



2022

STATE OF THE PROVINCE

ADDRESS

#MPSOPA2022



"Let's grow Mpumalanga together"



STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF MPUMALANGA PROVINCE ON 25 FEBRUARY, 2022.

Honourable Speaker of the Mpumalanga Legislature;
Honourable Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, Honourable Ronald Lamola;
Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation, Honourable David Mahlobo;
Members of the Executive Council;
Honourable Members of the Mpumalanga Legislature;
Honourable Members of Parliament and National Council of Provinces, Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces;
President of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa , Kgosi Mokoena;
Chairperson of the Provincial House of Traditional Leaders, Inkosi Ngomane and our revered Traditional Leaders;
Judge President of Mpumalanga Division Justice Legodi and members of the Judiciary present;
Chairpersons and CEOs of our parastatals;
The Executive Vice President of SASOL, Ms. Charlotte Mokoena;
The Director- General Mr Makhukhu Mampuru, Heads of Departments and Municipal Managers;
Acting ANC Provincial Chairperson, Cde. Mandla Ndlovu and the entire Leadership of the Alliance;
Representatives of labour, business, religious and other community based organizations.
Distinguished Guests and all Dignitaries present here today
Compatriots, Comrades and Friends.
Ladies and gentlemen

THE CONTEXT-THERE IS LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

1. Madam Speaker, when we came into office in 2019, we committed ourselves to a strategic framework that is aimed at assisting us to deliver our key objectives in the medium term.
2. The framework is in line with the National Development Plan and in the fullness of time it will enable us as a Province to contribute to the fight against poverty, unemployment and inequality.
3. The seven priorities of our medium term strategic framework are;
 - A Capable, ethical and developmental state;
 - Economic Transformation and Job creation;
 - Education, skills and Health;
 - Consolidating the social wage through reliable and quality basic services;

- Spatial integration, Human Settlements and Local Government;
 - Social Cohesion and safe communities;
 - A better Africa and a better world;
4. In the two and a half years since we assumed office, we have gone some way in implementing these priorities. It is this progress that I will be sharing with this august house and the people of Mpumalanga during the course of this State of the Province Address.
 5. It would be remiss of me not to reflect, briefly, on the impact Covid-19 pandemic has had on our ability to implement our set priorities, as well as on society as a whole.
 6. Madam Speaker, Honourable Members and Citizens of this beautiful province we call Mpumalanga "***The Place of the Rising Sun***", I bring with me a bag full of warm greetings and sprinkles of shining hope.
 7. Hope in a situation which some among us were beginning to think and believe is hopeless.
 8. When we all thought that the calamity and distress brought to us by a deadly Covid 19 virus had the potential of wiping out mankind on this universe, ***hope remained on our side and never deserted us.***
 9. When we thought this adversity was beyond our comprehension and we were resigning ourselves to its fate, ***hope gave us motivation to fight on.***
 10. When our strength and resilience was put to the test and stretched to its limits, ***hope reminded us of our past experiences and how strong we are;***
 11. When we were losing our grandparents, our parents, sisters and brothers, our close and distant relatives, our neighbours, our own children and our colleagues to the virus, ***hope gave us courage and made us believe that we will overcome this adversity.***
 12. When we could no longer mourn our dearly departed ones and everyday had become the day for a funeral, ***hope reminded us of another deadly pandemic the HIV/AIDS and how we dealt with it.***
 13. When we went to bed and we were not sure if we will make it alive the next morning, ***hope summoned our faith.***
 14. When a slight cough and an innocent sneeze would send a panic wave in the room, a bus or a taxi, ***hope gave us motivation and the sense of unity to overcome our trials and tribulations.***
 15. When we thought this could be the end of life as we have known it forgetting that generations in the past have faced such calamities and have survived to tell their stories, ***hope made us dig deeper to find our inner strength.***

16. Today, Madam Speaker , we can with a degree of certainty say that we have seen the light at the end of the tunnel. It is a small glitter that grows bigger and brighter every day. It doesn't mean we have crossed the hurdle; it means there is **hope**. Because suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope and hope does not put us to shame.
17. For two years we have been travelling through a very dark tunnel feeling like we are trapped in a roller coaster that was in no way about to stop.
18. But now we are seeing and feeling this glimmer of hope that is fast spreading throughout our nation.
19. Our people are learning to embrace this hardship with grace, courage and dignity.
20. We have all accepted the presence of the virus among us, and we are adapting and learning on how to live with it and are doing the best we can to find normality in an abnormal situation.
21. Everyone among us has been either infected or affected by the Covid 19 pandemic.
22. We are not alone facing this misfortune. The whole world is engulfed by the pandemic. We are all suffering from similar scars. Some are deep, others very deep , yet our people have chosen to look for a more positive perspective of their current situation.
23. As painful and as daunting our experiences of Covid 19 pandemic may be and continues to be, we have chosen courage over adversity.
24. We are drawing strength from our experience as a nation that has faced other greater calamities in the past.
25. Whilst the pandemic may have been the worst in our modern history, the battles that we have fought for our liberation were equally daunting.
26. As government we must seize this moment of hope and courage displayed by the masses of our people and rebuild from the devastation brought by the pandemic.
27. We want to thank you the citizens of this province. When we made a clarion call to you to observe the non-pharmaceutical protocols of wearing a mask, keeping a social distance, washing your hands and sanitizing. Difficult as it was, you listened and you complied.
28. During the first three waves of the pandemic you made huge sacrifices when you could not visit your loved ones at hospitals and you were not able to give those departed a dignified farewell and perform the rituals that form part of our identity as Africans. We know how painful and mentally upsetting that must have been.
29. When we asked you to trust our scientists and take your vaccinations again you listened to us and you dutifully did so. We say thank you. We would like to extend our heart-felt gratitude to the health care workers in particular frontline workers who have done a tremendous job in

saving lives sometimes losing their own lives trying hard to save ours. ***Sithi Siyabonga, Siyathokoza, Rea leboga, yi Khensile, Baie dankie, Ndolivhuwa nga maanda, Thank you.***

30. To those who are still hesitant and doubtful about vaccination, we wish to say that nobody said the vaccines were a magic wand. What we wish to emphasise is the fact that vaccines have played a crucial role in bringing down the spread of the virus and in reducing fatalities.
31. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, in honour of the nearly 100 000 people in this country who have lost their lives to the pandemic.
32. Yet again Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, we are also reeling with pain after a tragic accident that claimed the lives of our 9 precious learners in the Mayflower area. As we laid them to rest yesterday, tragedy struck when another learner passed on in a horrific accident within the same vicinity. We extend our sincere condolences to the bereaved families and the entire education fraternity. Can we observe a moment of silence in their honour.....thank you

ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND JOB CREATION

ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION & RECOVERY

33. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, allow me to report on the government's progress towards the realisation of our National Development Plan's vision 2030 goals of;
 - reducing unemployment;
 - increasing economic growth;
 - increasing employment ;
 - increasing investment;
 - reducing the Gini co-efficient Index; and
 - eliminating food poverty.
34. Despite an estimated economic contraction of approximately 7% in 2020 and a high unemployment rate of 34.9% in terms of the narrow definition of unemployment in terms of the 3rd quarter of 2021 statistics from Stats SA, we are more determined than ever to turn the corner and materially improve the quality of life for the people of Mpumalanga.

