

SOPA

STATE OF THE
PROVINCE

ADDRESS

BY THE PREMIER OF MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

FRIDAY
05 MARCH 2021
10:00 AM
MPUMALANGA LEGISLATURE



MPUMALANGA
PROVINCIAL
GOVERNMENT



MPUMALANGA
THE PLACE OF THE RISING SUN

STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF MPUMALANGA PROVINCE ON 5 MARCH, 2021.

Honourable Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Legislature;
Honourable Chief Whip of the Majority Party;
Ministers and Deputy Ministers present;
Members of the National Assembly;
Members of the Mpumalanga Legislature;
Colleagues in the Mpumalanga Executive Council;
Executive Mayors and Councillors;
Provincial Chairperson of SALGA;
Provincial Judge President Justice Francis Legodi and all esteemed members of the judiciary;
Provincial Commissioner, General Zuma;
Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
His Majesty Ingwenyama Makhosonke II;
His Majesty Ingwenyama Mabhokho III;
Chairperson of the National House of Traditional Leaders, Ikosi SE Mahlangu;
President of CONTRALESA, Kgoshi Mokoena;
Chairperson of the Mpumalanga Provincial House of Traditional Leaders, Inkosi uNgomane;
Acting Director-General Mr Peter Nyoni and all Provincial Heads of Mpumalanga Provincial Government,
Chairpersons and CEO of Parastatals and other Chapter 9 Institutions;
The Acting Chairperson of the Public Service Commission in Mpumalanga;
The Leadership of the African National Congress, represented by Acting Chairperson Cde Mandla Ndlovu;
Veterans of our struggle for freedom;
Distinguished guests; Ladies and Gentlemen;
Good Morning;

The Flower, a symbol of hope, beauty and love

Madam Speaker, we have chosen a very special, gorgeous, attractive, bright and a unique flower as our symbol of hope for a better and prosperous future, the beauty of our province and our environment and above all else **LOVE for our people, especially our women and children.**

This glorious flower in question is the **Barberton daisy.**

It is indigenous to South Eastern Africa and in our beautiful Province, it is commonly found in Barberton.

We have also chosen this beautiful flower to make an appeal to males in our Province to help us stop the pandemic of Gender Based Violence. Our women and children are like this Barberton Daisy, beautiful, fragile and in need of love and protection.

This pandemic exacerbates the triple challenges of patriarchy, racism and inequality endured by **us women** for generations.

In this crucial year of Mama Charlotte Maxeke , it is time for us women to occupy our rightful place and still feel safe in our homes , workplaces and our surrounding communities .

Bakwethu sekwanele. Wathintha' Bafazi , wathintha imbokodo

The Context

1. Madam Speaker, I stand before you today to deliver the state of the province address at 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.
2. We deliver this SOPA exactly a year since the first positive covid-19 case in the country was reported on the 5th of March 2020. We have made significant strides to counter the devastating effect of the pandemic.
3. Our unique approach to managing the surge of the virus in the Province has encompassed;
 - 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;
 - The linking of the ward based containment teams with Clinic-driven ward based targeted screening, testing and care teams; and
 - Intensifying the identification of active cases through testing, isolation and quarantine.
4. This strategy was developed in collaboration with the **clinical advisory panel of experts** that I have appointed to augment the Provincial COVID-19 containment strategy. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the panel, led by Professor Simon Nemutandani from the University of the Witwatersrand.
5. Evidence of their excellent work is seen through the relative low rate of infection and mortality across the Province as well as our recovery rate that has been stable at over 97% across the two waves of COVID-19 infections.

6. Madam Speaker, to-date Mpumalanga has lost 1271 people to COVID-19, from 71525 infections and a total of 69 073 recoveries.
7. In memory of all those who have passed on due to the COVID-19 pandemic may I request that we observe a moment of silence....may their souls rest in eternal peace.

