Lilanga













www.mpumalanga.gov.za physical Government



@MpumalangaGov









Welcome to yet another edition of this informative Provincial publication, Lilanga Letfu.

For decades, South Africa has grappled with deep-rooted social and economic challenges. Historical inequalities, crumbling infrastructure and lack of access to basic services are still prevalent across the country, notwithstanding government's push to remedy the situation through developmental programmes. In the midst of all these systemic problems, a vibrant agricultural sector and rich natural biodiversity support millions of citizens in the province by providing food, jobs and livelihoods. However, these crucial assets are at risk from Climate Change.

Small-scale farmers, for example, have long been aware about the threats that climate change pose to their lives and livelihoods, while structural barriers such as access to finance, insurance and infrastructure, mean that the small-scale farmers continue to be more vulnerable to the unfavourable weather impacts than their commercial counterparts. This therefore calls for initiatives to enhance ecological infrastructure and adapt to climate change in nature-smart ways, since it has been identified for the severe weather patterns we have been experiencing lately, most notably the heatwave and drought, which obviously affect negatively on their farms.

Yes, there is no doubt that Climate Change is affecting agriculture, but the reality is that we can reduce climate-warming emissions and help farmers adapt for the sustainable production of all nutritious food in the future. The effects of climate change, is a global phenomenon which include unpredictable changes in rainfall patterns, bringing drought, heatwaves and destructive flooding. As extreme weather becomes more frequent, and destructive events hit small-scale farmers even harder, the impact on farming will be more and more severe.

Noting the above, the main concern is the impact of the severe heatwave we have been experiencing of late. This heatwave leads to many environmental effects like droughts, wildfires, poor air quality and water, and poses a serious threat to food security, thereby inflicting communities with hunger. These effects include water shortages, plant damages and urban heat island effect, which is caused mainly by buildings, roads and infrastructure because of the absorbed heat, leading to extreme hot temperatures.

According to a March 2024 report, released by the University of Cape Town on the impact of climate change in South Africa, it is very likely that the climate conditions will exacerbate even further, with severe consequences. This call for a fundamental reduction of pollution.

It is common cause that South Africa has led calls in international climate negotiations for a "Just Energy Transition" to elevate concerns about social justice and commit high-income countries to financing decarbonization projects, for the benefit of middle and low-income countries. As government is playing its central role to tackle the climate crisis, the private sector is also expected to play its part too, to lend a helping hand. Together, let us advance policies that reduce carbon pollution, support clean energy technologies, curb deforestation and protect wildlife. In that way, we would be playing our individual roles as we prepare to tackle the effects of climate change.

Happy Holidays, Productive 2025 and Beyond.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor-In-Chief Mr. George Mthethwa

Managing Editor Mr. Tebogo Ditlhale

Assignment/Content Editors Mr. Moeti Mmusi
Mr. Freddy Ngobe
Mr. Bheki Nyathikazi

Research & Coordination Ms. Zanele Khoza

Mr. Louis van Der Walt Ms. Linda Ngwenyama

Creative Editor Ms. Unathi Mbube

Support Team Ms. Xoli Dlou

Ms. Sinqobile Themba

Writers and Contributors Provincial Departments
Public Entities/Enterprises

District & Local Municipalities

PUBLISHER

Office of the Premier: Mpumalanga Makhonjwa Building No. 7 Government Boulevard Riverside Park Mbombela 1200

Information enquiry: 013 766 2242/2266

www.mpumalanga.gov.za

DISCLAIMER

Opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the Provincial Government, Executive Council or Management of the Province. The Editorial Team strives to ensure the publication is accurate and factual. Comments regarding this publication can be forwarded to the Chief Editor.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Our aim is to provide accurate, truthful and balanced reporting. As a publication that subscribes to The Press Code of Ethics and Conduct for South African Print and Online Media, we are serious and remain committed to accurate and fair reporting.



TACKLING FOOD POISONING HEAD ON

Africa South has experienced unprecedented a spate of foodborne illness cases, which affected in the main, learners. These cases were linked to 'spaza shops', and led to fatalities. A special task force charged with investigating the cause of the deaths, headed by the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, revealed on October 28 that school children from Soweto died from ingesting a restricted pesticide, an organophosphate called Terbufos.

Classified as a highly hazardous chemical, Terbufos is primarily utilised in agricultural environments. However, in South Africa's townships, it is also illegally sold as a "street pesticide", and is commonly used to try and control rat infestations. In Mpumalanga, no fatality was recorded.

The President, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa made an official declaration in November 2024, indicating that it is mandatory for all spaza shops and food handling facilities to register with the municipalities within 21 days. This was later followed by the gazette of a new by-law by the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), Mr. Velenkosini Hlabisa which mandates that all business activities in the township align with public health and safety regulations.

Although no fatalities were reported in Mpumalanga, however, the Province was never sparred from the outbreak of the foodborne illnesses. The Premier, Mr. Mandla Ndlovu established a multi-disciplinary team to tackle the matter, with MEC for Health, Ms. Sasekani Manzini appointed as the Chairperson of an Inter-Departmental Committee. Other MECs who constituted the Committee, are Ms. Cathy Dlamini of Education, Mr Jacky Macie of Community Safety, Security and Liaison, Mr. Speed Mashilo of Cooperative Governance, Human Settlement and Traditional Affairs and MEC Makhosazana Masilela of Economic Development and Tourism.

As part of its focus areas, the Committee's critical tasks is to coordinate the inspection of spaza shops to determine compliance, to enforce regulations and hygiene protocols of handling food. By the end of the 21 days period, as announced by the President, more



registration had been recorded.