ATTRACTING AND INVESTING IN THE MPUMALANGA ECONOMY

35. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, I am delighted to report that our continuous engagements with European airlines for direct routes to Mpumalanga are beginning to bear fruit.
36. I am therefore happy to announce that ***Lufthansa Airlines***, through their ***Euro-Wings division***, will soon establish a route from Frankfurt in Germany to Mpumalanga Kruger International Airport. This is a major boost and a welcome investment to our ailing tourism industry.
37. As I pronounced in last year's State of the Province Address, we are making significant progress with the development of a new hotel and conference facility in Middelburg. The project is currently at earthworks stage. We anticipate completion in 18 months.

38. Vodacom has announced that they will invest **R450 million** into their network and power back-up upgrades across the Province.
39. Madam Speaker, in September last year, I officially launched the sky walk project along the Panorama route in Thaba Chweu Local Municipality to unlock our tourism offering.
40. The sky walk that will turn Gods window into a global must see location. Located at the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, Gods window skywalk project will offer visitors a 360 degree panoramic view, with a 12 m walkaway suspended on the cliff.
41. The skywalk will be much higher than any that was ever built all over the world. We expect to attract 2 million tourists to the Blyde River Region. This project is a partnership between government, the private sector and the Mapulana CPA that owns the land. The community will have a shareholding in the project. Once completed it is expected to create more than 100 permanent jobs and during construction 300 job opportunities will be created.
42. As Government we have continuously advocated that Public Private Partnerships are an effective avenue through which we can accelerate investment in our Province. A total of R475 million in public private investments has been raised for the Sky Walk project.
43. SANRAL, our national road agency will invest R9 billion on road infrastructure in the Province.
44. The top structure buildings for the Mpumalanga International Fresh Produce Market will soon be completed and we are targeting operationalisation within the 2022/2023 Financial Year. We call upon the Private sector to partner with us and reap the rewards of what shall be a truly mutually beneficial Private Public partnership.
45. As part of our efforts to stimulate the Provincial economy, we will host a trade and investments conference within the next three months focusing on Technology, Agro-processing, Mining, Green Economy and Manufacturing.
46. We have established a Just Transition and Climate Change Working Group that reports directly to the Office of the Premier on a quarterly basis. This will enable us to tap in the R131 billion that has been promised by the industrialized countries to help South Africa implement a Just Transition to low carbon while addressing job security for the affected communities.
47. We shall accelerate the completion of infrastructural projects across, including but not limited to the parliamentary village, the Mpumalanga Fresh Produce Market , Tekwane South bridge, Bethal hospital, Mapulaneng hospital and Mammethlake hospital which were interrupted by illicit forums extorting money and blocking the delivery of services.

TRANSFORMING THE ECONOMY AND CREATING JOBS

Madam Speaker and Honorable Members,

39. ***Industrialization, Localization and Export Promotion*** is another important priority area that forms part of the ***Mpumalanga Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan*** – an area of work

that seeks to intensify diversification of the resource-based sectors of mining, agriculture and forestry, currently dominated by large corporations, into downstream manufacturing-based industries to enable broader economic growth and labour absorption.

40. Again, these initiatives will be largely driven through the ***District Development Model***. It is of critical importance that the ***Local Economic Development*** Strategies of our Municipalities should align themselves with all these initiatives so that our people can benefit from them.
41. The **Mpumalanga Industrial Development Plan** will guide the rollout of interventions identified under this Priority area.
42. To be more precise, one refers to the roll out of the ***Nkomazi Special Economic Zone*** (SEZ) in Nkomazi municipality and the ***Petrochemical Industrial Technology Park in Govan Mbeki municipality***. Both these catalytic projects have huge potential to expand the industrial base of the province and consequently stimulate economic growth, alleviate poverty and reduce unemployment, including enhancing the requisite skills demanded by the provincial economy.
43. Without doubt Madam Speaker, these projects offer investment opportunities for companies in agro-processing, logistics, chemical industries, training sector, warehousing, office space, conference and incubation facilities. In addition, these projects will also facilitate the export of commodities through, amongst others, the South African ports, including the Maputo Port or air transportation to foreign markets using Mpumalanga Kruger International Airport.

SOCIAL RELIEF INTERVENTIONS

44. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, we have gone through a period filled with social and economic upheaval caused by what the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby referred to as ***“uncertainty, uncontrollability and unpredictability.”*** The archbishop could not have summed it any better.
45. Covid-19 has deepened our economic crisis which was already experiencing contraction even before the onset of the pandemic. Many of our people lost their jobs, many went without income for extended periods and hunger while poverty worsened.
46. The President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa aptly put it in his state of the nation address that - ***“South Africa needs a new consensus. A consensus that is born out of a common understanding of our current challenging situation and a recognition of the need to address the challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality.”***
47. Our government’s response to this crisis has been phenomenal. It has been recognized and hailed by the international community as among the best emergency social responses in the world. We extended our social grants to all South Africans who qualified for it. This has had a very positive effect in a situation that otherwise would have been dire, hopeless and engulfed by despair.
48. We warmly welcome the announcement by the President Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa that the R350 social relief of distress grant has been extended until March next year.