(MOMENT OF SILENCE IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO HAVE LOST THEIR LIVES TO COVID-19.)

8. I also extend my gratitude to our frontline workers, who have worked tirelessly in the face of great adversity and in difficult circumstances to save the lives of the people of Mpumalanga.
9. Their efforts will not be in vain. The Provincial Government will, in due course, honour and celebrate our frontline workers.
10. As Mpumalanga Province, we have begun rolling out the COVID-19 vaccination programme as we take the first steps to returning to life as we knew it.
11. We have completed part of the first phase which entailed the vaccination of health workers at two provincial health facilities, which are Rob Ferreira and Witbank hospitals.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. We shall have achieved herd immunity once we vaccinate at least more than 67% of our population.
15. The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a health crisis in every corner of the world and has birthed an economic crisis of unprecedented proportions.
16. Our socio economic response to the pandemic has been swift, targeted and assisted millions of our unemployed people and low wage vulnerable workers.

17. As early as April last year, government announced a massive stimulus package which was allocated to among others;
- wage protection through the Unemployment Insurance Fund;
 - financial support for small and informal businesses;
 - support through the tax system or tax holidays;
 - assistance to municipalities for the provision of basic services;
 - additional health support to our institutions; and
 - the credit guarantee scheme.
18. The biggest social support package was allocated to the expansion of social grants resulting in an increase in the amount provided through existing social grants as well as the introduction of a new special COVID-19 relief grant.
19. The COVID-19 special grant targeted individuals above 18 years, who are unemployed and neither receiving any income nor any other social grant or support from the UIF. This special grant was intended to run for six months but has since been further extended and will now run until the end of May 2021.
20. Most researchers and analysts agree that the COVID-19 special grant has had a significant positive impact on the lives of our people as it targeted the most vulnerable members of our society.
21. Our government stimulus package has been hailed as among the largest by global standards and by reach in terms of the number of people who have benefitted.
22. As a Province, we welcome these short term interventions, mindful of the fact that this social security net must be augmented by the creation of sustainable job opportunities to drive inclusive economic activity.

The Socio Economic Impact of Covid-19 in our Province

23. Despite all our efforts to cushion the adverse effects of the pandemic, predictions are that the Provincial economy will record a negative growth rate of between minus 6% and minus 7% for 2020.
24. The most affected provincial economic sectors and industries, in this regard, are trade which include tourism, construction, manufacturing, as well as transport and communication.
25. 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.

26. Agriculture was the least affected industry in 2020 due to the demand for agricultural products, proving once more that our Province is an important contributor to the food basket of South Africa.
27. 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.
28. 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.
29. Despite the rebound, the economy is still more or less 6% smaller than it was at the end of 2019. Tourism remains the worst affected as it struggles to gain momentum due to fears of the pandemic which necessitated the closure of borders here at home and abroad.
30. However, it is not all doom and gloom as some economic recovery is expected in 2021, with a projected provincial growth rate of around 3%.
31. With regards to job losses, we projected a loss of 100 000 jobs in 2020.
32. These job losses were expected to be experienced in industries such as construction, trade, including tourism and manufacturing.
33. To this end, the 2020 quarter 2 figures from Statistics SA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey indicated the worst job losses at 134 000.
34. However, when the economy re-opened in the third quarter, Mpumalanga recorded 49 000 job gains which eventually led to net job losses of around 85 000 during the period under review.
35. 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.
36. The latest unemployment figures which were released by STATS SA recently show that unemployment in this province, if you use the strict definition, jumped to 33% in the fourth quarter, the highest since 2008.
37. 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%.