Medical experts describe children as more susceptible to pesticide toxicity and other environmental toxicants than adults. This is due to several physiological factors, such as:

- Smaller body mass children have small body mass than adults, and therefore a given dose of pesticide can have a more severe impact on a child to this smaller body size;
- Developing organs children's organs are still developing, making them more vulnerable to effects of pesticides;
- Behavioural patterns children's behaviour, such as hand-to-mouth and Use hand-to-object; and
- Route of exposure children are affected by acute pesticide poisoning and chronic effect of exposure through ingestion, inhalation and dermal contact (WHO). That Organophosphate can even enter your body through contact with your skin, and hence can affect you from contaminated clothing. In children it has been reported that oral ingestion is the most common route for Organophosphate toxicity.

The Provincial Government has taken a stance to advise parents and communities to exercise caution and buy food and snacks

than seven thousand (7000) applications for from reputable food outlets. "This is a serious concern and we humbly request to all communities, faith based organisations, traditional leaders and civil society to add their voices in this regard, by conscientising our learners to take extra care when buying food. Schools are expected to engage with parents to talk to their children about some of the dangers of buying food stuff in some of the shops on their way to and from schools," said the Inter-Departmental Committee.

> Spaza shops play a significant role in the ecosystem of food handling in South Africa, and accounts for an estimated 40 percent of South Africa's total food expenditure, with an estimated value of R178 billion. The call for their registration seeks to entrench the regulations of food management, and to force them to adhere to hygienic standards.

In Ehlanzeni District, collaborative efforts with the law enforcement agencies have heightened joint operations which resulted in the closure of several illegal shops, for the contravention of the by-laws. Illegal immigrants with false documentation or with no documentation, have been arrested.

The Executive Mayor, Cllr. Terror Shabangu has reiterated that, "the presence of other law enforcement agencies will help a great deal as the district continues to make inroads in the fight against all illegal activities within the district".



FRESH PRODUCE MARKET – AN ECONOMIC GAME CHANGER FOR THE MPUMALANGA PROVINCE



ow that the construction of the first Mpumalanga International Fresh Produce Market (MIFPM) is completed, the next phase is the operationalisation of the infrastructure. Located in Mbombela, the state of the art building is designed to connect local farmers with international markets, such as the Chinese, through the export of agricultural products.

In a province grappling with a high unemployment rate, a mix of 96 400 permanent, temporary and seasonal jobs, will be created from the farm harvest to the transportation of agricultural products and the storage thereof. An analysis of the agriculture ecosystem, suggest that the market is well positioned to drive an inclusive growth and job creation and reduce poverty, thus making it a cornerstone of government's apex priorities.

The market provides opportunities for small scale farmers and Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMMEs) to play a significant part in the provincial economy. The Premier, Mr. Mandla Ndlovu is leading

a programme of action to operationalise the market. He has already set his sight in China to establish cooperation with major players in the food and logistics industry. His focus is Tianshui City and Longricunan City in Gansu Province, and Xiamen City in Fujian Province, to sign bilateral agreements with reputable trade institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

The market will become a bee hive of activity, to revolutionalise the agricultural market in Mpumalanga.



FOOD SECURITY THROUGH SMART AGRICULTURE BOX









limate change has become a major concern the world over. From a subject of academic debates and postulations, the phenomenon has become a reality with many countries experiencing unusual weather patterns, ranging from cyclones and widespread floods to long spells of drought and record-breaking temperatures. One of the areas hardest hit is food security, and developing countries which account for the largest proportion of the world's population are tipped to be the worst affected, despite the many challenges they already face.

In Mpumalanga, the agricultural sector and communities in general had to contend with many challenges because of the effects and impact of climate change. The provincial Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affair came up with a innovative solution - the Smart Agriculture Box project, that aims to address food insecurity, poverty, mitigating climate change effects and increasing yields.

This innovation represents a scalable, replicable approach with implications for global agricultural sustainability. Innovative practices like dense planting and self-watering systems empower farmers, leading to rapid harvests, higher yields, and improved livelihoods. By enhancing food security, conserving water, and fostering community

collaboration, the initiative ensures sustainable agricultural practices.

Its success signifies a transformative model, emphasizing localized solutions and technology-driven farming.

Key Features of the Smart Agriculture Box:

- Water Efficiency: With a 28-litre reservoir, the Box can save water for 2-3 weeks, reducing the need for constant manual watering.
- **High Crop Yields:** Dense planting maximizes space, leading to high yields.
- Mobility: Easily moved for optimal sun exposure or protection.
- Sustainability: Recycled plastic stabilizer, ensures durability and environmental responsibility.
- Versatility: compatibility with various vegetables, catering to diverse needs.

The Smart Agriculture Box is an effective innovation that is *pushing back the frontiers of poverty* from all corners of the province. Its emphasis on empowering vulnerable communities is in line with the African Union's Agenda 2063, promoting inclusive development and poverty eradication.

Since its rolling out in 2022, the Smart Agriculture Box Project has yielded significant service delivery improvements, revolutionised agricultural practices, and positively impacting vulnerable households, smallholder farmers, Traditional Authorities and communities in

the province. The project has reached more than 7300 vulnerable households, over 1000 churches, and engaged about 5000 participants from various farming programs, including Traditional Authorities, quantifying its broad reach and beneficiary base.

This ground-breaking initiative has garnered much-deserved recognition on various prestigious platforms, highlighting its innovative solutions and significant impact, and endorsements of its potential to transform lives and build a more sustainable future. Some of the harvested accolades include:

- 1st Runner up for Best Innovation Category at the Continental Africa Public Service Day in Zimbabwe.
- Winner in Citizen-Centric Innovation Harnessing Non-ICT Solutions.
 Recognition at the Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI) Awards.
- Gold Award at the AAPAM Annual Roundtable Conference Livingstone in Zambia.
- And recently, a recognition at the 2024 SAB-sponsored Beyond Awards of the ESG Africa Conference at the Sandton Convention Centre on 2nd of October 2024.

The sustainability of the Smart Agriculture Boxes Project has so far ensured through comprehensive training programs, local partnerships, monitoring, community ownership, and resourcefulness.











