

**Keynote Address delivered by the MEC for Education, Mrs. Reginah Mhaule at the Youth Development Summit and Career Expo in Secunda on 29 April 2014**

---

Programme Director, DJ Sbu

Members of the Executive Council

Executive Mayor of Govan Mbeki Local Municipality, Cllr Lindi Masina

Executive Mayors

Speakers from Municipalities

Director General; Dr. Nonhlanhla Mkhize

Heads of Departments

Municipal Managers

Senior Managers and Officials of Government at all levels

Leadership of the NYDA

Representatives from Political parties

Representatives from our sponsors for this event

Representatives from Youth Formations

Miss Mpumalanga 2013, Natasha Dos Santos

Representatives from the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen and

The Youth of Mpumalanga

**Sanibonani,**

Allow me to take this moment to extend warm greetings to all the youth of the province and express our appreciation for attending this important session two days following the twentieth birth day of our beautiful country South Africa.

I also wish to thank the Executive Mayor of Govan Mbeki Local Municipality, Cllr Lindi Masina for hosting us and for the introduction.

It is always good and appreciated to stand before the young minds and the future of the province. It reminds us of what the late president of the African National Congress OR Tambo said:

“A country that does not take care of its youth has no future and does not deserve one”

These are sentiments which the current government has embraced and forms the basis of the conceptualization of the objectives of this summit.

Let me hasten to say that I am here addressing you as a result of my deployment by the Honourable Premier, Mr. DD Mabuza who unfortunately could not be with us today.

The Honourable Premier has asked me to convey his utmost and heartfelt gratitude to you all and has given us his blessings for this Summit. Other commitments have sought his presence and thus he could not be with us.

He directed that I should state that your presence in this summit confirms your commitment and desire to stand up and make positive contributions towards the growth of your lives and the development of the nation.

It is worth noting that according to Census 2011, the population distribution in Mpumalanga was made up by 69.4 % of the youth cohort of ages 0 - 34 and these statistics emphasize the importance of the youth and its relevance to the Province.

The importance of the youth of the province, can thus be equated with the significance of the heart and its beat in maintaining life in a man. The youth has a vital role to play in the development of the province, like the heart we

need to ensure that it is always well nurtured and healthy, so that the system is not destabilized.

## **The National Youth Development Policy**

Our Summit today is informed by our conception of youth development issues as influenced by the historical conditions that have shaped our country and its democratic goals.

Youth development therefore determines South Africa's future; hence it is at the core of our development agenda.

It is therefore an open agenda that young people should at all times be considered as beneficiaries and as agents of change and not as passive recipients of government services.

Our coming together here takes queue from the quest and progress made by our country to integrate youth development into the mainstream of government policies, programmes and the national budget.

This made sure that mainstream policies curb the marginalisation of young people from benefiting from the programmes of government.

It is thus our aim to strengthen the capacities of young people to enable them to take charge of their own well-being through building their assets and ultimately realising their potential to the fullest.

As stated in the Youth Development Policy, it is also the goal of this Summit to empower young people who are able to realise their full potential and understand their roles and responsibilities in making a meaningful contribution to the development of a non-racial prosperous South Africa.

## **Mpumalanga Youth Development Summit**

In his 2013 State of the Province Address, the Honourable Premier, Mr. DD Mabuza, declared that his office will be establishing a dedicated unit to foster youth development in the province.

The formation of this unit has been finalized and is ready to start tackling matters of youth development in the province.

This Summit is thus a symbol of the commitment and seriousness about youth development issues by the Mpumalanga Provincial Government to solicit views and ideas from the very youth we seek to serve hence the theme “Be Informed, Be Inspired and Be Heard”,

Our view is that this Summit should reflect on government goals as espoused in the National Development Plan as well as the National Youth Development Policy framework and in keeping with the four key pillars, namely: Job Creation and Youth Employment, Entrepreneurship and SMME Development, Education and Skills Development as well as the Eradication of Social ills. These pillars will form our focal point of discussions and our activities of the next two days.

It is also important that this Summit should take into cognisance, recognise and acknowledge the contribution made by NGO's and advocate for the strengthening of partnerships as far as youth development programmes are concerned.

We should appreciate the fact that the NGOs are mostly responsible for direct and indirect provision of youth services. It is acknowledged that youth services, originated and are predominantly rendered by the NGO sector.

## **Road Travelled over the Past 20 Years**

We celebrate the two decades of freedom and democracy mindful of the challenges at our disposal but of importance is appreciating the strides made to date.