Our 2020/2021 financial year commitments;

38. Madam Speaker, during the state of the province address last year we made a number of commitments and promises to the people of this beautiful province.
39. These commitments were clearly defined, adequately budgeted for and implementation plans had been well prepared.
40. The sudden emergence and rapid spread of 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.
41. Every national department, provincial department and our municipalities were asked to reprioritize and focus on COVID-19 response measures.
42. The situation in our Province has been exacerbated by the recent floods which destroyed roads and bridges, schools and clinics and blew away homes of the most vulnerable members of our society.
43. Once more, we have been compelled by forces beyond our control to divert budgeted resources and deal with this additional state of disaster.
44. 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.
45. 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.
46. One of our most important commitments undertaken in the last SOPA address was the launching and operationalization of the **youth development fund**.
47. We budgeted R50 million 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.
48. This multiyear programme invites numerous youth owned SMMEs to submit proposals outlining the growth and funding needs of their businesses.
49. These enterprises are then provided with training and funding to grow the operational footprint.

50. 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.

51. We also committed ourselves to expanding the infrastructure programmes throughout the province. To the extent that 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.

52. 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.

Fulfilling our Mandate in the Midst of a Pandemic

53. Madam Speaker, the core elements of our economic reconstruction and recovery roadmap are aligned with our Medium Term Strategic Framework, which is a reflection of the ruling party's manifesto and the commitment to implement the National Development Plan.

54. 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.

55. It lays out the package of interventions and programmes that will achieve outcomes to ensure success in realising the ideals of vision 2030.

56. We are also guided by the provincial imperatives as expressed by the elements of the manifesto that addresses our unique local circumstances. These manifest themselves in the form of policy guidelines as set out and pronounced by the provincial structures from time to time.

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

58. 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***
- ***A better Africa and a better world.***

59. Madam Speaker, we are almost half way through the five year period of our MTSF and a lot has been accomplished, yet much more still needs to be done.
60. The effects of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the floods disaster have set us back and it will be some time before we fully recover from these unforeseen challenges.
61. Our government has a huge responsibility to galvanize society towards a common vision as articulated in the NDP.
62. Given the ground that we have lost we must act with speed and renewed determination and commitment in order to defeat the triple challenges of **unemployment, poverty and inequality**.

Building a capable, ethical and developmental state

63. Our performance as government relies on a capable, ethical and developmental state which underpins all seven priorities of the MTSF that I have outlined earlier.
64. It is a vision of strong leadership, a focus on people and improved implementation capability.
65. We are continuously and tirelessly working hard to strengthen our human capabilities, our institutional capacity, service processes and technological platforms to deliver on the NDP through a social contract with the people.
66. We will be working together with the Institute of Risk Management of South Africa to train our senior officials on ethical leadership so as **to embed and strengthen** ethical conduct.
67. Through mobilization of resources across all spheres of government, we are building a more functional and integrated government, which is capacitated with professional, responsive and meritocratic public servants who will put people first **not their own personal interest**.
68. In our efforts to accelerate and improve the delivery of basic services, we are committed to eliminating our fragmented approach to development and strengthening coordination across the three spheres of government.

Towards a fully integrated District Development Model

69. Madam Speaker, a capable ethical and developmental state is not achievable as long as the government continues to function in a disjointed and uncoordinated manner.

70. As part of the solution to this problem, we have introduced the District Development Model. A new integrated district based approach to address our service delivery challenges, prioritize localization of procurement and job creation within our communities.
71. 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.
72. The public private partnership component within the District Development Model is beginning to bear fruits. In Steve Tshwete local municipality, we will be working together with private sector partners to build a R350 million four star hotel.
73. 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**.
74. The hotel will have a capacity of 150 beds and a convention centre of 1000 seats. 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.
75. This project will create hundreds of jobs during the construction phase and permanent jobs once operational.
76. 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.
77. Sod turning is expected by the end of this month.

Focus on economic transformation and job creation, through Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan during the Pandemic times.

78. Madam Speaker, on the 15th of October last year, His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa presented an **Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP)** to a joint Sitting of Parliament.
79. In his 2021 State of the Nation Address (SONA), the President has further elevated the **Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP)** by identifying as one of the country's priorities, **"the acceleration of our economic recovery"**.
80. The **Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan** focuses on a few policy drivers to achieve the intended outcomes, including; a) massive roll-out of infrastructure, (b) energy security, (c)

employment stimulus, (d) industrial revitalization, localization and small business promotion for women and youth.

