

2024

STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS

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Mpumalanga Provincial Government



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STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF MPUMALANGA PROVINCE ON 1 MARCH , 2024.

Honourable Speaker of the Mpumalanga Legislature;

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;

Executive Mayors present today;

Chairperson of the Provincial House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders, Kgosi Mokoena and our revered Traditional Leaders;

Judge President of Mpumalanga Division Justice and members of the Judiciary present;

Chairpersons and CEOs of our parastatals;

The Acting Director- General Mr Peter Nyoni, Heads of Departments, Municipal Managers and all senior government officials;

The Provincial Secretary of the African National Congress in Mpumalanga Cde Muzi Chirwa and the entire Leadership of the Alliance, COSATU and SANCO;

The Leadership of the African National Congress Women's League, in our midst.

Leaders of the Opposition parties in our midst;

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-THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN

1. Madam Speaker, let me begin by extending my gratitude to all of you who have travelled throughout this magnificent province we call our home Mpumalanga. Others came from far and wide across the breadth and length of South Africa, just to be with us on this momentous day in the history of our province. A province of hope and progress.
2. On the same breath, allow me to extend my warmest greetings and welcome to those at home who are tuned in on their radios, tv stations and social media platforms in order to be part of the last state of the province address for the current administration, and if I may add the one that will conclude 30 years since the democratic dispensation in 1994.
3. I want to say, we have left the valley though we have not reached the mountain top. I salute the African National Congress. It has fulfilled our expectations in its role as the leader of the great march towards the attainment of a national democratic society.
4. On a very sad note, let me add my voice in mourning our comrades and friends who died in a bus accident in the early hours of Sunday morning near Mkhondo Municipality.
5. We also learnt with great shock of the passing of 3 educators following a head on collision on the N4 between Schangen and Sudwala intersection on Wednesday, the 28th of February.
6. With your indulgence Madam Speaker, may I request that we bow our heads and observe a moment of silence for the lives we have lost.
7. It is indeed a sad loss not only to their families but to the province and the country as a whole, and may their beautiful souls rest in peace.

8. We wish those who were injured, a speedy recovery.
9. Madam Speaker, I am truly humbled and filled with a sense of honour and gratitude for the invitation you have extended to us, for the past five years, to come and account to the people of this beautiful land, The Province of the Rising Sun on the progress we have made in our efforts to make the lives of our people better, in particular the poor and the down trodden.
10. As we close the one chapter and open a new one, we are energised by the manifesto of the governing party as presented by his excellency, President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa.
11. This Manifesto of the ruling party and other government policies, which emanates from progressive policy framework documents like the ***Freedom Charter, the Reconstruction and Development Program, the National Development Plan and the Medium term Strategic Framework***, that we are concluding in this current term, guide us in all our government work as we endeavour to deliver services to our people.
12. As we approach the end of the tenure of this current administration and move towards celebrating another great milestone in our history of 30 years since we ushered the democratic dispensation, we need to reflect on the journey that we have travelled together, acknowledge the tremendous progress that we have made, identify our short comings and mistakes and forge ahead with a common purpose to better the lives of our people.
13. April the 27th, 1994 will forever remain indelible in the minds and annals of our history. A day when South Africans of all races voted for the first time as one nation under a democratic dispensation.
14. In his inaugural address as the first democratically elected President of South Africa Nelson Mandela had this to say and I quote;

“We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the millions of our people. We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity - a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.”

15. Indeed, Madam Speaker, on each and every occasion that we have held the general elections, the ANC led government, working with its alliance partners and civil society, have made commitments to renew this covenant with the people of this province which the late President Mandela committed us to.
16. As part of strengthening and legitimising our democratic dispensation, we periodically hold national and provincial elections, followed by local government elections, one of the key internationally recognised tenets of our democratic government.
17. On May the 29th, just over 2 months from now, our people will be going to the polls to decide who represents their dreams, aspirations and plight for the next coming five years.
18. For the past six general elections, the people of Mpumalanga province have overwhelmingly voted for the African National Congress, demonstrating their confidence that we can, and we should continue with our work no matter how difficult it is to make their lives better.
19. Despite all domestic and global challenges that we have had to contend with, our performance as measured by what prevailed in 1994 and what prevails now speaks volumes. I will address this point in detail later on.
20. We therefore call upon all citizens of this province, to go out in numbers and vote for the parties of their choice. And give them a fresh mandate to represent them in government.