Great strides have been made in regards to the development of the youth in the province. We are all quite aware that education is central to youth development and the development of a nation. Thus please allow me to highlight some of our milestones in that regard.

As enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, access to education is one of the foundations that the Department saw through the birth of the democratic nation. It was through this strong foundation, that our communities were able to access No-Fee Schools.

Some of our enabling factors that ensure access to education is the inception of the **No-Fee Schools** policy which currently stands at 80% of our schools benefitting. **The School Nutrition Programme** is also an effort to curb the hurdles of poverty and to ensure that no learner in the province attends classes with an empty stomach, as this does not only disturb their ability in achieving great results in class, but may also lead in nutrient deficiency which will compromise their health. This programme benefits **882 349** learners throughout the province this year.

As a province, we have over the years encouraged learners not only to enroll and study but to pass Mathematics and Physical Science. In order to improve on learner performance in that regard, in March this year, we held a **Mathematics Summit** with the aim of looking at measures that can be implemented to improve the intake and outcomes of Mathematics in the province.

The province has also established a **Maths, Science and Technology Academy** which will serve as a vehicle that will encourage more learners to enroll, study and pass Mathematics, Science and Technology. The Maths, Science and Technology Academy will serve as a Technology and connectivity hub to 4 schools each located in the four education districts of the province. These four sub- hub schools will in turn each be connected to 24 schools which translate to a total of 100 connected schools.

The Maths, Science and Technology Academy will also serve as an institution for in-service training for educators in the field of Mathematics, Science and Technology. It is our belief that this project is on track and that the battle in the quality and quantity of passes in Mathematics, Science and Technology will soon be won. And thus contribute to the economic development goals of our province as enshrined in the Mpumalanga Economic Growth Path

**School Infrastructural Development** has also taken a front seat. This administration has built new 50 state of the art schools since taking office. With regards to bringing the CRDP areas on board of the education delivery machinery, the Department has built three state of the art boarding schools to cater for orphans and the farming communities.

**The Physically Challenged** have also been catered for with the construction of special schools in the province, bringing the total number of special schools to 19. We must take cognizance of the fact that more than 686 teachers were trained in a variety of specialized teaching fields to take care of our learners in the special schools.

As citizens of Mpumalanga we have seen great improvements on our Grade 12 results over the past years. In 2009, when this administration took over our Grade 12 pass rate was at **49.9%**.

**The Mpumalanga Grade 12 Class of 2013** registered a glorious **77.6%** pass rate recording the sixth highest share of learners with bachelor admission in the country at **Twelve Thousand Nine Hundred and Fifty Four (12 954)**.

I must also inform you that in this course there has been a lot of hurdles and challenges. The drop out of learners before completing matric remains an area of great concern. Social ills such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and gangsterism have bedeviled some of our schools and the co-operation of communities and law enforcement agencies as well as the intervention of sister departments such as social development have seen us through such challenges.

To remedy and mitigate the effects of such social ills the Provincial Government has designed various integrated programmes implemented across departments in the province such as the Integrated School Safety Programme and the Integrated School Sports Programme.

### **Human Resource Development Strategy**

The province has also launched the Provincial Human Resource Development Strategy to indeed ensure that we can develop our people, in particular our youth towards improved economic growth of the province.

Through this strategy government, the private sector and other institutions came together to foster a way forward with regards to the development of

our human resource. More than that this strategy which has the backing of mining, agriculture, trade, manufacturing, construction, transport and finance sectors of our industry seeks to address not only skills shortages but job placement and creation as well.

The lack of skills and skills development initiatives have an over bearing influence on unemployment and job creation. The unemployment rate of the youth of working age was, according to the Census 2011, **73.6%** of the total number of the unemployed in the province. These statistics also spell out the significance of the hosting of this Summit so that we can have an impact on the scourge of skills scarcity.

We have travelled a long way since the dawn of the new democratic South Africa. The ruling party has initiated and implemented a lot of progressive plans and means in order for us to enjoy the fruits of democracy. The journey to continue to build a new South Africa remains a path that will be travelled by the youth all over the province and you present here today.

As the youth of Mpumalanga, please always take note that this path will be less rocky when one is equipped with an education. The doors of teaching and learning are always open in South Africa with institutions of higher learning all over the country.

On the home front, **The University of Mpumalanga** opened its doors to the first intake of students this year. This signifies a new dawn for the province and it presents a new leaf of hope for the children of the province. The Provincial Government has provided 40 bursaries to students to study on fields related to Agriculture and Hospitality Management at the **University of Mpumalanga** for the 2013 academic year.