81. As a province we are also aligning the ***Mpumalanga Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (MEERP)*** with the Presidential pronouncement and we are currently in the process of engaging our different stakeholders to obtain their input, buy-in and support.
82. 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.
83. We have committed ourselves to intensifying the roll out of the:
- ***Mpumalanga Industrial Development Plan;***
 - ***Nkomazi Special Economic Zone (SEZ);*** and the
 - ***Mpumalanga International Fresh Produce Market.***
84. These last two catalytic projects, that I have mentioned, have a high potential not only to place the agricultural sector on a growth trajectory but also to create massive job opportunities for our people and investments to the Province.
85. These initiatives will open opportunities for value chains development, agro-processing, trade and export, including the agricultural development of the SADC region.
86. The Nkomazi SEZ has received a boost following a very ambitious investment proposal by an Mpumalanga based property development company.
87. 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).
88. These discussions are at an advanced stage and include proposals that encompass a wide range of investment initiatives anchored on a regional beneficiation hub and trade port.
89. Madam Speaker, we are beginning to see progress 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.
90. On the Nkomazi SEZ, we are 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;

91. We shall ensure that the development of small businesses are prioritised in both projects, especially enterprises owned by young people, women and people with disabilities.

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

92. Madam Speaker, we have identified other important economic measures as part of our drive to create more jobs and fight the scourge of poverty and inequality. 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;

93. Another important area of work that government is paying undivided attention to is the green economy.

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

95. 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.

96. This government is collaborating with Green Cape and the GIZ, to implement the Mpumalanga Green Economic Development Plan.

97. 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.
98. Opportunities and projects ready for investment have been identified in the areas of renewable energy, diverse economy in post mining closures, agriculture, and the built environment.
99. 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.
100. This is a major milestone which could only be achieved through the symbiotic collaboration between government and the private sector.

Collaboration with strategic stakeholders and the Private Sector

101. Madam Speaker, for the ANC led government to succeed and deliver on its mandate, it needs strong, vibrant and strategic partnerships with the private sector, organized labour civil organizations and other non- governmental formations.
102. We have been very fortunate that some of these institutions have come on board and are partnering with us in the arenas of sustainable socio economic development.
103. Private sector companies are also providing financial and technical assistance to our municipalities and departments.
104. They also provide employment opportunities to local people and continue to support small and emerging businesses.
105. They extend bursaries to our needy students and have opened up their training facilities to our unemployed youth and provide them with soft and hard skills.
106. These companies include; ***Sasol, Exxaro, Eskom, Sappi, Columbus, South 32, Samancor, RCL foods, Mondi, Safcol, Glencore, Standard Bank, Absa Bank, Nedbank and First National Bank.***

A roadmap to a better brighter future

107. Madam Speaker, as I have indicated, the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc of unparalleled proportions to our economy and we need to respond with a much stronger economic stimulus.
108. In the past 10 months, government had to implement its plans under very challenging local and global economic, geopolitical and social environment.

109. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a ripple effects on the Provincial fiscus and the MTEF budgets. As a result, there were cuts across all departmental budget in the current financial year.
110. The impact was also felt in terms of contract and project delays due to a number of restrictions introduced to contain the spread of the virus.
111. Notwithstanding this, 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.***
112. As I had indicated in last year's State of the Province Address, each Department shall continue to ring fence 2% of their total budgets for maintenance of existing infrastructure.
113. The issue of dilapidating infrastructure will continue to receive attention in the upcoming Financial Year. We 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.
114. Madam Speaker, in last year's SOPA, I also announced that the Province will start the process of developing a new tertiary hospital in Emalahleni. I am glad to announce that, true to the ideals of the integrated functioning of all spheres of government, the Emalahleni Local Municipality has apportioned land for the construction of the tertiary hospital.
115. We have completed the business case development and also completed the clinical brief. Construction will commence soon.