49. This will go a long way in guaranteeing all South Africans a meal or two per day. ***Bakwethu akekho umuntu kulelizwe lethu okufanele ayolala ngendlala engadlile. Lokhu kungezinye zezinkomba zokuthi uhulumeni ophethwe yi Khongolose uyabanakekela futhi uyabacabangela abantu abampofu abahluphekayo nabadla imbuya ngothi.***
50. If we had not taken a decision to provide support to the most vulnerable in our society we could have been facing a danger of series of converging crises that, if not attended to and addressed, will feed into each other and usher our country into a dark place where even the angels do not dare to tread.
51. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, we have demonstrated time and time again that we are a resilient nation that has the capacity and the ability to bounce back against all odds, out of ashes caused by factors beyond our control, we have always risen like a phoenix and charted a way forward.
52. Like the eagle building its nest, step by step, twigs and sticks gently dropped into their respective spaces, weaving them through a simple yet complex structure, the ANC-led government, together with the people of this province have begun in earnest to rebuild our social and economic lives that were destroyed by the Covid 19 pandemic. Our ***provincial economic reconstruction and recovery plan*** is beginning to take shape and bear fruits.
53. We are building a future democratic society as envisioned by our forebears abomama ***uCharlotte Maxeke, uRuth First, uNomzamo Winnie Madikizela Mandela, uAlbertina Sisulu no Lilian Ngoyi*** among many others. We do this guided by our blue print – the Freedom Charter.
54. We are engaged in a protracted process of reconstructing and rebuilding a society that has been bruised by the effects of an enemy that is invisible yet its effects are very evident for everyone to see.
55. Millions of our people are at a risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of people falling into a debt-trap is increasing at an alarming rate.
56. A significant number of our small enterprises face an unprecedented threat whilst thousands of our workforce have already lost their jobs.
57. Informal economy workers are particularly vulnerable because the majority lack financial support structures needed to sustain their businesses.
58. To counter all these adversities, we must act and we must act now.
59. We warmly welcome the announcement by President Ramaphosa that a new, redesigned loan guarantee scheme is being introduced to enable small businesses to bounce back from the pandemic and civil unrest.
60. This new bounce-back scheme incorporates the lessons from the previous loan guarantee scheme. It will involve development finance institutions and non-bank SME providers in offering finance whilst expanding the types of credit available and adjust eligibility criteria to encourage

greater uptake. The Office of the Premier, working with municipalities , will hold workshops using various media platforms to create awareness of such opportunities.

61. Despite current limitations caused by fiscal constraints, our government has done exceptionally better in reprioritizing our resources to accommodate the poor and the vulnerable. Yet we know that it is not enough.
62. Now is the time for solidarity among various stakeholders in our province. We cannot afford to pull in different directions.
63. Government, labour, business and civil society must hold hands and find common ground to rebuild our societies.
64. We must unite and renew our commitment to being a caring society that advances and defends our constitutional democracy.
65. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, our march to the Promised Land did not end in 1994. It was only the beginning of a long walk to building a future based on the principles of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights.
66. As the first President of a democratic South Africa our icon uTata Nelson Mandela once observed and I quote ***“After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.”***
67. We have also been told that we may have to live with the current virus for a much longer period.
68. It therefore means that our health systems need to be strengthened and be robust, our economy needs to be resilient and our social support structures need to withstand the test of any potential disruption.

PRIORITIES OF THE ANC-LED GOVERNMENT

69. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, there is no doubt that while much has been achieved in terms of access to electricity, housing, water, social security and infrastructure for our marginalised communities, more still needs to be done to change the lives of our people for the better.
70. Today, we have appeared before this august house under very difficult conditions to account for the implementation of the social contract that the ANC-led government has entered into with the people of the Province in 2019.
71. As if the effects of Covid 19 were not bringing hardship enough, we have had to bear with destruction to our infrastructure and our properties caused by storms and heavy rains.
72. Whilst the pandemic has been a setback, it has also given us an opportunity to assess and review how we do things as government.
73. It has fast-tracked our journey to the fourth industrial revolution, forcing us to adopt innovative ways of governance.

74. We are embracing advanced technologies that will speed up service delivery to our people.
75. As the ANC-led government, we are quite mindful that, as part of restoring the confidence and dignity of our people, meaningful participation in the mainstream economy should remain our top priority.
76. We have to ensure that our economy is inclusive, creates large numbers of jobs and absorbs cooperatives, informal and small businesses in great numbers. These are steps that will propel growth to higher levels.
77. However, we cannot do this alone.
78. We need a strong committed private sector partnership that goes beyond corporate social responsibility.
79. Our immediate focus is on our Medium Term Strategic Framework, therefore our resources will be directed towards implementing our strategic plans.
80. What this means is that we have to build on the promises we made in our Manifesto and find more innovative ways in delivering on them. We simply cannot continue on the same trajectory like before the pandemic.
81. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members , we will be the first to admit that unemployment, in particular youth unemployment, in this province has reached unacceptable high proportions. This is a global phenomenon which in our case has been exacerbated by other issues which include amongst others;
- The mismatch of available skills to those needed by the industries in the province;
 - Low levels of technical skills among the majority of our young people;
 - Low levels of foreign direct investments as well as domestic investments;
 - Inadequate supply of reliable energy due to challenges faced by Eskom; and
 - Covid 19 pandemic and the recent floods that destroyed our already fragile infrastructure.

PROVINCIAL ECONOMIC GROWTH PROSPECTS

82. Madam Speaker, Mpumalanga contributed almost R400 billion or approximately 7.5% to the GDP of South Africa in 2019 before Covid-19. Mpumalanga’s contribution was the 5th largest of the provinces.
83. Our economy in 2021 grew by approximately 4.6% from a contraction of 7% in 2020. A growth rate of just around 2% is expected for 2022. It is predicted that 2023 growth may not exceed 1.5%. Risk factors to the downside include load-shedding, rising inflation, as well as COVID-19 related factors.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

84. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members as I have indicated earlier, the elephant in the room for us is the persistently increasing numbers of unemployed people in this province. This figure has reached astronomical levels that cannot be sustained.
85. Of critical concern to us is youth unemployment in general and even higher figures of young women who are unemployed.
86. These figures are not just alarming but they point to an urgent need to find solutions that will lead to large scale employment by the industries, supported by self-employment through formal and informal businesses, massive programmes of skills development and labour intensive programmes.
87. Despite all our efforts as government to create both sustainable jobs, we are nowhere near our targets of creating 105 000 jobs per annum. On average we were able to create only a quarter (26 250) of our targets over a period of ten years.
88. We have observed , with concern, the number of industries shedding jobs in big numbers in 2020, only agriculture and finance recorded job gains. By the middle of last year the province had lost 62 000 jobs despite the recovery of the provincial labour market.
89. Madam Speaker, this is the elephant in the room I was talking about. This is our biggest challenge as government. This is what makes us have sleepless nights.
90. I thought I should share these figures with you so that all of us working together can understand the urgency required to address this calamity but also appreciate the gravity we are facing as a nation.

MPUMALANGA ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION AND RECOVERY PLAN (MERRP) OUR RESPONSE TO COVID 19 PANDEMIC

91. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, after extensive consultations and engagements with our social partners including labour, business and civic formations we have produced a road map that will assist us recover from the ravages of the pandemic. This road map is aptly named the ***Mpumalanga Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan*** (MERRP).
92. The MERRP is underpinned by five important principles.
93. ***Firstly***, the strategic objective of the MERRP is not only to mitigate the negative impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the economy and livelihoods but also to place the provincial economy on a growth trajectory that creates more job opportunities for the people of Mpumalanga;
94. ***Secondly***, it is a Plan that is aligned to the national ***Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan***;
95. ***Thirdly***, it is Plan that is a product of key social partners who participated and contributed meaningfully during its development process;

96. **Fourthly**, it is a Plan that assumes a **Project-based Implementation Approach** - focusing on Game Changer Projects and targeted programmes; and

97. **Lastly**, it is a Plan that will be implemented through the District Delivery Model platform.