A REFLECTION ON THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

21. Madam Speaker, we want to reflect on the past and the present. ***Numbers don't lie.*** Let us pause a bit and reflect on a Mpumalanga Province of 1994 and the Mpumalanga Province of today.
22. When we were elected to office in 1994, our population was a mere 3.3 million people. Today Mpumalanga is home to 5.1 million people.
23. The Gross Domestic Product, (GDP) that is the value of goods and services produced in Mpumalanga was R46 billion, today our economy has grown

in leaps and bounds to more than R530 billion, twelve times bigger than what it was, becoming the 4th largest economy in the country.

24. In 1996 there were around 627 000 people employed in the province, today our economy employs more than 1.25 million people.
25. The percentage of people living below the lower bound poverty line improved drastically from 64%, in 1996 to 49.5% in 2022. This is supplemented by the provision of a wider safety security net that includes the special COVID 19 Social Relief of Distress grant, the Old Age Pension Grant, the Child Support Grant and the Care Dependency Grants, to name but a few examples.
26. There has been a phenomenal growth in access to education in our province with Stats SA General Household Survey findings indicating that the Percentage of 7- to 17-year-olds attending school in Mpumalanga Province is at 98%. The throughput rate has improved from 46 % in 2019, to 72% in 2023.
27. Before 1994 , thousands of children from poor families attended classes on an empty stomach, they had to endure traveling long distances to attend school. Today one million children in this Province from poor backgrounds enjoy free hot meals served at their respective schools. Approximately 75 000 students are transported to school daily through our scholar transport programme.
28. Prior to 1994 teenage girls from poor background would miss school due to unaffordable sanitary towels. Today, the ANC led government has restored the dignity of a girl child. A total of 96 077 girl children in all quintile 1 schools are provided with sanitary towels.
29. In 1994 only a few households had access to piped clean water and proper sanitation. Today, 87% of households in Mpumalanga have access to clean water and more than 93% have access to adequate sanitation.
30. Today, more than 94% of all residents in Mpumalanga have access to electricity.
31. In 1994, the infant mortality rate in Mpumalanga was 80 per 1000 live births. Today, that figure stands at 11.2 per 1000 live births.

32. The maternal mortality rate in Mpumalanga in 1995 was much higher than the average rate. Today that rate has dropped to 106.8 per 100 000.
33. Before the advent of our democracy, the life expectancy of our people in this province was hovering around 50 years and lower. Today our people are living longer with women averaging 65.8 years and men 60.7 years. We would like to see these figures rising to an average of 75 and 70 years respectively.
34. One of the reasons why our people are living longer and healthier is because our government has an extensive TB and HIV/AIDS treatment programmes which have assisted in prolonging the lives of those affected.
35. When the ANC was elected to lead government in 1994, we had no universities. We only had a few technical colleges.
36. Today, Mpumalanga is home to 4 universities which are the **University of Mpumalanga, the Tshwane University of Technology, the Vaal University of Technology and the University of South Africa**. We are also home to 2 private Universities, which are **Eduvos and Regenesys**.
37. In 1994 there were 89 public libraries. Today we have 123 fully equipped public libraries, translating to 34 newly built libraries in townships and rural villages.
38. We are opening the doors of learning to every child who calls Mpumalanga home, as envisaged by the freedom Charter.
39. Prior 1994, the future of a farm dweller's child was determined by the environment of his or her upbringing. A significant number of them were forced to drop out of school before completing their primary education and work in farms with their parents, in most cases getting paid with a bag of mealie meal.
40. Today, the ANC led government has built 6 state of the art boarding schools to restore the dignity and the plight of the farm dwellers children and improve the quality of education. These boarding schools are;
 - Ezakheni boarding school in Mkhondo;

