take advantage of it and continue vigorously with structural reform, skills development and attracting foreign direct investment to unlock our growth potential.

Of critical importance, job creation should be at the center of our economic activities.

Honourable Speaker and Members, in the past two years, we have not been performing very well in this priority area. The world economic crisis not only stifled our efforts to foster rapid economic growth that could create jobs and tackle poverty meaningfully but also increased the level of unemployment.

Thanks to the strong, coordinated and timely fiscal response of government and the important role played by the private sector to cushion the negative effects of the crisis, particularly in terms of protecting jobs. Otherwise the situation could have been far much more devastating to all of us, not to mention the poor.

I would, once again, like to thank all the business people who did their best to protect jobs during those difficult times.

My gratitude also go to Eskom, in particular, for re-commissioning the three old power stations – Camden near Ermelo, Grootvlei around Barlfour and Komati between Middelburg and Bethal and the resuscitation of the Kusile project. All these initiatives created new job opportunities for our people. We are grateful indeed.

Honourable Speaker, escalating the Expanded Public Works Programme also assisted in terms of providing relief to our poor people during these trying times. To date, we have **created 28 908 job opportunities** through EPWP.

As government, we will continue to enhance our support to this programme in years to come. It provides opportunity for skills acquisition and bread on the table for our poor people during the life span of projects.

The skills acquired by individuals serve as the base upon which they could build on to enhance their capacities for future opportunities in the labour market.

Honourable Speaker and Members, still on the point of job creation, this month last year, we promised to take forward resolutions of all Summits held in the past with business and labour.

To this end, one must point out that we did not fare very well. While there are few resolutions that are currently in the implementation phase, the bulk of them are still in the planning phase.

The deep institutional reforms introduced by the new administration slowed down our own provincial implementation processes because these fundamental changes brought along with it paradigm shifts on, among other things, matters of economic planning and the growth trajectory that we have to follow as a country.

Fortunately, the completion of the National Growth Path recently provided us with a window of opportunity to pursue our provincial policy imperatives. As we speak, we have already initiated a process of developing the Mpumalanga Economic Growth and Development Path – a process that is almost at its final stage.

We have ensured that our provincial perspective in the development of this Growth Path is informed, to a large extent, by the work that we have already done in our previous Summits.

Honourable Speaker and Members, let me emphasize that central to the proposed Mpumalanga Economic Growth and Development Path, like the National Growth Path, is economic growth that focuses on job creation and the reduction of poverty and inequalities.

It is a Growth Path that is looking at a ten year growth horizon. It is a Growth Path that envisages to create **720 000 jobs** by 2020. However, for the Province to realize this target, analysts suggest that the economy of the province has to grow at an economic growth rate of between **5 to 7 percent** per annum.

Honourable Speaker, given the growth potential of the Province, we believe that these targets are achievable.

Analysis show that the main economic sectors that will support this growth potential involve:

- Agriculture and forestry
- Mining and energy
- Tourism and cultural industries

Honourable Speaker, we are largely a rural province. Agriculture is one of our biggest job absorbers.

While the contribution of the agricultural sector to the GDP shows a declining trend over the past ten years or so, it still remains an extremely important sector to our economy. The existing opportunities in crop and animal production, including the entire value chain have not been fully exploited.

One is talking of opportunities in the production of sugarcane, nuts, vegetables, citrus and sub-tropical fruits, summer grains, oilseeds and deciduous fruits, particularly for small-scale farmers.

Through research we could:

- improve farming techniques of farmers, especially emerging farmers,
- improved cultivars,
- Increase productivity and skills development, including increasing value adding and agro-processing.

Mining, manufacturing and the energy sectors are also important drivers of economic growth and job creation in the province. We are the major producers of coal and power generation, and also a home for big manufacturing industries. It is argued that opportunities in the mining industry will come from coal; chrome; gold; platinum and dimension stones.

While the activities of mining, manufacturing and power generation have negative impact on soil, air and water quality, they also present new opportunities in the area of green economy. We need new technologies to abate the social costs incurred from the Energy Complex activities.

Tourism and cultural industries also have huge potential in terms of growth and job creation. We are rich in physical products and heritage.

Honourable Speaker, as government, we believe that, if we invest more in these sectors, it is possible to place our economy on a positive growth path.