98. Guided by these principles and clear rigorous project identification processes, game changer projects were identified under each priority area. These catalytic projects will go a long way towards placing the provincial economy on a growth trajectory and create more job opportunities for the people of Mpumalanga.

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members

99. Allow me to highlight the priority areas that form the bedrock of the **Mpumalanga Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan** – priority areas that are guided by the principles that I have just mentioned in the latter statement:

100. The first priority area that the MERRP relates to **Infrastructure Investment and Delivery**.

101. This is a priority guided by the **Mpumalanga Infrastructure Master Plan** (MIMP) and the **Provincial Spatial Development Framework**. Both these plans are informed by the **Integrated Development Plans** of Local and District Municipalities, and the Province.

102. As social partners, we aim to, among others, fast track the construction, maintenance and rehabilitation of strategic basic infrastructure, social infrastructure and economic infrastructure of the entire province across all spheres of government.

103. In essence, we intend to pay more attention on road infrastructure network that enhance opportunities for our people in the villages, townships and rural areas, unlock industrialization, agro-processing, agricultural value chains as well as enhancing the tourism potential in the province, including the promotion of integrated and sustainable human settlements for our communities. In practical terms this means that;

- ***Our gravel roads will be bladed and graded making them more accessible and user friendly;***
- ***We will upgrade gravel roads to surfaced roads;***
- ***Our surfaced roads will be resealed to deal with the challenge of pot holes;***
- ***More gravel roads will be upgraded to surfaced roads;***
- ***Working with local government we will fast track the paving of community roads in our municipalities; and***
- ***In collaboration with our social partners and MTPA we will construct, perform routine and major maintenance of key tourism routes and corridors throughout Province.***

104. In line with the **Project Implementation Approach**, together with our social partners, we have identified the following game changer projects that will contribute meaningfully towards inclusive growth and job creation.

105. One refers to the Rehabilitation of the Coal Haulage Network around Gert Sibande and Nkangala District, which covers a total of 14 percent of the provincial roads that transport coal, mainly, to Eskom power stations. Therefore, it is extremely important to safeguard sustainable energy provision through rehabilitation and maintenance of the coal haulage road network.
106. As part of the DDM approach, Mpumalanga has benefited from the upgrading of the Moloto Road (R573). This is a major route linking the north-western part of Mpumalanga to the province of Gauteng and North Eastern Mpumalanga to Limpopo. It has the potential to unlock and enhance agriculture and tourism in the region including mining linkages between Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Maputo port in Mozambique and Richards Bay port in KwaZulu Natal.
107. We welcome the decision by SANRAL to invest R9 billion in the road infrastructure in our province. These projects will include the upgrading of the N2 between Ermelo in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal as well as the R40 between Hazyview and Bushbuckridge. Both these projects will create employment opportunities and will benefit enterprises owned by young people, women and people with disabilities.
108. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, our road infrastructure is ageing much faster than we had anticipated. Part of this is caused by truck overloads, increased volumes of transport and above all the effects of climate change. Recent heavy rains throughout the province have created multiple potholes.
109. To try and address this problem, we have deployed our roads maintenance teams and routine road maintenance contractors.
110. Madam Speaker, the people of Mpumalanga have complained about the poor workmanship on our road network system. As a caring government, we have heard you. (*Sinivile bantfu bakitsi*)
111. In order for us to address the poor work done by some contractors, we have resolved to strengthen our internal capacity as part of developing a capable State. To this effect, we have invested in mechanised pothole patching vehicles in an endeavour to improve the conditions of our roads, reduce costs, save time and improve quality.
112. This initiative will focus on maintenance of strategic road infrastructure network systems with tourism routes receiving the highest priority.
113. The initiative will create more than 45 046 EPWP jobs and provide local small-medium and micro-sized enterprises (SMMEs) an opportunity to participate in the mainstream economy during the next financial year.
114. Madam Speaker, as you will recall, we committed to constructing a tertiary hospital in Emalahleni, we shall name the hospital, the Linah Malatjie Tertiary Hospital In honour of the legacy of the late Executive Mayor of Emalahleni Local Municipality.
115. Planning for the Linah Malatjie Tertiary hospital is progressing well and we expect construction to start in the 2022/2023 Financial Year.

116. In addition to the completed projects, we have initiated new projects including but not limited to; providing 176 schools with water and sanitation; 183 schools undergoing maintenance and refurbishment; 40 new classrooms in fast growing towns including **Hoerskool Bergvlam, Nelspruit Primary School, Laeveld Laerskool, Laerskool Nelspruit, HTS Middelburg and Pine Ridge High School.**
117. We have completed work and I had the honour of officially opening the state of the art Aerorand primary school in Middelburg in January this year.
118. Another priority area covered by the MERRP focuses on **Energy Security and Green Economy.** Informed by the **Mpumalanga Green Economy Development Plan**, the provincial government, together with its strategic social partners, intend to work very closely with Eskom on the '*Just Energy Transition*'. In the short to medium term, the Just Energy Transition will affect three power stations, namely, **Komati, Hendrina and Arnot.**
119. While the decommissioning of the power stations will have a negative short-term impact on the income stream of the affected municipalities and current businesses, jobs and livelihoods of communities, however, the Just Energy Transition Programme also present new opportunities that will benefit the people of Mpumalanga in many fronts.
120. We expect all Municipalities in particular those affected by the decommissioning of the power stations to be at the forefront championing the **Just Energy Transition Programme.**
121. As we speak, Eskom has embarked on a **Repurposing and Repowering Programme** that is being piloted at Komati Power Stations. This programme will create new opportunities that will drive, among others:
- **Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment** and the **Black Industrialists programme**; particularly in the area of battery storage manufacturing;
 - Reskilling of the current workforce, social upliftment, industrialization and numerous manufacturing opportunities in the renewable energy space.
122. Indeed, Mpumalanga will benefit from jobs created directly and indirectly through the Just Energy Transition. The question remains as to whether our Municipalities have claimed their space on this table. Our concern is that things are being planned and done for our Municipalities without them.
123. To fast track this process I will be appointing a Just Transition and **Climate Change Working Group** under the leadership of the Director General within the Office of the Premier.
124. We have established the **Mpumalanga Green Economy Agency**, as a **Special Purpose Vehicle**, to coordinate all Just Transition activities within the province and also develop the green economy.
125. One must also point out that the establishment of different Clusters is already unfolding in the areas of energy, water, smart agriculture and circular economy and they are at different stages of development.