- Izimbali boarding school in Mkhondo;
 - Emakhazeni boarding school in Emakhazeni;
 - Thaba Chweu boarding school in Thaba Chweu
 - Shongwe boarding school in Nkomazi; and
 - Steve Tshwete boarding school in Steve Tshwete
41. Before our icon the late President Mandela could take an oath on the 27th of April in 1994 more than 85% of land in this province was in the hands of the minority. Today about 1 767 370 hectares of land have been acquired and transferred to the hands of the previously disadvantaged through our land reform programmes of restitution and redistribution.
 42. Of this land, over 555 000 hectares of land have is restituted back to our people through **communal property associations** benefitting in excess of 110 000 beneficiaries, which includes women, youth and persons with disabilities.
 43. From our agricultural support programmes like **Masibuyele Esibayeni** and **Masibuyele eMasimini** for emerging farmers, we are supporting farmers with livestock such as cattle, sheep, goats, pig and chickens.
 44. In addition to the above we are supporting all those who have farms to do cash crop and large scale farming of Maize, Soya Beans, Sugar Cane and deciduous fruits such as Apples and Peaches, litchis, mangoes and avocados.
 45. Before the dawn of our democracy our people lived in squalor conditions with no housing and social amenities. Title deeds were restricted to the so called 99-year leasehold. Today we have built 236 395 low-cost houses for the most vulnerable.
 46. In addition, we have serviced 65 538 sites for the missing middle category those who do not qualify for subsidized houses but are also not qualifying for bank funded bonds. In total this translates to 301 833 housing opportunities created.
 47. We have also issued 88 551 title deeds to the homeowners guaranteeing their rights and the rights of their descendants to the ownership of such properties for life.

48. Our province has grown from having a few corner shops in each and every town to having several shopping malls which are in the main, prevalent in villages, which also create job opportunities and bring valuable services closer to our people.
49. Despite the challenges, our people are facing, which are different from other emerging economies, the ANC led government has left an undeniable mark in changing the lives of our people for the better.

THERE SHALL BE WORK AND SECURITY...

50. Madam Speaker, the freedom charter asserts that there shall be work and security for all. We are in the season of jobs, jobs, jobs and more jobs. The Quarterly Labour Force Survey released last week shows that at the end of the 4th Quarter of 2023 our province was employing 63 869 more people than the same period in 2022.
51. From last year, employment in our Province jumped by a whopping 47 705 people taking the overall number of people working in this province to 1.25 million. This was the highest figure in Mpumalanga in years.
52. However, we are still concerned with a high youth unemployment rate currently at 46,4% for young people between the ages of 15-34.
53. Through the National Rural Youth Service Corps, a total number of 1 103 jobs have been created in the 2023/24 Financial Year.
54. Our Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) has been a meaningful contributor to household incomes of unemployed people, and especially the youth, women and persons with disabilities.
55. Since its inception in 2004, this flagship programme has created over 761 301 work opportunities in the province, of which 463 815 or 61% were women. Youth accounted for 362 523 or 48%, and persons with disabilities were 5 206 or 0.7%.
56. In the months ahead, the programme is set for major shake ups that will see adoption of the ***Khawuleza Model*** to characterize the new implementation approach. This comes after government has reviewed the past four phases of EPWP and planning for the next phase which will see over 5 million

opportunities being created.

57. EPWP Phase 5 will result in the programme contributing to building better community infrastructure, empowering participants with training and skills to enter the job market and becoming entrepreneurs as part of their exit strategies.
58. The programme will be massified to create more employment opportunities as well as upskilling and reskilling, while attempting to solve the country's key challenges such as:
 - Road maintenance (pothole patching, brick paving and ensuring pothole free road networks);
 - Cleaning of neighbourhoods and waste management;
 - Energy (retrofitting of government buildings and solar installations); and
 - Fixing water leaks and plumbing.
59. Madam Speaker, in our State of the Province Address last year we promised the people of Mpumalanga a Job War Room to tackle the high unemployment rate, with 21 programmes identified to enhance job creation efforts.
60. By the end of January 2024, a total of 63 478 jobs were created through the 21 identified programmes including the ***Siyatentela Road Maintenance Programme, Government Nutrition Programme, School Handymen and Tourism Safety Monitors*** to name a few.
61. Since 2021 and through the ***Presidential Employment Stimulus***, we have trained and created a total of **65 296** job opportunities for unemployed youth in different schools.
62. One of our youth economic empowerment flagship programmes, the Premier's Youth Development Fund has produced stunning results.
63. Since its inception in 2019, the Premier's Youth Development Fund has disbursed *R258 million* to fund 182 youth owned enterprises. The funded beneficiaries have created *more than 630 jobs* in the following sectors;
 - ***Agriculture,***
 - ***Mining,***