CONCERNS OVER ONGOING GILLNET FISHING

pumalanga is home to the world-famous Kruger National Park, the Blyde River Canyon and the region is dotted with numerous nature reserves teeming with flora and fauna. This province is a true South African showcase of natural beauty boasting wonderful establishments and people doing their bit for tourism. The province's rare combination of lowveld and escarpment, sub-tropical weather, summer rains and unbelievable scenic beauty makes the province one of the country's best-kept secret.

Just like any industry, illegality pose a serious threat to its success. Over the recent period, the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency has been hard at work tackling gillnetting practices at several dams in the province, the recent one being the illegal use of gillnets at Mkhombo Dam Nature Reserve. The reserve is experiencing a high rate of these illegal activities, which are threatening the

pumalanga is home to functioning of the ecosystem. The use the world-famous Kruger of gillnetting is causing unsustainable National Park, the Blyde harvesting of the resources, which might River Canyon and the region lead to over depletion and ultimately is dotted with numerous extinction.

The public entity is working with strategic stakeholders such as ECO Care Trust NPO and the South African Police Service (SAPS) to conduct operations around the dam to ensure that gillnetting is prevented. According to the recently published Nature Conservation Index

(NCI), the Republic of South Africa ranks 25th out of 180 countries in terms of nature conservation. The MTPA will continue to double its efforts to ensure that our treasure is preserved and conserved for future generations. The agency is continuously running an awareness campaign to mobilize the public to protect their environment and report any incidents of gillnetting to the police and authorities.

The strategy implemented is having an impact as the number of gillnet catches has decreased compared to previous months. The Reserve management, in collaboration with the Stock Theft and Endangered Species Division, the Law Enforcement Agency, the Anti-Poaching Division, the Compliance and Monitoring Division and the volunteer anglers, will continue to conduct several actions to combat these illegal activities at this dam. It is only through the combined efforts of all those involved in law enforcement that this battle could be won.

Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) rangers regularly patrol inside and outside the dam and if anyone is found using nets, the agency will step in and enforce the law. These nets are indiscriminate, as they do not only catch the target species. Waterfowl, small crocodiles and otters also are caught in these nets.



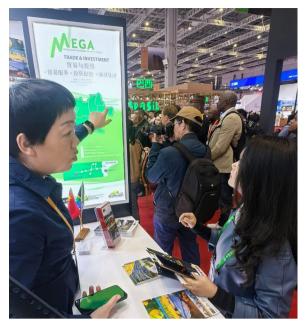


UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

Mpumalanga **Economic** (MEGA) Development Agency is an entity of the Mpumalanga of Department Economic Development and Tourism. The Trade and Investment Promotion entity represented Mpumalanga Province at the 7th China International Import Exhibition 2024 (CIIE 2024) in Shanghai, China. The CIIE is one of the world's largest trade fairs, aimed at opening up the Chinese market to imports from developing countries. The MEGA team, led by Mr. Thulani Nobela, received inquiries for local products, specifically agricultural products such as avocado and macadamia nuts, and export opportunities which will unlock market access for the Mpumalanga agricultural sector.

This participation in CIIE 2024 marks a significant step towards expanding Mpumalanga's trade and investment horizons. By displaying the province's products and services, MEGA aims to attract new investments, foster economic growth, and create employment opportunities. In the aid to ensure export readiness, the Trade and Investment Promotions unit hosted an

Exporter Readiness and B2B Market Linkages workshop. The three-day event brought together representatives from Mozambican and the Kingdom of Eswatini firms, as well as key stakeholders from various organizations.



Participating stakeholders were representatives from the KLCBT, NAFCOC, DEDT, USAID Africa Trade and Investment, APIEX, and Namboard. The workshop aimed to equip local businesses with the knowledge and tools necessary to tap into new markets and opportunities. We believe that this event will have a lasting impact on the local business community. The Trade and Investment Promotional entity successfully facilitated an opportunity for four entrepreneurs to exhibit, network, and display their products and services at the prestigious Manufacturing Indaba 2024, held in Sandton.

One of the participating companies, Siya Local Solutions Pty Ltd, expressed gratitude for the

opportunity by stating that, "The opportunity presented by MEGA to showcase our product and business at the Manufacturing Indaba has proven to be a pivotal moment for the hygiene industry. Participating in the Manufacturing Indaba has not only generated positive leads but has opened doors to potential partnerships instrumental in propelling Siya Local Solutions towards sustainability in the manufacturing sector." Meanwhile, the Properties Division has been working tirelessly to cultivate strong, healthy relationships with its customers, and our tenants. Through regular monthly sessions, the division aims to: increase visibility, raise awareness about MEGA's services and offerings, strengthen landlord-tenant relationships, foster open communication and trust, demonstrate tenant support, and show commitment to addressing concerns and challenges.

In a significant step towards enhancing partnership and resolving ongoing electricity challenges, MEGA's **Properties** Infrastructure Management team met with Eskom representatives. The key objectives of the stakeholder engagement session were to foster a stronger relationship, enhance collaboration and partnership between MEGA and Eskom, improve communication and collaboration, and strengthen efforts to address electricity challenges faced by MEGA's Ehlanzeni tenants. MEGA does more with regard to economic upward mobility for the citizens of Mpumalanga Province.

REVIVING RURAL AND TOWNSHIP ECONOMIES

ake-a-Lot Township Economy is an initiative by the Department Economic Development and Tourism (DEDT). It forms part of its key priorities aimed at empowering Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs). The initiative is also part of the Provincial Government's efforts to stimulate the rural and township economies, through the provision of comprehensive business development support to SMMEs, and increase opportunities for entrepreneurs to access markets.

The Take-a-Lot Township Economy initiative brings to the table programmes such as The Last Mile Driver Development, Personal Shopper initiative, Township Franchise Initiative, Stock Reseller Programme and Market Place Growth Programme. Beyond this partnership, the DEDT plans to also collaborate with other strategic stakeholders or organisations that provide excellent suite of offerings to SMME development. Among these stakeholders, is the Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (SEDFA) and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA). These entities are key allies in the journey of developing viable and sustainable SMMEs.