116. Government has introduced the **Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme (PESP)** as part of the public investment in mass employment.
117. Last year, Mpumalanga received R645 million to improve access to services and opportunities for people in rural areas. 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.
118. Currently, several projects are being implemented in the following municipalities: ***Bushbuckridge, Chief Albert Luthuli, Dr JS Moroka, Thembisile Hani and Nkomazi Local Municipalities.***
119. Going forward, ***Infrastructure South Africa (ISA)*** will be responsible for project preparation, packaging, funding pathways and providing strategic oversight over all the gazetted projects that will be funded through the ***National Infrastructure Fund.***
120. These projects will create opportunities for support of local manufacturing and development of township economies.
121. What is critical to note is that not all the proposed infrastructure projects will need new funding and therefore, there is no need to develop other new grand plans.
122. Instead, the departments are expected to build upon their existing infrastructure plans and employment programmes to restore the economic growth that will result in creation of jobs on a massive scale.
123. Furthermore, this pandemic presents an opportunity to reposition previous initiatives to address the long standing demand for economic transformation and job creation.
124. 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.
125. As a Province, we have created ***19 649 jobs*** through the ***Expanded Public Works Programme.***
126. The main beneficiary of these opportunities were:
- 12 254 Women;

- 9 239 Young people; and
- 159 People with disabilities.

127. Government is strengthening this programme so that it can also assist those who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

128. 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.

Recent Devastating Floods Disaster and our Response to it

129. Madam Speaker, as I have indicated, our already precarious economic condition has been exacerbated by the recent floods that hit our Province.

130. Once more we are called upon to reprioritize resources and deal with the urgent needs of our people.

131. Roads and bridges are like the arteries of our transport network, without which the economy cannot function.

132. For us to restore and rebuild our infrastructure, create much needed jobs for our people and set this economy on a growth path, we are committing ourselves 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.

133. 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.

134. National COGTA has declared a state of disaster across the nation following the heavy rains.

135. 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.

136. However, the costs for urgent and immediate work that needs to be undertaken within 3 to 12 months are just over R600 million.

Tourism

137. Madam Speaker, the coronavirus pandemic has triggered an unprecedented crisis in the tourism sector.
138. The industry has been hit hard by the pandemic. Predictions indicate that the shock could translate to an 80% decline in international tourism sector.
139. A significantly high number of jobs have been shed by this industry and until such time that the global vaccination campaign has reached almost every corner of the world, this industry will continue to experience difficulties.
140. To cushion the burden and assist small and emerging businesses, the government has launched the R1.2 billion **Tourism Equity Fund** aimed at improving the participation of black entrepreneurs in this sector.
141. The fund will boost black players in the industry in the next three years through grant or debt funding for companies owned largely by black women and disabled entrepreneurs.
142. In the recent budget adjustment, the Province has made available **R20 million** to help mitigate the effects of the pandemic on this sector.
143. As part of our plans to revive the tourism industry and attract more tourists we will put more impetus in the public private sector partnership to develop **God's Window Skywalk Project, The Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains World Heritage Site and the Railway Heritage Tourism projects.**

Mining

144. Madam Speaker, mining remains one of the key mainstay contributors to our gross domestic product at 25.9 % and employs more than 53 000 people.
145. Recently we have seen a hive of activity on the investment front led by a multibillion capital injection expansion from South 32, Exxaro Resources, Pan African Resources, Canyon Coal and many others.
146. Mpumalanga province accounts for 83% of South Africa's coal production and is the third largest coal producing region in the world.
147. Gold mining has returned to the Pilgrims Rest area providing much needed jobs and local economic development. Stonewall is planning to expand its activities in this area.