- **Film and Production, and**
- **Manufacturing,**

64. These entrepreneurs have the potential of being pioneers in their chosen industries that play a key role in our economy and have demonstrated exceptional dedication and talent in their respective fields.
65. As highlighted in a recent speech by President Ramaphosa, these young entrepreneurs serve as perfect examples of the empowerment programmes offered by Government. We are proud to see these young entrepreneurs flourishing and making a meaningful contribution to our economy and society. Their achievements are evidence of the power of investing in our youth and nurturing their potential to drive positive change and innovation in our community.
66. A number of businesses are operational and excelling within the three District Municipalities, for example:
- **Mbita Electrical & Construction (Pty) Ltd** owned by Mr. Nyiko Mathebula, a young entrepreneur based in Steve Tshwete Municipality whose business focuses on repairs and maintenance of electric generators for mining and manufacturing industries. This business has created 36 permanent jobs and 10 temporary jobs. May I request that Mr. Mathebula to stand up so that we can acknowledge him.
 - **Manikasiri Enterprise (Pty) Ltd** is owned by a young entrepreneur Mr. Brighton Khoza from Bushbuckridge Local Municipality. The focus of this business is manufacturing, specializing on painting production as well as renovation of houses. 8 job opportunities were created by this business. May I request that Mr. Khoza to stand up so that we may acknowledge him.
 - **Mbuduma Trading and Projects**, owned by a young disabled entrepreneur, Mr. Bradley Sifiso Masombuka. This business is located at Thembisile Hani Local Municipality operating in the construction sector and providing tool hire services and has created 14 job opportunities. May I request Mr Masombuka to stand up so that we may acknowledge him.

- **Pigro projects**, owned by Ms. Poppy Eva Nkosi. The business is operating in Thaba Chweu Local Municipality. The business is in the agricultural sector specialising in piggery. The business has currently created 4 new job opportunities. May I request Ms Nkosi to stand up so that we may acknowledge her.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

67. Madam speaker and fellow citizens, as early as in 1994 the ANC led government identified infrastructure as the catalyst that has the potential to grow the economy and enhance the competitiveness relative to other provinces whilst improving the quality of life of our people.
68. In the last 30 years, the Provincial Government completed a total of **3 762** projects in terms of education and health infrastructure. These include;
- 3306 school infrastructure projects including construction of 21 new schools, 6 new boarding schools, upgrading 283 schools, 1 228 sanitation and ablution facilities and 1769 various other rehabilitation, renovation, repairs and maintenance projects.
 - 303 health facilities were constructed which include 3 new hospitals, 57 new clinics and community health centres, 70 upgrades and 173 renovations.
69. Additional projects that have been completed during this period include:
- Riverside Government Complex;
 - Mpumalanga Archives Building, City of Mbombela;
 - Provincial Disaster Management Centre in the City of Mbombela;
 - Mpumalanga Traffic Training College in Mkhuhlu, Bushbuckridge ;
 - Mkhuhlu Agri-hub in Bushbuckridge; and
 - New Municipal administrative offices in all three districts.
70. National Departments initiatives in the province include: Mbombela Stadium, The High Court, University of Mpumalanga in the City of Mbombela.

71. Our Province has also benefited from major transport, logistics, water, broadband and electricity infrastructure projects which were implemented by other spheres of government. Amongst these are the following;
- The Machadodorp interchange;
 - The Karino interchange; and
 - The Montrose interchange.
72. The following **health infrastructure projects** are at different stages of development:
- Linah Malatjie Tertiary Hospital (New 400 Beds), is at design and planning phase;
 - Construction of mental ward with 60 beds capacity at Kwamhlanga Hospital;
 - Construction of Mapulaneng hospital;
 - Middelburg hospital has been completed ;
 - Upgrading of Siyabuswa CHC; and
 - The upgrading of Witbank Hospital Mental Unit.

ROADS AND TRANSPORT

73. Madam Speaker and fellow citizens, the Mpumalanga Road network is a core component of the provincial infrastructure because it precedes and facilitates development. Moreover, adequate infrastructure is a fundamental precondition for transport systems.
74. Significant improvements were recorded on the provincial roads which saw the upgrading of 802 kilometres from gravel to surfaced roads and the rehabilitation of *1274 km of roads across the province*.
75. Our road infrastructure network has made it easy for our people to access social and economic centres such as schools, clinics, hospitals, shopping centres and markets for their produce.
76. The Maputo Development Corridor which connects Mozambique to Mpumalanga and Gauteng has brought tremendous improvements in the transportation of goods especially mineral resources and tourists over the past two decades.