Together with the relevant stakeholders in these sectors, we need to tackle the issues of unsettled land claims, water availability, infrastructure, skills development and comprehensive support to small-scale farmers, particularly those who have benefitted from the land restitution and land redistribution programmes.

However, as we gear the economy towards this growth trajectory, our economic activities must always be underscored by the sustainability agenda – an area of work that must be strengthened as we exploit the natural resources for development.

The case in point is the competition that exists between agriculture and mining in the Province.

Both sectors are key to our economy. Unfortunately, as we conduct mining activities, we simultaneously destroy the fertile agricultural land which is so crucial for our food security and job creation. Underground water also gets polluted in the process.

To mitigate this unfortunate dilemma, rehabilitation of depleted or old mines to restore agricultural land, including purification and reclamation of polluted underground water must remain our top priority.

Another important principle that must guide our Growth Path is the development of SMMEs and cooperatives.

We have to bridge the gap between the first and the second economy. We have to ensure that the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment continue to guide our economic activities.

Special attention must also be given to Youth, Women and people with disabilities.

Evidently, for this Growth Path to succeed, we need to address, among other things, constraints such as deficiencies in our infrastructure network, resulting in high transport and production costs, high levels of concentration in key economic sectors undermining competitiveness and the challenges faced by the labour market.

In essence, the supply of appropriate skills to the economy and financial support cannot be overemphasized.

Honourable Speaker and Members, President Zuma has declared 2011 as the Year **of job creation**.

Now, as a response to this call, the Provincial Government has decided to put aside **2,7 billion** to support **job creation initiatives in the next three years**.

This amount will be dedicated to, in the main, infrastructure development due to its ability deliver massive jobs within a short space of time. This money will be utilised for, *inter alia*:

- Roads construction and maintenance, particularly roads in Piet Retief, Witbank, Ermelo and Mashishing
- Paving of streets in human settlement areas
- Maintenance of public institutions such clinics, schools and government buildings
- Construction of schools, Peoples Housing Programme, Community Health Centers in rural areas, and
- Bulk Water infrastructure

We are also planning to work together with the private sector and labour in this regard. Together, we could leverage additional money from **the R9 billion** set aside by the national government to support job creation initiatives.

Honourable Speaker and Members, we are quite aware that, for these good intentions to see the day of light, proper planning and tight monitoring of the implementation plans is extremely crucial.

To this end, the office of the Premier will be responsible for monitoring and evaluation of the implementation plans of all Departments involved in this area of work, including agreements that we would have reached with other stakeholders.

All our parastatals, namely, The Mpumalanga Economic Growth Agency, Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency and Mpumalanga Regional Training Trust are also going to be central in driving the job creation agenda of government.

We expect to see the Mpumalanga Economic Growth Agency playing a major role with regard to delivery of strategic infrastructure projects and other key economic initiatives. The agency must expand its current base of viable small businesses.

Attraction of foreign direct investment and mobilization of other sources of funding will be other major responsibilities that this agency will be expected to intensify.

Growth potential in the tourism sector will be driven by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency.

Like MEGA, we expect to see this agency attracting more tourists to the Province, capitalizing on the strength of our physical attractions, rich culture and heritage, and rigorously developing new tourism products for the market. Transformation of the industry through the development of small business is going to be paramount.

In the light of the new developments in government, the role of the Mpumalanga Regional Training Trust cannot be overemphasized.

The focus of government on up-scaling small businesses development activities in all the job drivers reflected in the Growth Path, particularly in the area of infrastructure and the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme, places the MRTT right at the center as far as skills development is concerned. It has to empower our people *en masse* on a range of skills that will be required at different delivery points of government work.

However, for all these parastatals to be able to deliver effectively on their mandates, we have to ensure that the institutional and human capital capacities, systems and processes are strengthened. Fortunately, together with the parastatals, we have set in motion processes to address these challenges.

Honourable Speaker and Members, a number of businesses, particularly SMMEs, are forced to shut down due government's failure to pay on time. This has a negative impact on the economy and our ability to create and retain jobs.

The procurement system of government will also require a serious revamp if we have to realize our expectations on service delivery. We need an administrative machinery that is geared towards the acceleration of service delivery to our people. We cannot afford a situation where our service providers are not paid on time.

Our turn-around time of paying service providers within 30 days still stands.

Managers and officials who fail to adhere to this standard for no apparent reason should face disciplinary action. We cannot afford to keep officials who are not prepared to take the interests of our people to heart.