148. We are delighted to also announce that **Uthaka Energy** will commence work on developing an underground coal mine in the Wakkerstroom area within the **Pixley ka Isaka Seme Local Municipality**. This project shall create 576 jobs for the people in the surrounding communities. The sod turning shall be done on the 24th of March 2021.

149. There are many other small mining activities that are stimulating our economy, creating jobs and supporting local businesses.

Agriculture, the backbone of our economy

150. Madam Speaker, Agriculture is one of the most employment intensive sectors of our economy. It is the only industry that has the potential of propelling our people from abject poverty into prosperity. The question is how to grow this sector which is often referred to as the backbone of our economy to fulfil its potential.

151. The answer lies with the land issue. Our people are yearning for land, and they have told us in no uncertain terms. As an ANC led government that listens and responds to what people say, we have released 33 farms totalling to 8906 hectares throughout the Province.

152. These farms are available for emerging farmers to lease on unused or underutilized or vacant state land. As government we are offering our previously disadvantaged farmers 30 year leasehold with an option to buy.

153. To avoid the repetition of what we have experienced in the past where land restitution took place only for that land to lie fallow, all beneficiaries who have been allocated land and signed agreements will be subjected to a compulsory training programme.

154. It is this capacity building measure that will serve as entry level training for aspirant farmers.

155. Quarterly inspections will be undertaken to see if there is progress and annual reports will be submitted.

156. These farms will greatly assist in expanding our Fortune 40 programme that has a specific focus on developing young entrepreneurs in farming.

157. Twelve of the Fortune 40 farms have been linked to retailers such as Spar, Shoprite and Boxer and with wholesalers and agri-hubs.

158. Our 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. Farmers receiving support from government are expected to enrol in courses offered by the **AgriSETA**.

159. Our goal is to have an agri-hub in each of the province's three districts as a vehicle for small-scale farmers and co-operatives to connect to the formal economy via the hub which will also provide equipment, technical and operational advice.
160. 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.
161. We have, as part of our key strategic intervention to assist these farmers, developed One-Stop-Centres.
162. Madam Speaker, the impact of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation are rapidly escalating globally. We have stepped up our commitment in advocating and mainstreaming climate change and environmental issues for a better, cleaner and healthier environment for all in the Province and beyond.
163. 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.
164. 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.

Education and skills development

165. Madam Speaker, the class of 2020 matriculants have defied all COVID-19 pandemic odds, producing the kind of results that we did not expect. **Bangene ngaphansi komfula baphuma nesikhuni somlilo sivutha.**
166. 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.
167. Amidst all the fear and anxiety, even when there were calls to defer the academic year, government chose to reprioritize its plans and ensured that lives were protected and that the education calendar is salvaged.
168. We were encouraged to witness a situation where everyone placed their hands on deck and supported all endeavors aimed at protecting lives and also saving the academic year.

169. 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.
170. 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 and when all indications were predicting a road that goes nowhere.
171. Schools were closed for some time and when they opened, learning and teaching was made difficult by the need for social distancing and other COVID-19 protocols.
172. A number of teachers were infected by the virus keeping them away from classrooms for lengthy periods. Some of the educators succumbed to the deadly virus leaving a void that was not easy to fill.
173. We therefore would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all educators and the support staff as well as to congratulate all students who passed their matric exams and other grades.
174. To those who did not make it, we will provide them another chance to write their examinations. All that is required of them is to work hard from the beginning of the year and not wait until towards the exams.
175. Madam Speaker, the province has made strides in terms of delivering its mandate of providing quality basic education in the past 25 years, with the last 5 years seeing accelerated growth in a number of areas.
176. Access to education has improved significantly, Stats SA General Household Survey (2019) findings indicate that the percentage of 7 to 15 year olds attending education institutions in Mpumalanga Province is at 99%.
177. However, challenges still remain in other areas like the throughput rate. Learners writing Grade 12 examinations in 2019 were equal to 48.7 percent of the Grade 1 class of 2008.
178. There are various reasons that contribute to the less than desirable throughput rate, in the main they are grade repetition and learner dropout due to socio-economic challenges. We must continue to work hard in order to reach the NDP target of 80%.
179. Madam Speaker, as part of the campaign of improving reading and learning capabilities at an early stage for our children, we will put more resources and emphasis on early childhood development as well as early grade reading for comprehension.