These efforts are designed to stimulate the rural and township economy, according to the MEC, Ms. Makhosazane Masilela. "SMMEs and cooperatives are the backbone of any economy. They create more jobs than big businesses, and contribute far much more to the economy. Therefore, the partnership we are entering into with Take-a-Lot, is another significant steppingstone in our quest to translate the overarching goal of economic transformation into reality. Undoubtedly, this partnership will add impetus to the initiatives that government has been, and continues to roll-out, regarding the development of small businesses in all the main sectors of the provincial economy", said Masilela during the official launch of the initiative recently at Songimvelo Nature Reserve, in the Chief Albert Luthuli Local Municipality.

Through the agreement with Take-a-Lot, parties have agreed to cooperate and collaborate in achieving the following objectives for their mutual benefit:

 Utilise the five (5) programmes of Takea-Lot to develop more small businesses in the Province, through unlocking new market opportunities, improving economic infrastructure and enhancing entrepre-

- neurial skills with specific focus on women, youth and people with disabilities in townships and rural areas;
- 2. Provide support to small businesses in developing products that are informed by market research of each sector, and uniqueness of the Province; and further;
- Support SMME initiatives that boost local manufacturing, re-industrialisation and enhancement of the Provincial Incubation Programme.

Ms. Masilela is adamant that this initiative will serve as a game changer in government's quest to support the rural and township economy. "As a Department, we are more than determined to work with Take-a-Lot and other key stakeholders, in supporting township and rural businesses with a series of targeted support interventions, aimed at addressing the legacy of spatial exclusion faced by many small businesses. That is why I urge all SMMEs and aspirant SMMEs to familiarise themselves with these programmes and offerings of this partnership so that they would seize all available opportunities. This is, indeed, the beginning of greater things to come, for our SMMEs," she emphasised.



CULTURAL XPERIENCE – ON THE RIGHT PATH OF DIVERSITY AND LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

outh Africa's arts and culture reflect the country's diversity and rich cultural heritage. Culture encompasses the customs, traditions, values, and beliefs.

The Mpumalanga Government coordinates the Cultural Xperience in a quest to preserve the diverse cultures in the province for future generations. Through the Cultural Xperience the government fosters unity among the communities, through a range of activities, namely:

- Comedy shows;
- Sporting activities;
- Cultural exhibitions, and
- Musical performances.

The activities include carnival, kasi flair, music, sport and awards, where audiences are entertained through creative and modern artistic expressions.

Since its inception nine years ago, the Mpumalanga Cultural Xperience has become the province's signature event and prime attraction for tourists from various provinces and the two neighbouring countries, Mozambique and Kingdom of



eSwatini.

According to the MEC for Culture, Sport and Recreation, Ms. Leah Mabuza, the event has become a catalyst for economic development as it promotes tourism and

entrepreneurship, thus advancing the province's plan of driving an inclusive economy and create jobs, as a critical part of the apex priorities of the 7th administration. "It offers opportunities for emerging artists, Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) across various locations of the province, through the bookings of accommodation facilities, and visits to tourism attraction sites," she motivates.

Since its inception, the following are key milestone achievements:

- Created platforms for emerging talents to display their skills;
- Created partnership opportunities between emerging and well established artists, for the advancement of their artistic business;
- Promoted social cohesion through coordination of events;
- Created spending opportunities for the development of the local economy and short term jobs.

Mabuza says the Cultural Xperience has come into full circle as an event that affirms the province's reputation as a cultural and tourism hub.





POUNCING ON ILLEGAL MINING



here is an entrenched view which portray illegal gold mining as a widespread phenomenon in South Africa. The country was regarded as a mining giant, but is now perceived as a centre of attraction for thousands of people routinely searching for gold deposits in abandoned mines, that are no longer deemed as viable or safe.

More than \$1bn is lost annually in revenue because of illegal mining. Over the last few months, government has been tackling these activities at various parts of the country, through Operation Vala Umgodi campaign.

Mpumalanga is listed among the four provinces worst hit by these activities. The North West, Gauteng, Free State are also affected. As government intensifies the fight, the Thaba Chweu Local Municipality in Mpumalanga, recorded two widely publicised cases of illegal mining, in Pilgrims Rest and Sabie. A multidisciplinary team of the South African Police Service (SAPS), South African National Defence Force (SANDF), Department of Home Affairs and other members of the Security Cluster, raided these sites where foreign nationals from countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho, were arrested.

During the operation, several 'zama zamas', as the illegal miners are referred to, were charged in connection with illegal mining activities. In Pilgrims' Rest, the team also confiscated equipment used in this clandestine activity. The Premier, Mr. Mandla Ndlovu appreciated the team for executing the demanding work of arresting the suspects. He visited the Pilgrims Rest site, accompanied by MEC for Community Liaison, Security and Liaison, Mr. Jacky Macie and the Acting Provincial Commissioner of SAPS, Major General (Dr) Zeph Mkhwanazi. He also visited the Sabie site.

Mr. Ndlovuis adamant that victory against illegal mining is certain, as the team is determined to arrest suspects who break the law without fear. Community members are encouraged to assist the police with information that may lead to the arrest of the illegal mining mafias.

Meanwhile, the Mpumalanga Province is stepping up the fight against crime. A crime-fighting strategy, which is anchored on an integrated response, and entails the creation of a sustainable, well-resourced mechanism, building capacity for fighting crime, and mobilizing all financial and relevant human resources, has been approved by the government.

Through the strategy, government is poised to achieve the following:

- Reduce domestic violence.
- Create awareness campaigns which promote behavior change and restore positive values.

- Provide assistance to victim empowerment centers.
- Reduce secondary trauma to survivors.

Tourism plays a vital role towards the growth of the economy, and Mpumalanga province is regarded as one of the leading tourist destinations in the country. This is substantiated by economic experts, who explain that the influx of tourists into the Province, and their spending power on accommodation facilities, as well as goods in the local shops, become a spin off to the economy.