We are, therefore, calling upon all government officials to assist in creating a culture of a caring government – a government that is striving very hard to deliver on the commitments that it has agreed upon with the people.

Comprehensive Rural development strategy that linked to land and agrarian reform and food security

Honourable Speaker and Members, poverty continues to be a thorn in the flesh of our people, particularly to those living in the rural areas.

The negative effects of the economic crises continue to haunt the poor the most. The recent increase in prices of essential goods and services, especially oil and electricity, further worsen their poverty situation.

The recent floods that engulfed the entire country and some parts of the world will also add to their misery because, not very long, food prices will also be increasing.

Honourable Speaker and Members, the ANC-led government committed itself to lift up the standard of living of the rural poor. In the past two years, the plight of the rural poor never escaped our attention.

As a Province, our interventions were quite targeted and will continue to be such for as long as our people are confronted by abject poverty. Our current approach to poverty is slightly different.

We are no longer focusing on the forests but the individual tree. To be precise, we are now paying close attention to individual households rather than focusing on the entire community or village.

Our interventions are not only assisting households who are linked to good market opportunities but also ensures investment in human capital development, good nutrition and a healthy life style. Our social expenditure never bypasses the poorest of the poor living within the same community identified as poverty pockets.

Honourable Speaker, it is our conviction that 'The Anti-Poverty Strategy' that we are pursuing currently as government, will contribute meaningfully towards addressing the challenges confronting the rural poor. It will definitely contribute towards changing their lives for the better.

With regard to the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme that we are piloting in Mkhondo, if Members will recall, we promised to run this pilot project for a period of two years, after which it will be rolled-out to other parts of the Province. March this year will mark the end of the two year time period.

Looking at the two years of our involvement in Mkhondo, how did we fare in terms of piloting the CRDP concept?

While we did not perform as expected, there are positive strides that we have made.

As far as sustainable agrarian reform is concerned, through the Masibuyele Emasimini Programme, we managed to encourage people to till their land and produce food for their own livelihood. We provided technical and infrastructure support such as mechanisation, fencing and irrigation to the identified beneficiaries. We also provided training to the Youth, empowering them on building and tourism related trades.

Progress was also made with regard to rural development and land reform activities. In partnership Mondi, we have already initiated an agri-village project, a concept that we believe could assist us to address service delivery issues in rural areas.

Honorable Speaker, while the work of the pilot is appreciated, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in this area. Projects that are underway need to be completed. Road infrastructure and other important basic services require attention. Therefore, government will not pull out from the pilot project until the planned projects are completed and off the ground.

In 2011/12 financial year, we are planning to expand the roll-out of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme to six municipalities, namely, Nkomazi, Bushbuckridge, Chief Albert Luthuli, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, Dr JS Moroka and Thembisile Hani.

Our experience in Mkhondo has made us sharper as we approach these new areas.

Experience has taught us that, for the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme to make a huge impact on the lives of our people, we need to improve in the following areas:

- Proper planning, community mobilization, effective institutional arrangements and strong Monitoring and Evaluation systems
- The provision of targeted technical and financial support, as well as,
- Fostering an integrated approach by all stakeholders

What must be emphasised is that:

- As we roll out this project, job creation will be at the centre of our activities.
- Government is going to upscale the Masibuyele Emasimini programme. We intend to increase the number of extension officers to support this programme.

We will also link our students at the Agricultural College as part of that support, both at the level of practical studies and after completion of their diploma.

- To fast-track the issue of skills development in the agricultural sector, we are currently upgrading the Marapyane College to serve as a satellite of the Agricultural College. We are also exploring to open a similar facility in Gert Sibande.
- We are appealing to our people that they must work together with us to change their lives for the better. The success or failure of this programme depends on all of us.

Integrated Human Settlements

Honourable Speaker,

As a country and the Province in particular, we have made a decisive shift from providing housing to building integrated human settlements. I wish to reiterate our ideals as espoused in one of the clauses in the Freedom Charter of 1955, which says:

“There shall be Houses, Security and Comfort! All people shall have the right to live where they choose, be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security;

Unused housing space to be made available to the people;...

Slums shall be demolished, and new suburbs built where all have transport, roads, lighting, playing fields, crèches and social centres”;

These ideals find resonance with the priorities of government which focus on building social cohesion and sustainable communities.