180. We will also increase the number of high schools that provide technical subjects to cater for learners who are more interested in skills development. 31 circuits out of 70 will now have schools that cater for technical subjects.
181. As part of responding to the call by the Freedom Charter that doors of learning shall be opened to all learners irrespective of their background, we have 370 students on full government bursaries furthering their studies in Russia.
182. 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.
183. This year, we will resume with our piloting robotic coding programme which was postponed last year due to the pandemic.
184. As a Province, we 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 our 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;
 - We will 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, we will build the skills hub at eMalahleni; and
 - We will finalise our e-learning strategy in the first quarter of the upcoming financial year. Over this MTEF we will roll out the distribution of tablets to all learners across the Province.
185. All these initiatives are responding to the ruling party's mandate as contained in our election manifesto.

Health and Social Development

186. The Department of Health will continue to play a pivotal role in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

187. As would be expected, this department was at the coal face in combating the spread of the virus and they did a sterling job.
188. 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.
189. 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.
190. To improve on emergency turn-around time, we have procured 67 new ambulances to add to the existing fleet.
191. As part of our efforts to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic we 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

Social Services

192. Madam Speaker, the current pandemic presents an added burden to the existing mental health crisis. Long after the pandemic has gone, we are likely to remain with long-term social and mental health crises that are complex and traversing emotional challenges.
193. According to researchers many people are experiencing COVID-19 related stress. Rampant job losses have led to financial strain. Stay-at-home orders have exacerbated toxic relationships and have increased the risk of gender based violence (GBV).
194. In addition to this burden, 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.
195. 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.
196. It can also be expected that the number of orphans and children who need foster care will increase, so will the number of women and children who are survivors of gender based violence who will need shelter.

Integrated Human Settlements

197. Madam Speaker, when we addressed this august House last year, we alluded to the fact that our focus henceforth will be on providing serviced stands and allowing people to build houses of their own choice.
198. This was in line with the national strategy to shift resources towards increasing the number of serviced stands exponentially so that we support more people in their efforts to build homes of their liking.
199. We also made it clear that we will continue to provide top structures for the most vulnerable members of our 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.
200. 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.***
201. For the 2021/2022 financial year, we are 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

202. In recognition of our commitment to ensure that Government operates in an integrated and efficient manner, we will continue to exercise oversight over Local Government in line with the provisions of the Constitution. Our priority is in ensuring that the people of Mpumalanga are afforded access to basic services.
203. Madam Speaker, it gives me pleasure to give a positive report of some progress that 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 to this progress.
204. A total of 21 Water Infrastructure Projects were completed benefiting 45 470 households to the value of R592 million.

205. 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.
206. The Department of Water and Sanitation continues with support in 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.
207. 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.
208. 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.
209. 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.
210. I am also proud and elated Hon. Speaker to report the establishment of the DBSA sponsored Provincial Programme Management Unit (PPMU) within CoGTA as we had announced in the previous SOPA. 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.
211. Applications from municipalities to access support through DBSA funding have already been submitted by municipalities and are being currently processed by DBSA. This support will close the gap on long identified deficiencies of poor infrastructure service delivery planning and inconsistent delivery.
212. Madam Speaker, in line with our responsibility to fight corruption and maladministration in our municipalities, we have completed investigations 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.