Therefore the strategy is a vital guidance towards efforts to eliminate crime which threatens the tourism sector. This includes the deployment of Tourism Safety Monitors to hot spot areas.

As the Premier explains, government is paying special attention to crime-fighting measures. "We have heard the concerns about crime affecting even our tourists. We want to assure the people of Mpumalanga and our investors and visitors that we are going to deal with the scourge of crime. We want to build the economy of the Province," the Premier assured.



WARNING AGAINST DANGERS OF ILLEGAL GAMBLING



na decisive step to protect communities from the dangers of illegal gambling, the Mpumalanga Economic Regulator (MER), in collaboration with the South African Police Service (SAPS), destroyed 180 unlicensed gambling machines in October 2024. Overseen by MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, Ms. Makhosazane Masilela, the operation emphasized the province's commitment to safeguarding the public—particularly young people—from the harmful effects of unregulated gambling.

"These illegal machines, including Chinese roulettes and 50c slot games, prey on vulnerable individuals with promises of quick rewards," stated MEC Masilela. "In reality, they lead to financial loss, addiction, and despair. Without regulation, these machines offer no safety standards or protections, posing both physical and financial risks."

The operation, conducted in areas such as KwaMhlanga, Standerton, Pilgrims Rest, Verena, Siyabuswa, and Mbombela, saw MER and SAPS targeting locations where illegal machines posed direct threats to public safety. Through extensive sting operations, they seized unlicensed machines, marking significant progress in eradicating illegal gambling in Mpumalanga.

Negative Impacts on Youth and the Economy

One of the biggest concerns with illegal gambling is its impact on the youth. MEC Masilela noted that early exposure to gambling distorts young people's perception of success and promotes risky behaviour. "When children see gambling as accessible and seemingly rewarding, it disrupts their understanding of responsibility and success," she warned, highlighting the dangers posed by unregulated gambling environments.

Illegal gambling also affects the province's economy. Unlicensed operators evade

taxes that could otherwise be used to support essential community services such as healthcare and education. In contrast, licensed establishments contribute positively to economic growth, channelling revenue responsibly back into the community.

A Call for Community Vigilance

This event underscored Mpumalanga's determination to eliminate illegal gambling and promote safe, regulated alternatives. MEC Masilela urged the public to stay vigilant and report any suspicious gambling activities to support a safer, more responsible province. "Community members play a vital role in this effort," she added, "and together, we can protect our youth and ensure a healthier future for Mpumalanga." By curbing illegal gambling activities and promoting responsible gaming, the MER and SAPS are working to build a stronger, safer province.



CHANGING LIVES THROUGH SOCIAL HOUSING



n the face of rapid urbanisation and rising inequality, social housing in South Africa has become more important than ever before. The Mpumalanga Department of Human Settlement is dedicated to providing sustainable housing solutions for low-income households, making sure that none is left behind. Social housing offers affordable rental options for individuals and families, playing a vital role in reshaping our communities. The Social Housing Regulatory Authority (SHRA) ensures that housing is accessible for those earning between R1, 500 and R15, 000 per month.

Since the program started, the Department has successfully delivered a total number of 1,917 social housing units across various Municipalities, including 1,311 units in eMalahleni and 606 units in Steve Tshwete. There are also 493 additional units currently under construction in Secunda, displaying the department's

commitment to meeting housing needs. Mr Vusi Ngomane, Programme Manager for Social Housing, puts it, "Our aim is not just to provide shelter but to create thriving communities. Every unit delivered is a beacon of hope for families who have long struggled with housing insecurity."

One of the beneficiaries in this programme, Ms Theresa Zondo, a 52-year-old mother of three, was overjoyed to have benefitted from the program. "I never thought I would have a place to call my own. This house has changed my life," she says, reflecting on how stable housing has positively

affected her family. Her story resonates with many others who have found hope and opportunity through this program.

Looking to the future, the department is focused on expanding the program by working closely with accredited institutions and streamlining approval processes. While there are challenges like funding and land availability, collaborations with various stakeholders will help create a more effective housing delivery system. For those interested in applying, the process is straightforward: applicants need to meet income requirements between R1, 500 and R15, 000, submit their application through accredited institutions, and provide necessary documents like proof of income and identification.

The journey toward equitable housing in Mpumalanga is filled with both challenges and triumphs. The department is committed to creating sustainable communities where everyone can access a safe home. Each new unit built brings us closer to a more inclusive society, and together, we can ensure that every resident of Mpumalanga has a place to call home, fostering hope and opportunity for all.



UN-HABITAT SHAPING A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

annual global celebration of the UN-Habitat Month under the theme "Engaging Youth to Create a Better **Urban Future.**" The occasion highlights a worldwide commitment to sustainable urban development and the essential role cities play in shaping a resilient and inclusive future. In case of South Africa, where urbanisation is constantly increasing. UN-Habitat's mission is critical. These ideals provide frameworks and resources that empower towns and cities to grow sustainably, aligning closely with the country's own goals of fostering social inclusion, economic growth, and environmental resilience.