We do acknowledge that some of you may require financial assistance and the Provincial Government through the Department of Education offers bursaries to deserving learners so that they may further their studies with a University of their choice. This programme benefits **2 015** learners this year.

Allow me to take this time to inform you that there are bursary schemes that are initially made to assist students financially, such as the Fundza Lushaka and NSFAS.

Let me also take this time and encourage learners to also apply at our various FET colleges and the Mpumalanga Regional Training Trust (MRTT) for acquiring technical skills which the country so much needs and are an advantage into the future.

Speaking at the skills development conference attended by the heads of FET colleges, President Jacob Zuma said: "***Universities are important in any economy. But the example of successful industrial economies such as Germany, point to the importance of vocationally-based training, rooted in an apprenticeship model. Such a vocational focus enables the building of a strong manufacturing base and productive economy.***"

It is therefore important that we change our mindsets and start thinking positively about FET colleges and vocational education. FET Colleges are institutions that are established for the youth so that they may acquire the necessary skills needed for the working environment.

The province is also blessed with the **Mpumalanga Regional Training Trust**. This institution also aims to develop the youth through the provision of experiential, hospitality, tourism and entrepreneurship and life skills

training. The presence of the MRTT can also be taken advantage of with regards to technical skills as well as qualifications in the hospitality and tourism industry.

I should also take this opportunity and acknowledge the different businesses that have shown great commitment over the years in helping shaping the lives of the children of the province.

The unprecedented response of the business sector towards our endless calls towards improving the lives of our communities is amazing. We have over the years received endless support from companies such as Eskom, Kusile Power Station, Sasol, The Kay Motsepe Foundation, Mining Sector and NYDA amongst others. These companies offer deserving learners bursaries so that they are given an opportunity to fulfill their dreams. Other business have opened their doors to accommodate our young graduates for experiential learning. We call on others that have not done so yet, to please open their doors to absorb our FET College and University graduates. They need these placements to complete their qualifications.

Other opportunities such as learnerships are provided by the SETAs. The youth should indeed take advantage of these.

### **Vision for the Future**

Let me say that as a province, we have made a lot of gains in reaching the UN Millennium Development Goal of ensuring that all children are in school by 2015. This is an important milestone as the doors of education also lead to access to economic participation and thus the imminent eradication of illiteracy and poverty. To that effect the ruling party still remains committed to the progressive realization of free education at all levels.

As stated on the January 8 statement the ruling party states that:

***“Our key commitments for the next 5 years are making early childhood development a priority, eradicating illiteracy; improve quality in teaching and learning in schools and expanding and building capacity in higher education and training.”***

It is therefore important to be reminded that the future has been planned for; we are still on the verge of making the lives of the youth of Mpumalanga a better one.

In our quest for youth development our targets should also reach Young women, Youth with disabilities; Unemployed youth; School aged out of school youth, Youth in rural areas and Youth at risk. We need to be mindful of the challenges that plaque our youth who are heading households, those who are in conflict with the law as well as those youth who are abusing dependency creating substances.

Economic participation is equally important in the holistic development of the youth as an essential process which engages citizens to contribute productively in an effort of eradicating poverty. The challenge is to enable the youth to contribute as productive citizens by shaping their talents and creative energies, equipping them with appropriate skills, and removing the barriers that may constrain their participation in the labour market. This should be part of our focus today as we chart a future for our country and province.

Our deliberations should also reflect on the enhancement of the employability of young people through familiarising them with the expectations and requirements of the world of work by the time they leave the education system.

## **Conclusion**

The National Development Plan advocates for the improvement of education, skills development and innovation. This summit forms part of our journey as we move towards the realization of a better life for all. Let us thus partake in this endeavour for the betterment of our country and province.

It is the intent of government to have an inclusive policy that focuses on holistic development of young people. Our objective is also to integrate youth development initiatives into government's policy planning frameworks such as Provincial Growth and Development Strategy and Local Government Integrated Development Plans, both in terms of strategic planning and resource allocation.

Presentations will be made today on plans and opportunities available to take our lives forward. Let me encourage you not to be just participant in the talks but also to seek to participate in the development of our country and Province.

As I conclude, allow me steal words from a young poet from KwaZulu Natal, Nokwathemba Mchunu as she states that: “***Young people you are***

***a light set upon a hill that cannot be hidden. Others should look to you for guidance. Be an example, a good one.”***

**I Thank you.**