Integrated human settlements embody our national vision of promoting non-racialism and prosperous communities.

It is indeed a paradigm shift from the past where people were settled along racial lines and Blacks were placed as far as possible from the areas of economic activity.

As a province we are committed to promoting and facilitating affordable rental and social housing market. In addition, we will continue with our plans of fast-tracking the

development of integrated human settlements in Klarinet, Balfour and Thaba Chweu as identified last year. This year, we will expand this programme to include Emakhazeni.

Central to this programme is our contribution towards alleviating poverty and creating opportunities for work through the delivery of housing units. To this end we shall increase our efforts in the roll-out of Peoples Housing Programme (PHP) in the three district municipalities. We are targeting to build 5000 units in the new financial year.

Most importantly, the PHP will be linked to our comprehensive rural development programme and will ensure that local people are employed and developed as contractors to government. To support this programme, we have set aside **R305m** in the next financial year.

Honourable Members, for us to create sustainable, integrated human settlement, it is critical to speed up the delivery of basic services and other social amenities.

Despite challenges, we are making progress in the delivery of basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity.

In order to achieve the 2014 Millennium Development Goal of universal access to basic water supply in the Province, municipalities have been allocated funding through the Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant (RBIG) and through the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) to construct both internal and external bulk infrastructure.

Access to water remains a challenge that continues to impact negatively on the quality of life of our citizens, especially women and girl children in rural areas.

In the main, our problems lie in ageing water infrastructure, inadequate funding for operations and maintenance, the poor state of water treatment and waste water works as well as the lack of skilled operations and maintenance staff.

To address the challenges of water in the Province, I have set up a multi-disciplinary team comprising of the Provincial Government, Municipalities, Water Affairs and Water Boards to develop a Bulk Water Infrastructure Master Plan. This plan will be completed by the end of May 2011.

Alongside this, we are continuing to address pressing challenges of bulk water supply to ensure the communities have access to basic water services.

Among other key interventions, we will speed up:

- The construction of the Bloemendal- Delmas pipeline project in Victor Khanye Local Municipality to the tune of R171m
- The construction of the Acornhoek pipeline in Bushbuckridge at the cost of R162m.
- the upgrading of a number of water purification plants across the province. The construction of new dams will be investigated.

Strengthening our skills and human resource base

Honourable Speaker and Members, the importance of education as the stepping-stone to a better future for our children and society as a whole cannot be overemphasized.

As government, we remain committed to the objective of enhancing the quality of our education. Our economy needs certain set of skills to generate economic growth that could lead to job creation and the reduction of poverty and inequalities.

Indeed, we remain committed towards:

- Improving overall learner outcomes in all grades;
- Improving performance in numeracy, literacy, mathematics and science;
- Improving school governance and teacher development programmes.
- Increasing the number of students attaining university entrance requirements and
- Addressing infrastructure backlogs

However, these commitments must be supported by all of us – teachers, learners and parents.

- Our teachers should be in class, on time, and teaching not less than seven hours a day.
- Learners must also do their part. They must be in class, on time, and subject themselves to the process of learning.
- Parents must support the endeavours of both educators and learners as they execute their respective tasks in the teaching and learning environment.

We are calling upon all of you to play your part, particularly in ensuring that learners are kept away from roaming the streets during school hours.

We cannot just leave this responsibility to the police. If parents could be united against these tendencies of our learners, we can succeed to restore the culture of respect, learning and teaching. Let us go back to basics: ***Your child is my child.***

In the 2010/11 financial year, we isolated few tasks that we committed ourselves to perform as we pursue our goal of improving the quality of our education.

We made a commitment:

- To eradicate schools in mud and shack structures,
- Upgrade the managerial skills of principals,
- To introduce Saturdays and Winter School classes for learners in grade twelve (12) in those schools that obtained a pass rate below 50%,
- Assist schools to run the scholar transport and nutrition programmes on their own and also
- To pursue the process of the establishment of the University.

Honourable Members, I am pleased to announce that, overall, we have made positive strides on the identified tasks.

- The implementation of a holistic Improvement Plan for the matric class of 2010 has seen Mpumalanga achieving **56,8 percent** increase in the matric pass rate – an

increase of **8,9 percent** from the **47,9 percent** achieved in 2009. This represents the fourth highest increase in the country.

The Improvement Plan involved, among other things, the introduction of Saturday and Winter school classes. **4** regions conducted these classes and had **30 000** learners in attendance for **15 days** in **115 centers** during June/July holidays.