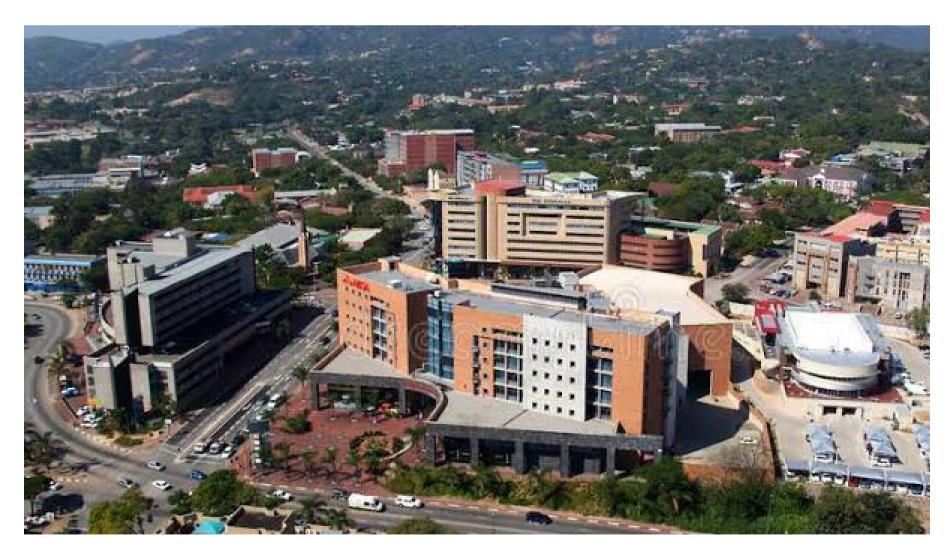
UN-Habitat, an agency of the United Nations, works to promote socially and environmentally sustainable urban development. With nearly 70% of the world's population expected to reside in cities by 2050, its focus on critical urban challenges includes sustainable housing, infrastructure, and resilience cannot be overstated. It is for this precise reason that UN-Habitat works member States governments and urban development stakeholders to address issues like housing which deeply influence quality of life in cities.

In South Africa, UN-Habitat's initiatives, including the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal (making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable), provides guidance in addressing these challenges holistically. Urban challenges such as housing backlogs, informal settlement upgrades, and infrastructure development among the country's most urgent issues, especially for youth.

This year, the Mpumalanga Department of Human Settlements marked UN-Habitat Month with a focus on youth and urban resilience through the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP). Aligned with the theme of youth engagement, the department set a goal of servicing 1,450 sites as part of the UISP initiative for the 2024/25 financial year, already 1,168 sites are completed to date. This achievement reflects Mpumalanga's commitment to creating safe, structured living environments and educating young people on sustainable urban development.

n October, South Africa joins the shortages and infrastructure deficits, all of As UN-Habitat Month concluded, the Mpumalanga Department of Human Settlements' dedication to upgrading informal settlements and engaging youth remains unwavering. The UISP initiative highlights the government's dedication to fostering a sustainable urban future for its citizens. UN-Habitat's goals resonate strongly within South Africa, serving as a catalyst for sustainable urban growth that champions inclusivity and resilience. This celebration reminds us that sustainable cities are not just built but nurtured; one community, one partnership, and one generation at a time.

> further entrench this approach, MEC Cooperative Governance, for Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs (CoGHSTA), Mr. Speed Mashilo joined team South Africa to the World Urban Forum (WUF 12) in Cairo, Egypt in November 2024. Team South Africa participated in a number of discussions and sessions including the localisation of Implementation of the Global Action Plan for Accelerating the Transformation of Slum and Informal Settlements.





MAJOR ROAD UPGRADE FOR EMAKHAZENI



South Africa a construction site resonates well with the infrastructure development in one of Mpumalanga's 17 Local Municipalities. A major road and storm water construction project is underway in Ward 08 of Emakhazeni Local Municipality. At the core of the project is the improvement of infrastructure and enhancement of the quality of life for the local residents. The Nkangala District Municipality has set aside an amount of R28 million to implement the project, which entails the construction of a 2.35km of road, upgrading of storm water infrastructure, and installation of road furniture.

According to the Executive Mayor, Cllr. Thomas Ngwenya of the District, the project is designed to improve the

he President's call to make infrastructure and contribute towards job creation. "This project demonstrates our commitment to delivering quality infrastructure and services to our communities. We are proud to create employment opportunities and improve the lives of our residents," he emphasised. The scope of work includes construction of pavement layer works, installation of storm water pipes, culverts, and kerb inlets, replacement of inlet and outlet structures, installation of trapezoidal concrete drain for storm water control, installation of road furniture and road markings as well as the installation of height restriction measures.

> The project prioritized local economic development by partnering with a local contractor and six local subcontractors,

promoting diversity and inclusivity. The subcontractors represent a diverse group, comprising males, females, and youth from the community, ensuring that the project's benefits extend beyond infrastructure development to empower local talent and stimulate economic growth."

The project will benefit over 19 thousand households in the area and has created jobs for sixteen general workers. Ngwenya says the successful completion of this project will be a demonstration of commitment by the District Municipality to deliver quality infrastructure and services to the community, and to improve the lives of the residents at the local Municipality. It is envisaged that the project will be completed by May 2025.



ONCOLOGY WARDS PROVIDE DECENT HEALTH CARE SERVICES

ancer is a chronic and incurable disease worldwide, listed among the leading causes of deaths worldwide. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), it accounted for nearly 10 million deaths in 2020 in both first world and developing countries, including South Africa.

It is most commonly found in the breasts, lungs, colon, rectum, and prostate. Tobacco use, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, and unhealthy diets, are amongst others, risk factors for the cancer disease. Research studies identify the top ten (10) cancers that cause age standardised deaths in the Mpumalanga Province as Breast, Prostate, Kaposi's Sarcoma, Lymphoma, Anorectal, Cervical, Lung, Colon, Bladder and Penile.

In support of cancer patients, the Provincial Government has established Units for dedicated Oncology Services in two (2) Tertiary Hospitals, namely: Rob Ferreira and Witbank, with the primary purpose of providing critical healthcare services to patients in the province.

The Rob Ferreira Hospital Oncology Unit was initially established in August 2019 and operated as outpatient unit. It was subsequently expanded to include an inpatient ward, which was officially opened in July 2021. The Unit provides oncology services such as Surgery and Chemotherapy, among others. 23,968 patients received treatment since inception with approximately 300-350 patients receiving oncology treatment monthly.