EMPLOYMENT STIMULUS AND ECONOMIC INCLUSION OF WOMEN AND YOUTH.

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members

126. Another critical priority area that forms part of the MERRP is ***the Employment stimulus and the economic inclusion of women and youth.***
127. Different provincial Departments and municipalities have been intervening through public employment programmes and other related measures that are able to create a large number of jobs for our people in the shorter term.
128. The provincial and local municipalities will continue to intensify their existing programmes such as the ***Social Enterprise Development Programme; Government Nutrition Programme; Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP); Siyatentela Roads Maintenance Programme; National Youth Service; Paving of township and municipal roads; Emerging Contractor Development Programme and Skills development through the incubation programme*** to create massive job opportunities for our people.
129. In the past year, we were allocated R72, 9 million as part of the President's job protection and creation support package in response to the coronavirus pandemic.
130. This programme placed youth unemployment at the centre of its agenda through implementation of various public employment programmes.
131. It also builds upon other youth targeted programmes such as the Internship, Learnership, National Youth Service, Young Professionals Programme, Artisans and the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP).
132. As at the end of December 2021, EPWP created a total of 30 470 work opportunities to assist with poverty alleviation and skills development for the people of the Province in this current Financial Year.
133. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, as we endeavour to deliver services to our people, we have a responsibility to have the necessary foresight and presence of mind to explore economic opportunities that will grow the Provincial economy for the benefit of future generations.
134. To this effect, we have noted with keen interest, the developments in the arena of medicinal and recreational use of cannabis.
135. A recent study by the ***Goldman Sachs investment bank*** found that the cannabis industry will average 20% growth over the next decade. The opportunities that this represents are enormous. As the Mpumalanga Province, we are blessed with weather patterns that make the cultivation of cannabis a sustainable revenue stream for the Provincial fiscus.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

136. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, earlier on I alluded to our partnership with the private sector and other social partners.

137. Our private sector partners have in the past played a pivotal role in our efforts to fight poverty, inequality and unemployment. We have seen companies partnering with government, building clinics and schools, fixing water and sewer problems, building roads and fixing electricity issues, offering bursaries to students, providing capacity building and preparing our youth for the future just to name a few.
138. We want to assure you that every penny and every effort that you contribute to make the lives of our people better will never go unnoticed. We are thankful indeed that you have always been willing to lend a hand whenever we ask you to do so. However, more still need to be done.
139. Government alone cannot solve societal ills of the past, the present and the future. We need you as our partners to come closer to the space of creating job opportunities and supporting SMMEs in a much more structured manner that will deliver tangible results that have an impact on the lives of our people.

FIGHTING POVERTY AND ENSURING FOOD SECURITY

140. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, in line with the ***Mpumalanga Economic Reconstruction and Recovery*** Plan and the ***Agricultural Agro processing Master Plan*** (AAMP), the province is in the process of increasing food production and ensuring participation of farmers throughout the value chain.
141. This is done through the innovative programme , called the ***Greening Mpumalanga Programme*** . The programme is designed on district based agro ecological advantage of each district designated as Fruit Basket. These are the Fruit corridor in Ehlanzeni, the Vegetable corridor in Gert-Sibande, and the Grain corridor in Nkangala .
142. The programme has been initiated with the greening of Chief Albert Luthuli targeting 12 174ha for vegetable production linked to the Provincial Government Nutrition Programme. To date, the department has already planted 100ha of vegetable and already secured good market from the GNP and other markets.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

143. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, this brings me to the issues of people living in rural and farm areas. We made a commitment that our people living in rural areas will never be left behind. We have, to a large extent, kept to our promise.
144. We committed ourselves that we will provide basic services to rural communities, paying more attention on social and economic infrastructure; training and skills development; and the development of cooperatives and small businesses.
145. We also committed ourselves to intensify the land reform programme so that more land can be in the hands of the poor for their own subsistence farming.
146. We further committed ourselves to expand the agrarian reform programme for the promotion of agricultural cooperatives throughout the value chain, including agro-processing.

147. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, I am happy to report that we successfully completed;
- Compulsory training programme and capacity building measure that serve as entry level training for aspirant farmers; and
 - To date 4 550 farmers have received skills development and 500 farmers have received AgriSETA accredited skills development programmes.
148. These programme target mainly the young farmers and women.
149. We are in our final year of the implementation of the ***Mpumalanga Rural Skills and Learnership Programme*** where 940 youth are receiving production, agro-processing as well as the farm equipment repairs and maintenance learnership qualification.
150. The programme has managed to recruit 226 aspirant young potential farmers who are currently undergoing both technical and practical training in the 23 training centers.
151. To date, 151 youth have completed the training courses and have been awarded certificates.
152. We are now facilitating a process of placing these young aspirant famers on their own farms to become farmers in their own rights. Farms are acquired from the stakeholders such as state, local municipalities, traditional leadership and the private sector.

The Mpumalanga Youth Development Fund (MYDF)

153. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, a total of 44 applications were finally approved for funding by ***Mpumalanga Youth Development Fund*** and in line with the disbursement Memorandum of Agreement between the Office of the Premier and MEGA, the 44 approved applications have been sent to MEGA for disbursement.
154. We will monitor this programme to make sure that funding is used for what it was intended for.
155. Given the serious constraints that we are facing as government and the demand for funding infrastructure projects that need funding, we have come to the conclusion that we need to enhance and harness our capacity to deliver on this commitment.
156. We need to focus on project fund raising for big catalyst projects like the Mpumalanga International Fresh Produce Market, Nkomazi SEZ, Tourism, Nkosi City, Mpumalanga High Altitude Training Centre, the total value chain agricultural projects geared for exports, Manufacturing and many others. It will also facilitate Public Private Partnership Projects. This unit will report directly to the Office of The Premier.

CONSOLIDATING OUR GAINS IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

157. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, our development, prosperity and the realisation of our vision for a better society depends on our ability to provide access to quality education. Education remains one of the critical levers to reverse the cycle of intergenerational poverty and growing inequalities in our society.