77. **Operation Vala Zonke** is aimed at pothole patching and is beginning to gain traction and this programme is considered as a classical example of the District Development Model in action. We have consolidated our budgets, personnel and plan to attend to potholes across the Province. To date, some pockets of excellence have been recorded on specific roads but there is still a need to intensify implementation.
78. Furthermore, the Province handed over to SANRAL some of our strategic roads. These will also include roads that will be considered for piloting Nano Technology and Materials.
79. Madam Speaker, we do acknowledge that some of our roads require repairs and maintenance. Within the current Municipal financial year, our municipalities will be completing a number of projects on roads rehabilitation and construction. The province is also rolling-out a road infrastructure maintenance plan which aims to augment the capacity of municipalities to speed up delivery on the patching of potholes.
80. As a province we have constructed 76 projects under the **Integrated Rural Mobility and Access programme**. These include 17 bus shelters, 10 footbridges, 29 culverts, 15 bridges, 4 walkways and 1 multi-modal facility. Also, multitudes of maintenance works were implemented across existing transport infrastructure which includes the patching and resealing of surfaced roads and the re-gravelling and blading of gravel roads.
81. A total of 57 roads construction projects were completed in the past 30 years which include the following;
- Rehabilitation of road P170/1 between Matibidi and Graskop;
 - D3930 Acornhoek to Hluvhukani; Coal Haul P141/1 South Clewer to Kriel;
 - Road P8/1 Mashishing and Bambi; D2486 N2 to Klipwal;
 - Upgrading of gravel roads to surface in Daantjie – Mpakeni; D3973 Hoxani and Marite; D281 Volksrust to Daggakraal;
 - Paving of roads D1875 Tweefontein to Gemsbokspruit; D2091 Marapyane to Limpopo border; D2952 Masibekela to Thambokulu.

82. During the current administration, we will complete the following projects;
- Rehabilitation of sections P8/1 (R36) between Mashishing and Bambi Phase 3; D2950 Mananga to River Crossing; Coal Haul P36/1 Delmas to N12;
 - Upgrading of D481 Mooiplaas and Ekulindeni; D4407 Hluvukani – Orpen Road near Welverdië;
83. To boost infrastructure development, government is collaborating with the private sector, multilateral development banks and development finance institutions to augment its skills, expertise and funding.
84. Madam Speaker, the people of Emalahleni have been complaining about traffic congestion close to the railway lines since time immemorial. To this effect, we are in the process of building a state of the art interchange along the railway line from the city centre leading to Pine Ridge, Klarinet, Siyanqoba and Verena. This interchange will improve safety and ease traffic flow in that area. The planning and design process have been completed. The construction of the interchange will commence in the 2024/25 financial year.

NKOSI CITY DEVELOPMENT

85. Madam Speaker, the Nkosi City Development remains one of the catalytic projects aimed at improving the lives of the people in the City of Mbombela and the Ehlanzeni district broadly.
86. Significant progress has been made on the legalization of the development in respect of planning processes, township establishment and the development of the surveyor general plans. This is critical in order to ensure that the Development is compliant with all relevant regulations and prescripts.
87. We are working hard to unlock investments and strategic partnerships for this development and other similar ones in the Province. Various options are being explored to ensure that bulk infrastructure constructed not only addresses the demand capacity of the development but also that of the surrounding areas within its proximity.

88. More importantly, there is progress achieved in respect of plans to improve the roads infrastructure such as upgrading of;
- Alice Gudlani road,
 - Nkomeni to Woboka road,
 - Pholani to Maseko Street and
 - Zamokuhle bus route which all lead to the development site to ensure accessibility.
89. In improving accessibility to Nkosi City, the province undertook a feasibility study on the construction of a high mobility ring-road providing ingress to and egress from the Nkosi City Development.