To enhance medical care accessibility, the department is presently undertaking an initiative to broaden these essential services through the establishment and addition of a Radiation Unit, providing Radiotherapy Currently undertaking Services. installation of the MRI, which commenced on 28th October 2024, with the aim of completing all necessary modifications by March 2025.

and have regular screening. Health MEC, Ms. Sasekani Manzini encourages everyone to utilize health facilities for screening, early detection, diagnosis and prompt treatment to maintain their well-being and minimize loss of

The Priovincial Government is on a quest to improve access to primary health care services by all communities in the province. To achieve this objective the government is investing in the construction of new state of the art health facilities and renovations. The Premier, Mr. Mandla Ndlovu handed over the Pankop

GENERAL CANCER SYMPTOMS MAY INCLUDE AND NOT LIMITED TO THE FOLLOWING:

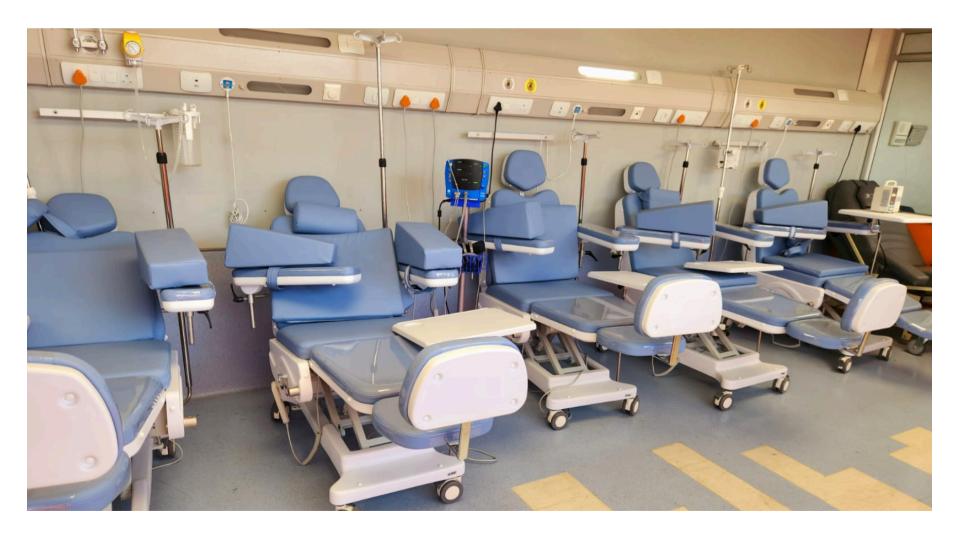
- Persistent Pain
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue
- Change in skin appearance; the skin may be itching, red or swelling or may develop a dimpled appearance (in case of breast cancer) resembling the texture of an orange peel.
- Loss of appetite

Fever

- Night Sweat
- New lump or mole, which can vary in size and texture, ranging from small and soft to feeling like a hard knot.

In some cases, cancer may cause organspecific additional symptoms. This may include blood in urine, coughing up blood or nipple discharge (breast ca) which might vary in colour. To prevent the disease, people should have a healthy diet, avoid smoking, maintain a healthy weight and be physically activity, avoid the sun, and risky behaviors that can lead to infections, get vaccinated

and Kanyamazane Health facilities to the communities, in the Dr J.S Moroka and City of Mbombela Local Municipalities recently. He was accompanied by MEC Manzini, Executive Mayors and Senior Management. These facilities have been established in accordance with the National Health Insurance (NHI) standards.





MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

ocietal pressures, economic instability, and cultural norms are cited among the contributing factors for men's health issues, such as mental health. These factors give rise to the stigmatization and vulnerability of men, not only in South Africa, but globally.

Research reveals that men face unique barriers such as unemployment, substance abuse, and limited access to mental health services. In Mpumalanga, a

ocietal pressures, economic province with an unemployment rate instability, and cultural norms of 49 percent and rural population are cited among the contributing characterised by high levels of poverty, factors for men's health issues, mirrors the challenges that exacerbate such as mental health. These mental health disparities.

November is globally recognised as a month to raise awareness of men's health issues, including mental health. This period is timely and essential in Mpumalanga, to address men's mental health. Initiatives, such as Movember, recognise men's attitude of failing to seek mental health support, due to stigma and traditional notions of masculinity.

A study conducted in Mpumalanga found that rural men are particularly vulnerable to depression and anxiety, with economic pressures social isolation cited as key contributors. Furthermore, the study discovered that harmful coping mechanisms such as substance abuse are prevalent, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates mental health issues. Cultural

norms also play a critical role, as many of them adhere to traditional notions of masculinity, viewing mental health struggles as a sign of weakness. This stigma discourages them from seeking help, leading to untreated conditions that can escalate into crises such

as suicide, which disproportionately affects men in South Africa

Despite growing awareness, men in Mpumalanga face significant barriers in accessing mental health care. Government's efforts to improve access to health care services, especially in rural areas provides hope that access to mental

health services will be improved through the availability of resources and dedicated staff.

Strategies for Intervention

Experts recommend a multifaceted approach, to address the challenge. These include the following, but not limited to:

- Increase the number of psychologists to balance the ration.
- Community Engagement through programmes tailored to Mpumalanga's unique socio-cultural environment. The programmes can help reduce stigma and encourage open discussions. Traditional healers, can play a pivotal role in normalizing mental health care.
- Improve access to services through the expansion of mobile mental health clinics and telehealth services, to bridge the gap in rural areas where infrastructure is limited.
- Create awareness through November initiatives which include culturally sensitive campaigns targeting men, and emphasize the importance of seeking help as a sign of strength rather than weakness.

Men's mental health awareness provides an opportunity and an urgent need to address stigma, improve access to care, and engaging communities. It is imperative to recognize that men's mental health is not just a personal issue but a societal one that demands collective action.