213. We have further supported these three (3) municipalities to develop Action Plans to implement the recommendations.
214. In order to stabilize our municipalities, 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.
215. Whilst we have recorded some milestones in improving the efficiency of our Municipalities, we acknowledge that there are still significant challenges in the areas of financial management, institutional capacity, governance and technical engineering capabilities.
216. Through the PPMU initiative, support from National Treasury and the District Development Model we are hopeful that we will turn the tide against these challenges and position Municipalities to be at the forefront of service delivery.
217. For this Government to succeed in delivering services to our communities, the cooperation and collaboration with Traditional Leaders is of the utmost importance right throughout our landscape.
218. The current leadership posture by all our 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.
219. The involvement of **Amakhosikati** structure further showcase these noble programmes to restore good societal values and humanity. We urge both councillors and traditional leaders to work together and be a part of key local government development decisions taken in Municipal Councils.
220. We further encourage the active involvement of Amakhosi in the Agrarian Revolution Programmes and plans aimed at stimulating the vibrant economies including the development of emerging farmers.
221. Madam Speaker, Mpumalanga Province is experiencing exponential population growth in particular among 4 local municipalities. 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.
222. Municipalities that are attracting large numbers of new residents and growing at 2.5% per annum and more are; Steve Tshwete, Emalahleni, Victor Khanye & Govan Mbeki. These municipalities are projected to grow from around 1.16 million in 2016 to 1.87 million by 2030.

223. City of Mbombela's population is projected to grow up to 800 000 people by 2030.

224. This will undoubtedly put pressure on basic service delivery infrastructure, job and economic opportunities in these municipalities.

225. As a provincial government we will work closely with these municipalities to strengthen their Spatial Development Plans, complement their infrastructure resources and focus on upgrading of informal Settlements to meet the additional demand from the new residents.

Social Cohesion, Culture Sports and Recreation

226. Madam Speaker, social cohesion has its foundations on the values of human dignity, social justice and compassion. It is also based on the vision that everyone, irrespective of their background, race, culture, religious belief or sexual orientation should be guaranteed equal rights and dignity.

Our Continent and the World

227. We are firm believers of one continent, one people of Africa and one vision.

228. We have signed agreements with Mozambique and will soon be engaging the Kingdom of eSwatini with a view of working together in tackling issues of cross border trade, climate change, road safety and security.

229. The recent tropical storm that came through Mozambique caused havoc in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu Natal is a clear indication that we need to work together on issues of global warming and how to mitigate climate change.

Crime, Corruption and Safer Communities

230. Madam Speaker, until such time that our people are free from fear of personal, physical and emotional harm, we cannot truly say that we are free.

231. 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.

232. 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.

233. We urge our people to report criminals to the police. We salute the bravery of those women and men who have reported their own children for crimes committed and handed them over to the police.
234. Working with police forums and community based organizations, we 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.
235. Road safety is one of the key challenges that needs all of us to confront. The rise in fatalities affect us all in one way or the other and place an additional burden on the already constrained fiscus.
236. We will continue to increase visibility across all roads in the Province. We will take harsh action against negligent and irresponsible drivers.
237. We will fight corruption in government ***whenever and wherever it raises its ugly head.*** I have 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.
238. We will continue to petition the Special Investigating Unit to probe instances of prima-facie financial mismanagement.
239. Honourable Members, this Administration will strive to give our people the confidence they are looking for in the management of public funds.

Conclusion.

240. Madam Speaker, whilst we are pinning our hopes on a successful vaccination programme, we must remain vigilant and not drop our guards against this monstrous COVID-19 pandemic.
241. It is therefore prudent that we wear our masks all the time, wash our hands thoroughly sanitize and keep a required safety distance.
242. We have been warned against a possible corona virus third wave which could be more severe than the two previous waves.
243. 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.

244. Madam Speaker we must remain positive. As the Finance Minister said in his budget speech last week, we must never forget that above the dark cloud that we see, the sun continues to shine.

245. We believe that once the dark cloud is gone, we will see the sun shining again and it will still be rising from Mpumalanga.

246. I thank you.