- 158.** History will judge us on how successful has our education system has been in creating an environment for children from poor households and those in rural areas and townships to realize their dreams.
- 159.** As one of the key priorities of the ANC-led government, education remains high on the agenda of our administration.
- 160.** Over the past decade we have prioritised important areas of intervention intended to improve the overall performance of our education system in the Province.
- 161.** Our main focus was on:
- Improving overall learner outcomes in all grades in particular grade 12;
 - Improving performance in numeracy, literacy, mathematics and science;
 - Increasing the number of students attaining university entrance requirements;
 - Improving school governance and leadership;
 - Addressing infrastructure backlogs; and
 - Improving discipline and security in our schools.
- 162.** We have invested in all these key measures to ensure we create an enabling environment for the continuous improvement of education outcomes.
- 163.** I would like thank all the stakeholders in education, in particular the private sector , for their contribution towards the overall improvement of learner performance.
- 164.** Previously, I had made a clarion call for the Private sector to join hands with the government and participate in our educational sector. I am equally encouraged by the overwhelming response by the Private sector. We continue to call upon the private sector, School governing bodies, communities and parents to continue to aid our efforts to provide quality education for our children.
- 165.** This Administration will continue to collaborate with the South African Police Service to strengthen an integrated school safety programmes as part of creating an environment conducive to quality learning and teaching. This programme focus mainly on addressing the challenge of drugs and substance abuse in schools.
- 166.** Among other key initiatives, emphasis will continue on capacitating School Safety Committees on random search, seizure and drug testing, procuring drug testing devices as well as installing alarm systems in schools.
- 167.** As we implement all these interventions to improve the overall performance of our education system, we would like to enjoin all key stakeholders in education to join hands with government and play an important role in the education of our children. The future of our children and the Province is in our hands.
- 168.** Madam Speaker, I indicated in last year's State of the Province Address that the Provincial Government has elected to transfer the Early Childhood Development Centres to the

Department of Education. This process has been finalised and will take effect on the first of April 2022.

MPUMALANGA RESEARCH INITIATIVE

169. Madam Speaker, like all government institutions, we place research evidence as critical to inform decision making. Our research function exists to produce information and evidence that enhances decision making. Learning organizations depend on research for new knowledge, for innovation and for new developments.
170. Our government has decided to increase our investment in research so that we are able to assess progress on policy implementation, track impact of our policies and changes that are happening within society. Empirical research will also give us access to the latest information/developments, and to benchmark against best practices.
171. As government we have already partnered with the University of Mpumalanga. We will be strengthening that partnership through the Mpumalanga Research Initiative which will include government researchers, the *University of Mpumalanga* and the *Tshwane University of Technology*.

Integrated Human Settlements

172. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, during my SOPA speech last year I announced that the focus has now shifted from providing houses to providing our people with serviced sites.
173. This however does not mean that those who are most vulnerable in our society will not get government assistance to build houses. This shift was informed by rapid improvements of RDP houses from their original plans to well-built big houses. It became clear to us that the biggest demand was serviced sites more than the houses. Our people had a desire to build houses of their own choice.

During the next financial year we will be embarking on;

- The prioritization of informal settlements upgrading, through provision of 2 934 serviced stands using the upgrading of informal settlements programme;
- The Utilization of the *Integrated Residential Development Programme* (IRDP) to invest in the 9 Priority Human Settlements and Housing Development Areas;
- Ensuring the provision of bulk water and sanitation infrastructure services and other amenities. These includes construction of 7 Child care facilities and a community Hall;
- Ensuring security of tenure through the issuing of 3 078 Title Deeds;
- Delivering a total of **2 453** housing units through the various programmes; including the following amongst others, Rural Housing Programme, Military Veteran Housing Programme, Finance Linked Individual Subsidy and Individual Subsidies;
- As part of *Revitalization Of Mining Towns* in the province, the following Housing Targets will be achieved:
 - Emalahleni 217 housing opportunities are planned;
 - Steve Tshwete, 208 housing opportunities are planned; and
 - Thaba Chweu 40 housing opportunities are planned .

174. *In addition, Bulk Infrastructure shall be provided by the Municipalities.*

175. We will intensify our collaboration with the local sphere of government through the DDM in order to augment our ability to effectively monitor the delivery of services. We will also employ the DDM to align the Provincial and Municipal plans in order to accelerate the coordination and integration of Provincial and Municipal priorities.

176. In partnership with local government and other key stakeholders, the Province will implement the following as part **of Integrated Human Settlements:**

- Promotion of the densification and intensification of towns and settlements within municipalities by subdividing under-developed land parcels to create land for housing and other uses as a means of achieving integrated human settlements;
- Facilitate the implementation of the **Mpumalanga Spatial Development Framework (PSDF)** by all stakeholders through the District Development Model (DDM), and ensure the finalization and implementation of the **Mpumalanga Regional Spatial Development Framework (RSDF);**
- Finalize the **Provincial Water Master Plan** to guide the planning and implementation of Water and Sanitation Infrastructure in the Province, and expedite the implementation of the Mountain View Regional Dam within the City of Mbombela; and
- Facilitate partnership with the Private sector to implement the District Development Model One plan for all in order to fast-track the delivery of services to communities.

177. Other key basic services intervention to be implemented in partnership with the Districts and Local Municipalities include;

- Servicing of 600 sites at KaMhlushwa;
- Servicing of 750 sites at Ermelo – Ext 44;
- Servicing of 220 sites at Rondebosch;
- Installations of bulk Infrastructure at Rondebosch;
- Installation of bulk services Siyathuthuka Ext 12;
- Construction of Empumelelweni extensions 7 & 9 Internal Sewers is under implementation;
- Construction of Internal Roads in Empumelelweni Phase 1; and
- Monitor the Provision of Water and sanitation Reticulation in Thaba Chweu Municipality.

178. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, in the last State of the Province Address, I made a commitment to address the acute water challenges in Thembisile Hani and Dr JS Moroka . **I am delighted to announce that** we have collaborated with the Ministry of Water and Sanitation to accelerate the implementation of the Loskop Bulk Water Project.

179. This project will entail the construction of abstraction works at Loskop Dam, a 20Mega-liters/day treatment module, a 40 km bulk pipeline, 4 booster pump stations and a storage reservoir.

180. We have completed the feasibility study along with the implementation readiness study and the environmental authorisation. The total cost of the project is R1 049 000 962. This will directly benefit over 13 000 households in both Thembisile Hani and Dr JS Moroka Municipalities.

STRENGTHENING THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM POST PANDEMIC

181. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, our socio-economic development as citizens of this Province is interlinked with the delivery of quality health care.
182. We need to strengthen our healthcare system to make it more resilient should the need arise to face similar or worse pandemics in future.
183. We are paying special attention to ensure the overall efficiency of our health care system. This will include the attraction and retention of health care professionals, timeous availability of medicines and personal protective clothing.