TACKLING THREAT OF VELD FIRES



n a stark reminder of the agricultural sector's vulnerabilities, this past winter saw a devastating surge of veld fires sweeping across Mpumalanga Province. These recent infernos have impacted over 11,200 farms, resulting in an estimated property loss of R1.3 billion. This alarming trend exacerbates an already precarious situation, heightened by ongoing droughts and dry veld conditions, which collectively foster an environment increasingly prone to fire hazards.

In response to this escalating crisis, the Department of Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs (COGHSTA) convened the Veld and Forest Fires Indaba on November 12, 2024, at Nutting House. This event brought together a diverse coalition of experts, policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders to devise strategies for combating the growing threat of veld fires, which are aggravated by climate change and human activity.

During the Indaba, the MEC for COGHSTA, Mr. Speed Mashilo, delivered a keynote address that emphasized the urgency of collaborative action. "It is crucial that we work together," stated MEC Mashilo. He highlighted the necessity of formalizing partnerships through Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) to clearly define shared responsibilities, synchronize efforts, and optimize resource allocation among government entities, nongovernmental organizations, community leaders and private sector representatives.

The Indaba featured informative presentations from specialists in the South African Weather Services and fire management. Participants engaged in discussions addressing the root causes and impacts of veld fires, exploring successful management practices adopted by local communities. Interactive sessions were designed to foster dialogue aimed

generating actionable solutions for sustainable land management and innovative fire prevention strategies.

A central theme of the Indaba, "Prevent urban, veld, and forest fires while protecting the natural environment, infrastructure, and livelihoods," underscored the importance of community involvement in fire management initiatives. Local farmers, land care groups, and NGOs shared valuable insights, emphasizing that grassroots involvement is essential for building resilience against fire threats.

The Mpumalanga Category of Authorized Persons (CAP) also presented on the state of Fire Brigade Services in municipalities. They were tasked with assessment fire brigade services across the municipalities to ensure compliance with SANS 10090 and applicable legislative frameworks, including the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the National Veld and Forest Fire Act of 1998.

Following comprehensive fire and rescue assessments conducted by CAPs at fire stations throughout the province, several significant challenges within the fire department were identified. Key issues include a critical shortage of human resources, which hampers operational effectiveness, and inadequate infrastructure, leading to prolonged response times as firefighters navigate considerable distances to reach emergencies.

The current fleet of vehicles has also been deemed outdated and ill-equipped to handle modern risks, complicating the department's response capacity. Furthermore, the available With strong partnerships and a shared personal protective equipment (PPE) for veld firefighting is insufficient and outdated, significantly increasing the risk of injury for firefighters during operations.

While self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) are accessible, the lack of maintenance records raises concerns regarding safety compliance, jeopardizing firefighter safety during emergencies. Addressing challenges is paramount to ensuring the fire department's effectiveness and the safety of its personnel in emergency response scenarios.

At the conclusion of the Indaba, stakeholders collectively pledged their commitment to a collaborative approach to fire management. This significant moment was formalized with the signing of a pledge that affirmed their dedication to working cohesively in the fight against veld fires, marking a milestone in enhancing fire service coordination and policy implementation.

Key resolutions from the Indaba included establishing a District Fire Services Coordination Forum and the development comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for incident management. Additionally, participants agreed to honour the dedication of fire service personnel through annual Fire Brigade Service Awards and to collaborate with private sector partners to strengthen firefighting capabilities across municipalities.

The success of the Indaba reflects the collective efforts of all participants from attendees to speakers and supporters. Their unwavering commitment lays the foundation for a unified approach to safeguarding both the environment and communities against the persistent threat of veld fires.

vision, there is newfound optimism for a sustainable future that effectively addresses the challenges posed by these destructive fires. By working together, stakeholders are poised to make significant strides in restoring stability, resilience, and prosperity within Mpumalanga's agricultural landscape.



MTEC HEARS ABOUT FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY OF INSTITUTIONS

he Provincial Treasury successfully conducted the expenditure medium-term committee hearings with the provincial departments and public entities in October. The Committee hearings focused on the fiscal sustainability of institutions at the midpoint of the 2024/25 financial year.

The committee is a critical structure that operationalizes the Medium-Term Expenditure framework now referred to Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP).

The government introduced MTEF more on the crucial role of fiscal sustainability than two decades ago as part of the reforms to improve budgeting in the public sector. During the hearings, departments shared information on their state of finance, highlighting progress made on implementation of budget priorities, with specific focus on earmarked funds and the spending proposals for the next threeyear planning cycle.

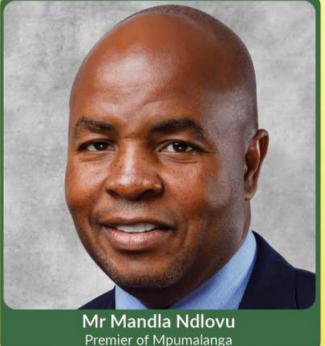
Finance MEC, Mr Bonakele Majuba has, throughout the MTEC hearings, emphasized the importance of consensus to the attainment of service delivery objectives in the midst of shrinking budgets.

The MTEC hearings also deliberated on spending outcomes of the votes and make recommendations on implementation of spending priorities for the current year and expectations over the three-year plan, MTEF.









MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL IN MPUMALANGA



Mr Speed Mashilo MEC: Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements & Traditional Affairs



Ms Catherine Dlamini MEC: Education



Mr Thulasizwe Thomo MEC: Public Works, Roads & Transport



Ms Nompumelelo Hlophe MEC: Agriculture, Rural Development, Land & Enviromental Affairs



Ms Makhosazane Masilela MEC: Economic Development & Tourism



Ms Sasekani Manzini MEC: Health



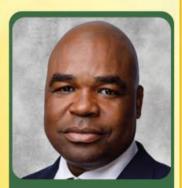
Ms Leah Mabuza MEC: Culture, Sport & Recreation



Ms Brenda Moeketsi MEC: Social Development



Mr Bonakele Majuba MEC: Provincial Treasury



Mr Jackie Macie MEC: Community Safety, Security & Liaison



"Let's grow Mpumalamga together"