Another important component of the Plan relates to additional support material for grade 12 learners to prepare for their final exam. To this end, 10 learning centers were used to disseminate such material - **7** in Bohlabele and **one each** in the other districts.

Other elements involve:

- Compiled exam banks and prepared CDs which were distributed to all schools in the province,
- The Dial-a- Tutor Programme and
- Audio Lessons.

Learning channel material was also supplied to **126** schools below 30% matric pass rate in 2009.

In addition, we had university students who volunteered to do revision work with learners and **10 000 learners** benefited from this exercise.

Honourable Speaker, let me take this opportunity to thank the Executive Council, the Department of Education under the stewardship of MEC Mhaule, principals, teachers, parents, the SABC, the business community and all other stakeholders for the sterling work done. A special word of appreciation goes to Minister of Basic Education and her team for their continued support and guidance.

Your support and contribution to the Improvement Plan is really commendable. Without doubt, this is definitely one step in the right direction.

Let me also commend the Department and all the people involved, including the police for ensuring that the integrity of our exams was not compromised.

It is, therefore, incumbent upon all of us to ensure that we do not lose momentum but consolidate our gains and march forward. We need to upscale our efforts and press on until the matric pass rate of our learners reaches the highest level of excellence.

We are pleased that we have made progress in critical areas aimed at improving the quality of education:

- With regard to the training of principals, out of **1 210** principals targeted, we have managed to train **110** to date. The rest of the principals will undergo their training over a period of three years.
- Progress has also been made on the building of classrooms in the identified **254** schools to eradicate mud and shack structures. In this regard, one must admit that we did not fare very well in this area of work due to a number of unforeseen challenges. In the coming year we shall accelerate the implementation of this work.
- As far as the running and management of scholar transport and Nutrition Programme are concerned, we have been, and still are, training members of the School Governing Bodies and principals on management skills.

As soon as the contract of the current service providers expires, these responsibilities will be gradually transferred to respective schools.

- The process for the establishment of the university, incorporating a tertiary hospital, is in progress. We are working with the Minister of High Education, Dr Nzimande in this regard. A Ministerial Task Team has already been set up to take the process forward.

Currently, the Task Team is working on the legal framework, institutional arrangements, planning and design. These activities will be completed in 2011 financial year.

Equally, planning work on the tertiary hospital is on course.

Honourable Speaker, as one alluded earlier, our growth and development as a nation depends on the provision of quality education to our young people, including the elders of course. Therefore, for as long as our education system is performing below par, we cannot call it a day. We have to double our efforts and change the education situation for the better.

It is in this context that, in the 2011/12 financial year, we will continue with all the work that we have already set in motion. Coupled with that,

- We are going to put most of our energies on making all schools to meet their basic minimum functionality level, that is, ensuring that the necessary basic infrastructure is in place, all learners have access to learning support material, and there are enough teachers in each school, including the establishment of proper management systems.
- We are also going to pursue our programme of building boarding schools for learners living on farms. We have already completed one such facility in Nkomazi and in the process of completing another in Mkhondo. As I indicated earlier on, we are going to build other three additional boarding facilities, two in Gert Sibande District and one in Nkangala.
- We are again appealing to parents of the targeted learners to support government in its endeavour to create a bright future for these children.

While we understand that they are quite helpful with family chores, let us allow them to grab this lifetime opportunity and become better leaders of tomorrow.

- In addition, government is going to revitalize all boarding facilities that stand empty and decaying with a view that they are utilised for winter and Saturday classes. We are also exploring the possibility of using such facilities to assist child-headed household learners.
- Attention is also going to be paid to children with disabilities. We are going to build facilities for these children so that they too get an opportunity to grow their different potentials.

We would like to make an earnest appeal to families having children with disabilities to come forward and afford government an opportunity to assist where it could.

We are, once more, making a call to all of us, to work together in improving the quality of education of our children so that we can build future leaders and a better South Africa.

Improving the health profile of Mpumalanga citizens

Honourable Members,

Our future development, prosperity and progress as a Province depend on our ability to deliver quality health care and enhance the health profile of Mpumalanga citizens. We need to continue paying particular attention to strengthening our health system effectiveness, addressing the challenges of HIV and Aids, as well as expanding access to health care to all.