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members,

184. For us to fight this battle and reduce HIV transmission we must aggressively implement the 90-90-90 strategy.
185. One of the concerns raised by our people when we were doing door to door campaigns seeking their mandate to govern municipalities last year was the turn-around time taken by emergency teams when responding to their calls. We have committed ourselves to improving EMS Response rate through a multi-pronged approach.
186. We have also made it clear to the department that at all times medicines and surgical sundries at medical depot should be at 95% availability. This requires a vigorous monitoring of the availability of medicines through the **Stock Visibility System (SVS)** in hospitals.
187. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, a significant amount of our budget has been going to settle liabilities caused by medical negligence. This is a serious cause for concern. We have instructed the department to reduce contingent liabilities by more than 80% in the short to medium term period and by more than 90% in the long term period. As part of addressing this unwarranted expenditure the department will among others;
- Implement the two pronged provincial litigation strategy which includes clinical management to prevent further litigations; and
 - Digitisation of health records to improve data management and availability of records.

CONSOLIDATING THE SOCIAL WAGE THROUGH RELIABLE AND QUALITY BASIC SERVICES

188. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, government has a duty of care. A duty to protect, defend and provide for those members of our society who are fragile, vulnerable and marginalized.
189. It is a duty that we as government cannot ignore nor can we abdicate and absolve ourselves from it. For the past 27 years we have carried this duty of care with the utmost of sincerity.
190. We have prioritized social protection grants for deserving groups, homes for the homeless and essential health-care guarantees.

191. As part of consolidating and advancing this duty of care, fight hunger and poverty protect and defend the dignity of our people and working with our local municipalities we will , amongst others;
- Make Provision of Family preservation and Child Protection services to 5300 families;
 - Place “at risk children” in alternative care centres;
 - Strengthen prevention and response interventions for substance abuse ; and
 - Strengthen awareness campaigns conducted on Gender Based Violence and Femicide;
192. We will continue with the provision of sanitary dignity support to indigent girls through the implementation of Sanitary towels programme in quintile 1,2,3 and farms schools and TVET colleges and public universities.

SPORT, SOCIAL COHESION, UNITY AND NATION BUILDING

193. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, our heritage defines who we are where we come from, our common history and national identity as diverse people. Notwithstanding the diversity of our cultures and language, what brings us together is a sense of nationhood that continues to shape our common destiny founded on inclusive heritage and shared democratic values.
194. Our history and heritage is a foundation that defines a set of common values that characterise the future society that we want to become. It is a society founded on core principles of Ubuntu that says I am because you are and without you I am not and without me you are not.
195. Our diverse historical background and heritage makes us even richer which motivated the late Archbishop Tutu to call us a rainbow nation.
196. We are committed to building a caring society that is based on values of common patriotism and loyalty in which cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of the people should not be the cause of their differences but the reason for their unity. We must celebrate this diversity rather than scorn it.
197. In the coming year, we will continue to implement programmes that aim to deepen values of unity, empathy and community cohesion.
198. We are alive to the fact that we are amongst five provinces that do not have a Television Station. Working with other stakeholders in the industry by providing opportunities to our youth in the film and television industry, we will be supporting initiatives to be granted a provincial license for a TV station that will promote our rich heritage.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND FEMICIDE

199. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, gender based violence and femicide has become more than just a pandemic, it is now endemic. I am pleased to report to you that following the recommendations that were presented at the 2018 Presidential Summit against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, His Excellency President Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa has signed into law legislation aimed at strengthening efforts to end gender-based violence, with a victim-centred focus on combating this dehumanising pandemic.
200. **The President has assented to:**

- **The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act;**
- **The Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act, and**
- **The Domestic Violence Amendment Act.**

201. These three pieces of legislation will protect , defend and uphold the rights of the victims.

202. The revised legislative framework seeks to improve the prevention of sex crimes.

203. Commenting on the revised legislative framework, President Ramaphosa stated that *“The enactment of legislation that protects victims of abuse and make it more difficult for perpetrators to escape justice, is a major step forward in our efforts against this epidemic and in placing the rights and needs of victims at the centre of our interventions. It also entails building a society based on advancing fundamental human rights and dealing severely with people who violate others.”*

204. As an ANC-led government and leader of society we do listen to the voice of our people and will not hesitate to take appropriate action to correct anomalies by amending legislation where necessary to throw the full might of the law to perpetrators of gender based violence.

TOWARDS A CAPABLE DEVELOPMENTAL AND ETHICAL STATE

205. Madam Speaker and fellow citizens, we have always argued that for the economy to grow at a faster pace and create the much needed jobs it needs well-oiled state machinery, a capable and developmental state that is accountable and responsive to the needs of our people.

206. The introduction of the ***District Development Model*** two years ago heralded the new era of intergovernmental relations between all spheres of government. Its overarching objective is to do away with working in silos, align and integrate service delivery under a single development plan per district that is developed jointly by national, provincial and local government as well as business, labour and the community in each district. It calls for one district, one plan and one budget.

207. At the core centre of this model is the optimization of all resources resulting in high impact service delivery programmes that are easy to monitor and evaluate. However, Madam Speaker and Members, this model faces the risk of being underutilized or even possible failure if issues of the devolution of powers and responsibilities are not properly aligned and given the attention they deserve.

208. All of us without exception need to support the District Model, give impetus to its functionalization and make it the most efficient vehicle by which government working with its social partners can deliver essential services to our people, create jobs and fight poverty and unemployment.

- 209.** We should not see it as a threat to our powers and positions over the control of budgets but see it as the best way of resolving the current challenges of working in silos, duplication and wasteful of resources.
- 210.** Once more I would like to extend an open invitation to our social partners to be part of this new approach of doing things and enrich our debates on how to bring better lives to our people.
- 211.** For the Model to succeed we will have to sharpen the skills set of our employees at all levels. This means that we need to re-visit our partnership with institutions of higher learning and ask them to assist our employees acquire new skills that are required to run a modern government. We should not be left behind when the whole world is moving into fully-fledged digital government that responds to the modern day needs of our citizens. We must do this without leaving any stakeholders behind.
- 212.** As the Mpumalanga , we reiterate our commitment to professionalising civil service in all spheres of the provincial government by employing capable and qualified men and women based on merit in both the Provincial and Local Government.
- 213.** Furthermore, we believe that public participation is critical to sustain and deepen a strong culture of a developmental democratic state. In the interest of deepening democracy, we urge all municipalities to prioritise public participation to bridge the gap between the citizens and their representatives.