TOURISM

90. Madam Speaker, we made a commitment last year to revitalise our provincial nature reserves.
91. We are pleased to report to this august house that we have upgraded tourism facilities in 4 nature reserves with accommodation facilities at the following reserves;
- Songimvelo-kromdraai Camp,
 - Andover,
 - SS Skhosana and
 - Manyeleti.
92. Phase 2 of fence installations is in progress in order to minimize human wildlife conflict in Songimvelo, Mthethomusha and Mdala reserves. It's important for us to implement these projects efficiently, economically and effectively in order to increase the number visitors to our Province. We are pleased with the intention to support the Provincial efforts in this regard expressed from the National Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development.
93. To this end, we are pleased to welcome FlySaFair to our shores from the 1st April 2024 as they have introduced new routes between Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport and Cape town, this adds further impetus to the gains we made when Eurowings, a German airline, chose Mpumalanga as its destination of choice more than a year ago. This is further supported by the Stats SA Tourism and migration report released in January

2024 which placed Mpumalanga at the second spot in international tourist arrivals.

94. As early as February 2024 we entered into a strategic partnership with Aspinall Foundation to elevate the Loskop Dam Nature Reserve to a Big Five Game Reserve. We have also concluded a collaboration with Greater Kruger Environmental Protection Foundation to fight poaching in Manyeleti. This collaboration includes establishing new pickets, maintenance of fence and the training of field rangers.

LAND SHALL BE SHARED AMONG THOSE WHO WORK IT

95. Madam Speaker, the land issue remains paramount to our struggle for economic emancipation.
96. Land ownership in South Africa has long been a source of conflict. Our history of conquest and dispossession, of forced removals and a racially-skewed distribution of land resources, has left us with a complex and difficult legacy.
97. The three key elements of our land reform programme – which is land restitution, land redistribution and security of tenure are responding to the requirements as set out by the Constitution of our country.
98. Through our ***Phez' Komkhono Mlimi*** initiative, we supported farmers with production inputs and mechanisation. As a result of this support, to date our farmers plough up to 199 169 hectares of agricultural land cumulatively and we have established no less than 12 720 food gardens.
99. The programme has also benefitted 37 733 farmers in the last 5 years of which 22 505 of them are women, 3 024 youth and 380 are persons with disabilities. In addition, 22 420 households also benefitted from these initiatives. This programme, Madam Speaker has created 35 945 job opportunities.

FOOD & NUTRITION SECURITY PLAN

Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme including Women, Youth & persons with disabilities empowerment.

100. During this 6th Administration, we have launched various programmes, that target and mainstream young women farmers and persons with disabilities in all agricultural interventions.
101. As we reflect on President's recent State of the Nation Address highlighting the importance of sharing good stories and recognizing the achievements of individuals in our society, we are proud to add the success stories of these young women farmers and persons with disabilities to the list of democracy's children.
102. ***Madam Speaker, these are our Tintswalos!!!***
103. ***Khulile Mahlalela***, our young farmer from Steve Tshwete Municipality who owns ***Becca Farms*** in Wonderhoek, specializing in Piggery production sells her porkers to Rietpoort Vark abattoir, G3 abattoir and BKB auction plants in Witbank and Bronkhorstspuit.
104. She further produces peaches in 100 ha; grains in 20ha and agro-processes such as 1500kgs of charcoal or 300 bags of 5kg produced per week from peaches dry branches. her peach project has off-take agreements with local and national markets which include Subtropic Fresh Produce Market at Emalahleni.
105. The charcoal she produces, are sold at 12 local retail shops around Middelburg and Witbank. These include Food Lovers Market, hyper meat and chicken, Roots butchery, and Chacalas, among others. Her Grain is sold to AFGRI milling, Godrich and Tiger brands. She currently employs 13 permanent workers, 1 farm manager, 30 casual workers and 15 seasonal workers.
106. She has won several accolades, which includes Best Smallholder Female Entrepreneur, Best Youth Female Entrepreneur, Overall Female Agriculture Entrepreneur in Mpumalanga Province 2019, and has represented the province at national level where she was awarded Best Youth Female Agricultural Entrepreneur in the country. With the winnings from the awards, she managed to invest back and expand her farming business to 4

profitable enterprise businesses.