The devastating impact of HIV and Aids calls for extraordinary commitment to action so that we prevent the spread of this pandemic and provide full life possibilities to those infected and affected.

Our collective task at all levels of society is to ensure that we take responsibility to test, know our HIV status and take necessary action to receive assistance.

As a province we have taken responsibility by confronting this challenge head on. While Mpumalanga remains the second highest after KwaZulu Natal in terms of HIV prevalence we are pleased that, together with our partners, our efforts are beginning to bear fruit.

The latest 2009 figures indicate a slight decrease in HIV and AIDS prevalence, giving a glimmer of hope that at least we have turned the corner. We need to sustain and accelerate the downward trend by ensuring that our targeted programmes drastically reduce the HIV prevalence rate.

Honourable Speaker, we will continue promote voluntary testing and expand access to Anti-Retroviral Treatment facilities. In this regard, we are making pleasing progress. As at 31 December 2010, we had successfully carried out HIV testing of half-a-million of our citizens.

Anti-Retroviral Treatment facilities had increased from 34 to 198 sites. A total of 94 099 patients out of a target of **102 000** had been placed on ARV treatment.

To date, we have carried out 2 597 medical male circumcisions since it was launched on 30 November 2010 as part of the programme to reduce HIV infections.

We call upon all of government, business, organized labour, traditional leaders, civic organizations, non-governmental organizations, community based organization and the society at large to all join hands and be part of the effort to strengthen the implementation of our education and awareness programmes to prevent new infections.

We need to proceed with speed in the implementation and upgrading of our health infrastructure, filling of all critical positions with suitably qualified persons, and ensuring the sustainable availability of medicines in all our facilities.

We will expand access to primary health care in rural communities as part of our comprehensive rural development strategy. Among other interventions, we will enhance access to home-based care by increasing the number of Non-Profit Organizations providing Community Based Health Services.

In preparation for the implementation of the National Health Insurance Scheme, we are going to accelerate the construction of community health facilities to reach out to communities that do not have adequate access to primary health care.

Honourable Members, we are happy to report that significant progress has been made on the revitalization Rob Ferreira,

Ermelo and Themba hospitals. The business cases for the revitalization of Barberton Lydenburg and Tintswalo hospitals have been approved.

We are pleased to announce that the revitalization of these hospitals will start in the 2011/12 financial year.

Despite remarkable progress we have made, the overall performance of our infrastructure delivery programme remains an area of concern. We are currently evaluating alternative models to address challenges related the performance of our infrastructure delivery programme so that we avoid unnecessary delays in the execution of our infrastructure projects.

Among other issues, we are focusing on strengthening capacity around infrastructure planning, contract management as well as implementation monitoring and evaluation.

Intensifying the fight against crime and corruption

Honourable Speaker, crime remains one of our priority areas of work as government. Collectively, we remain seized with the task of ensuring that crime does not undermine our efforts of building a united, humane and prosperous society entrenched in the values of 'Ubuntu'. Our people deserve the right to be safe and secure where ever they are in the Province.

Together with our communities, government will continue to intensify its fight against crime.

Honourable Speaker and Members, we believe that we are progressively winning the war against crime.

Comparing the crime statistics of 2009 and those of 2010, there is evidence of a gradual decline in almost all the different categories of crime tendencies including, contact-related crimes, property-related crimes, and other serious crimes.

However, this is not enough. We need to see a serious decline. For as long as our people continue to be terrorized by criminals, we cannot and shall not rest until such time peace and stability prevail in all our townships, villages, farm areas, cross - border areas and our suburbs.

Honourable Speaker and the house, we commend our police service personnel for the significant decline in the murder rate and other serious crimes, which indicates the success of the increased focus on the fight against crime.

As the province we pride ourselves for hosting an incident-free FIFA Soccer World Cup in 2010. We also had a relatively crime free festive season, except for the brutal murder of the late Cllr. Johan Ndlovu.

Despite this loss to the Ndlovu family, government and the entire province, would like to commend the police led by the Provincial Commissioner and MEC for Safety Security and Community Liaison for their swift response in ensuring that the suspects are apprehended.

The feedback that we are getting from our communities is that there is more police visibility but more work still needs to be done.

The pronouncement by the National Commissioner, General Bheki Cele to assemble a multi-disciplinary task team to focus on the killings in the province is mostly welcome.

As the provincial government we are giving this initiative our unequivocal support.