FIGHT AGAINST CRIME AND CORRUPTION

- 214.** Madam Speaker and Honourable Members fighting crime and creating safe environment for our citizens remains one of our top priorities. It is our obligation to ensure that all citizens of this province and non-citizens feel safe and are protected.
- 215.** We are committing ourselves to continue fighting crime and corruption using all available resources at our disposal. It is our desire that one day all our people will walk the streets at any time of the day free and fearless.
- 216.** Unfortunately as we win one battle over crime on one front, criminals find ways and means of opening up other new and more sophisticated ways of committing crime on the other front. We are battle ready and we will fight them wherever they are. It is a war that we intend to win one battle at a time.
- 217.** We have put together a number of intervention mechanisms which seem to be paying dividends. These includes interventions such as training and capacity building, stock theft units and effective border management.

218. However, whilst there has been a decline of 4.9% of the 17 priority crimes in the province for the reporting period ending September 2021, we have seen a significant increase in crimes like murder, sexual assault which includes rape and contact sexual offences, robbery which includes car and truck hijacking, residential and non-residential break ins .
219. Crimes that have seen a decline include attempted murder, assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm, common assault and common robbery. Robbery of cash in transit saw a huge decline an indicator that crime intelligence is beginning to bear fruit.
220. Notwithstanding what some of our citizens believe, we remain concerned about the killing of our farmers and their workers. We call upon our law enforcement agents to also prioritize safety of our farmers and farmworkers irrespective of their colour, race or creed.
221. We also want to make a call to the communities that harbour and protect criminals, we urge you to desist with such conduct. You are destroying our own communities, our province and our country. At some point or another these criminals will turn against you and you will be seeking protection from the police.
222. To those who murder our law enforcement agents, we say we will leave no stone unturned until we find you and call for the heaviest sentences prescribed by law.
223. We have seen tremendous success in the fight against crime where communities work with the law enforcement to identify and apprehend criminals. We believe that this is the only way we can defeat crime. Without community involvement we can never begin to make a dent on crime.
224. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, I am also pleased to report that there was a remarkable decrease on road accidents during festive season. However one death on road accidents is one death too many and the recent increase in road accidents is a cause for concern.
225. We shall continue with our efforts in making sure that our roads safer for all users.

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2021 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

226. As part of fulfilling its Constitutional obligation, not long ago the local sphere of government had to refresh its mandate. On the 1st of November 2021, the people of our country came out to vote during local government elections and elected the representatives of their choice.
227. Whilst the number of those who participated in this very important exercise was less than previous elections, the people of our province overwhelmingly voted for the ANC in almost all the municipalities and we thank you all for that.

228. Despite all challenges that we have endured during the past five years our people in this province still believe that it is the ANC with sound policies and track record that can deliver a better life for all. Let me therefore make a clarion call to all those elected councillors that ***we dare not fail our people.***

229. Our sincere gratitude goes to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the South African Police Service (SAPS) and other institutions for the good work that they have done in ensuring that we have free and fair elections.

230. Whilst the majority of municipalities experienced seamless transition from the previous administration to the new administration, we have seen others struggling to get to their feet and run. We will never leave them behind. We remain available to hold them by hand and show them the way forward.

MUNICIPAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORT

231. Our government is currently engaging with the new leadership of the municipalities that has assumed office so that we can give them all the necessary support to allow them to settle into their new roles.

232. As part of bringing stability to municipalities, we will continue to work with them in implementing the legislative requirements of the local government turnaround strategy. We urge all municipalities to waste no time in filling all the critical management positions as part of building and strengthening their administration.

233. We are concerned by lack of public participation in some municipalities. We believe that this has led to some of our people losing confidence in their local government public representatives.

234. A significant number of our municipalities continue to struggle to pay their creditors especially the Eskom account.

235. We will continue to work closely with Eskom by engaging the affected municipalities and monitor the honouring of reasonable repayment agreements.

236. Another challenge experienced by our municipalities is the increase of cable theft and other electrical equipment such as transformers and illegal connections. These criminal activities are viewed in a dim light and we will take decisive action to curb it.

SUPPORT TO THE INSTITUTION OF TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP

237. The province continues to work closely with the Institution of Traditional Leaders and we continue to cherish their role in pursuit of social cohesion and nation building. Our Traditional Leaders have continued to participate in all municipal and also perform their duties as the custodians of our traditions and culture.
238. The ushering of the ***Traditional and Khoisan Leadership Act*** that came into effect from April 2021 requires , amongst others, that we sort out the historical land disputes associated with distorted jurisdictions , resolve succession disputes and issues related to the recognition of traditional leaders, head-men and head-women. This will culminate in the reconstitution of traditional councils by 2023.
239. We have also approved and established the Provincial Initiation Coordination Committee (PICC) for the proper coordination of the important work of ensuring the safety of our young people during their rite of passage to adulthood.

DISASTER INCIDENTS IN THE PROVINCE

240. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members , our province and other neighbouring provinces have been experiencing heavy rains since October last year. These heavy rains were reported in many regions of this province causing extensive damage in some areas more than the others.
241. The rains caused flooding of infrastructure, damages to schools, clinics, roads, bridges, personal properties of our people and in certain instances communities were disconnected like it happened with the ***Kanyamazane bridge***.
242. On behalf of the people of our province we wish to convey our heartfelt condolences to all the families and friends who lost the loved ones during this period.
243. We need to develop and implement appropriate plans and strategies to mitigate the risks of disasters as part of adaptation measures on climate change. We should also prepare for the possibility of these disasters happening with more frequency and causing severe damages.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

244. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, we warmly welcome the signing by the African Union of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement whose objective among others is to:
- Progressively eliminate tariffs and non-tariffs barriers to trade in goods and services,
 - Co-operate on investments, intellectual property rights and competition policies,
 - Co-operate on customs matters, and
 - establish and maintain institutional framework for the implementation and administration of the Africa Free Trade Agreement.
245. We will consolidate and strengthen trade relations that we had already established with Maputo province in Mozambique and explore other possibilities especially around agriculture and tourism with regions and provinces in Kenya, Tanzania and Egypt.

246. We support the efforts of our national government in trying to promote dialogue in the Kingdom of Eswatini, our contribution as a global citizen in combating terrorism in Mozambique and bringing peace around mother continent Africa. We will continue to support those who are oppressed and are denied their human rights like the People of Palestine and South Sahara.

CONCLUSION

247. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, as the leadership of the Province of the rising sun, we commit ourselves to realise the pledges made before this house and our people.

248. We reaffirm that in these unprecedented times, we remain resolute to undertake actions to better the lives of our people. Together with the local sphere of government, we will deliver much needed basic services to our people.

249. Together with our social partners, we will enter a social compact to grow the provincial economy and create jobs.

250. I derive inspiration from the knowledge that ours is a political struggle, fought at different fronts and assuming different forms dictated to by the material conditions with the ultimate goal of a better life for our people.

251. The administration that I lead will continue to be people centred and service delivery focused. The road ahead will not be easy but we are equal to the task, ***failure is not an option.***

252. I thank you.