We are appealing to all citizens of the province to allow this team space to do its work without any hindrance and provide any information that will enable a speedy resolution of these cases.

Therefore, to continue intensifying our fight against crime in the upcoming financial year, we will further provide more resources to support:

- The implementation of Municipal Safety Plans
- Programme of Action on No Violence Against Women and Children
- The Social Crime Awareness Programme
- The deployment of 500 Tourism Safety monitors in tourist attraction sites, including
- The strengthening of Community Police Fora to collaborate with the police in rooting out crime.

Honourable Members, we have made strides in fighting corruption and ensuring that we strengthen systems of accountability to detect instances of fraud and corruption

The Commissions of Inquiry that were appointed have concluded investigations on scholar transport as well as the Disaster Management Centre and the Archives buildings.

We have begun with the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Commissions' reports.

In various municipalities where we have instituted a number of section 106 investigations, the reports have been considered by municipal councils and are fully implemented.

Working with other law enforcement agencies, we are rooting out corruption in the delivery of housing projects.

We will pursue those government officials who fraudulently received housing grants, probe housing contracts including contracts involving builders being paid for homes that did not exist, incomplete or seriously defective houses.

A number of people have been made to account and take responsibility for their actions through formal disciplinary proceedings, some have resigned or been dismissed.

The provincial administration is working closely with the law enforcement agencies in dealing with some of the cases including our determination of cost recovery where warranted.

Promoting Social Cohesion through Heritage and Sport

Honourable Members,

The defining values of a better society we seek to create are anchored on national unity, our inclusive and shared heritage, our national identity, and our common sense of belonging.

Our Province is endowed with diverse cultural heritage. Part of our inclusive history, heritage and identity is defined by the history of the struggle for liberation, human dignity, justice and equality.

In celebrating our liberation heritage, we should pay tribute and honour our liberation heroes, heroines and other unsung compatriots who made selfless contribution to the attainment of freedom and liberties that we enjoy today.

As government, we will continue to promote and conserve our rich history through the establishment of the Provincial Heritage Liberation Route that is constitutive of sites in different parts of our province, representing significant moments that characterized the different phases of the struggle for freedom and democracy

Our common destiny as a people must be underpinned by social unity and cohesion. Our inclusive celebration of unity in diversity should create the bedrock for tolerance, understanding, social cohesion and common identity.

As a Province, we want to create an environment that promotes the development and nurturing of our Province's unique culture and heritage. This year, we will commence with work on the establishment of a cultural hub that will contribute to the development of various performing arts genres such as theatre, dance, music, crafts and drama.

This hub will become a centre that will contribute to the development of talent in various arts genres as well as the promotion of artistic expressions of our diverse history and heritage.

As part of the cultural hub, we will finalize the establishment of the Film Office to ensure that we promote the development of the film industry in Mpumalanga.

Honourable Speaker, sport provides a critical platform to promote social cohesion, nation building and national identity. As a Province, we are committed to creating an environment that promotes the development of talent in various sporting codes so that we open up opportunities for the development of world-class professional athletes.

We are doing all we can to sustain the legacy of hosting the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup. During the 2011/12 financial year, we will commence with the establishment of the Sports Academy.

We have already identified and secured suitable land in Emakhazeni Local Municipality.

The Province has entered into a partnership with Portugal to learn from their experiences on how sport contributes to nation building and social cohesion.

Portugal will also provide assistance with expertise and skills transfer in the establishment and operations of the Sports Academy.

Governance

Honourable Speaker,

Our ability to achieve the developmental goals that we have set ourselves requires us to continue building a government that is transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of communities we are privileged to serve.

We are working hard to entrench a strong performance culture across the entire government machinery so that we are able to achieve nationally agreed outcomes.

During this course of this year, we have concluded Delivery Agreements on key priorities of government work to ensure that clear performance targets are set in the key areas such education, health, human settlements, rural development just to mention a few.

Public representatives, including MECs and Mayors have signed and committed themselves to specific implementation targets.

We will continue to monitor the implementation of commitments contained in the Delivery Agreements.

We will continue with the implementation of a monitoring and evaluation system to improve accountability for results.

Working with the Presidency, we will begin to introduce institutional performance assessment tools that allow us to monitor leadership, management practices, and effectiveness of our public institutions.

Honourable, we satisfied with the level of progress we have made in strengthening financial management and systems of financial accountability. We are seeing gradual maturity of our public institutions in managing and accounting for public resources. We have also seen the achievement of better audit outcomes.

We are determined to improve our systems to ensure that this administration becomes as a beacon of accountable and clean governance.

We are encouraged by the progress we are making in this regard, not least of all the prestigious awards for the 'best annual report in the province and the overall winner of the Annual Public Sector Reporting for 2010' that the South African Institute of Government Auditors bestowed on the Department of Finance in October last year.

Congratulations also goes to Sports, Arts and Culture for making it into the top 20 (ranked 14) of the awards. We also commend Human Settlements for being ranked number 8 among the top 10 for consistent performance in the past three years of the SAIGA awards.

Honourable Members, this year, our people will return to the polls to choose local government representatives of their choice. We are appealing to all political parties to exercise restraint, tolerance and ensure our people exercise their right to vote without fear and intimidation.

We need to ensure that the challenges of service delivery are addressed in a systematic, more determined and transparent manner; at all times working to involve communities in resolving problems and overcoming whatever obstacles that may exist. We have the power and means to make local government work better.

We have something to build on. There are many aspects of local government that work very well in our country and province in particular. In addition, the majority of our councilors have served our people with honesty and integrity.

As the provincial government we commend and thank these diligent and true servants of the people.

We also congratulate and acknowledge many municipalities that are fully functional and where Councilors and officials are doing their best to improve service delivery.

However, we acknowledge that there are problems in certain municipalities which are being attended to. In the main, challenges stem from the reality that some of our municipalities are unsustainable. They have a low revenue base, and rely heavily on grants and external assistance.

Institutional failures are also a consequence of not having properly qualified and skilled personnel to drive and manage development and service delivery programmes.

Notwithstanding these challenges, we are happy with the level of progress we have made in bringing about stability in affected municipalities.

In the 2011/12 financial year, our local government interventions will continue to focus on:

- Strengthening integrated planning and accelerated implementation
- Financial management
- Integrated municipal support through the enhancement and improvement of technical skills, planning, contract management, engineering, finance and project management
- The development of an action support programme for Municipalities for pre and post Local Government elections
- Building confidence in the local government systems, including the deployment of financial resources in critical areas of need.

We will continue to strengthen systems of public participation so that communities can participate meaningfully in development and service delivery programmes.

We will continue to enhance the functioning of ward committees in order to mobilize local participation in matters of development and service delivery.

We have the power and means to make local government work better.

In our democratic system of local government, communities should continue to hold public representatives accountable on agreed development and service delivery targets.

Honourable Speaker, the role of traditional leadership institutions remains important in our local government system. As government, we are committed to ensuring that we provide necessary support to enable traditional institutions to execute their functions in terms of applicable legislation.

We cherish the role played by Amakhosi during the struggle for freedom and, we believe that they still have an important role to play in the development of our local communities.

We are encouraging traditional leaders to participate actively in the implementation of government programmes to address challenges of poverty and underdevelopment.

As government, we are continuing to play our defined role in supporting the institution of traditional leadership to deal with the resolution of conflicts and issues of succession.

We are pleased to report that we have managed to take forward the President's pronouncement of matters of Kingship after the outcome of the Nhlapho Commission on Claims and Disputes.

We have concluded our work for the inaugurations of King Makhosonke II of aManala for the entire Ndebele nation and King Mabhoko III of aMaNdebele akwaNdzundza.

We will to continue provide the necessary support to traditional leaders to enable them to perform their functions as expected. We have now concluded a policy on tools of trade for traditional leadership in the province.

We are pleased to announce that as part of implementing the provisions of such policy, we have acquired vehicles for the 59 traditional councils. In the next few days, government will be handing over these vehicles upon the conclusion of the registration process.

Conclusion

As I conclude Honourable Speaker, I would like to thank all individuals and organizations who contributed to this State of the Province Address through mainstream and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Your inputs were indeed invaluable.

As we pursue our ideals, I wish to impress that, for government to achieve all these commitments that I have just outlined, working together is going to be extremely critical. If we are united in purpose, nothing can stand in our way.

Slowly but surely we will ultimately reach the ideal society envisaged by the Freedom Charter.

Let me borrow again these wise words from the Freedom Charter:

“Let all people who love their people and their country now say....These freedoms we will fight for, side by side, through our lives, until we have won our liberty”.

I thank You