107. With your indulgence, Madam Speaker, may I request that Ms Mahlalela stands so that we may acknowledge her.
108. Kagiso Mohlala, our Fortune 40 trainee in 2015 to 2018 is our young farmer from Thaba Chweu Municipality who owns ***Sibhizi Njani Co-operative***. After completing his Fortune 40 training he Joined Forek Institute of Technology during 2019-2021 as an Agricultural Assistant.
109. He was then further assisted by our government nutrition programme with a 10ha farm and farming equipment. He now produces potatoes, dry-beans, cabbages and green peppers. He sells mainly to our Government Nutrition Programme through our Mkhuhlu Agrihub, a facility our government built for the purpose of providing markets to young farmers like him. With your indulgence, Madam Speaker, May I request that Mr Mohlala to stand up so that we may acknowledge his presence.
110. Sibusiso Mogale, our young farmer with a disability from Mbombela. He was supported by our government with a 10ha farm at Mara, where he currently uses the Smart Agricultural Boxes in three Green House Tunnels to produce various types of vegetables. He further produces soy beans on 4.5 hectares open field. He supplies Food Lovers and Spar at Plaza and Valencia within Mbombela. With your indulgence, Madam Speaker, May I request that Mr Mogale to stand up so that we may acknowledge his presence.

FREE MEDICAL CARE AND HOSPITALIZATION

111. Madam Speaker, as a caring government, we have committed ourselves to improving the health care of our people through an effective and efficient health care system. This commitment stems from the public gathering of 1955 in Kliptown where the Congress of the People adopted *umhlahlandlela*, the Freedom Charter.
112. Remarkable improvements of the health indicators for our people could not have happened had we not embarked on an extensive and substantial investment into our healthcare system.
113. Madam Speaker, in the previous SOPA, we indicated that we will establish

oncology services in the Province. We are pleased to report progress as follows:

114. The old Rehabilitation building at the Rob Ferreira hospital was renovated and is now an Oncology Unit with a total of 12 beds for adults and 2 beds for children, to cater for very ill patients requiring admission.
115. Since August 2019, we have recorded an increase in the number of patients who access oncology services in the province, from **1556** to a total of **18125** by **January 2024**.
116. From April 2023 to January 2024 alone, a total of 3844 patients received checkups and 2133 received chemotherapy.
117. In total, 6016 patients have received Chemotherapy since 2019. These are all patients that ordinarily would have been referred to Steve Biko Academic Hospital in Pretoria for treatment.
118. We have also appointed 2 fulltime Oncologists, 2 Oncology pharmacists and 5 Oncology specialist nurses as key members of the Oncology Team.
119. A pediatric Oncologist has been appointed and will commence work from the 1st April 2024.
120. In collaboration with the National Department of Health, we will construct a Radiation Bunker in Rob Ferreira Hospital during the 2024/25 financial year.
121. Madam Speaker, His Excellency, President Cyril Ramaphosa has indicated his readiness to promulgate the NHI Bill into law.
122. To date, 85 healthcare facilities have been accredited by the Office of Health Standards compliance, which is a body that has been mandated by law to give accreditation on quality health standards to all facilities both public and private.
123. Additionally, 88% which is 258 of our 292 Primary Health Care facilities have achieved an ideal clinic status this means that majority of patients will have access to a clinic with good infrastructure, adequate staff, adequate medicine and supplies, good administrative processes, and sufficient adequate bulk supplies. 245 PHC facilities attained platinum and 13 gold

status.

124. As the NHI moves closer to becoming law, we have been working hard to prepare our health system for the full implementation of the NHI in 2028. We are certain that our state of readiness will hold us in good stead when the NHI Act is promulgated.

CARING FOR VULNERABLE AND MARGINALISED GROUPS

125. Our social programmes that are geared towards facilitating access to social grants and welfare services to reduce poverty and inequality, protect children and empower women, youth and persons with disabilities are progressing well.
126. The Foster Care Programme, is one of the programmes that is based on an African proverb; ***“it takes a village to raise a child”***, has made a huge impact in the lives of our children and families. Since the beginning of the 6th Administration, we have placed 542 children in Foster Care.
127. Madam Speaker and fellow citizens, substance abuse has become endemic, negatively impacting on the lives of the substance abusers and their close families. We opened our doors and our hearts to more than 1942 substance abusers who needed our help.
128. We have completed the construction of the Swartfontein and the Nkangala treatment centres, In the days ahead, we will officially handover the Nkangala treatment centre.
129. In the current administration, 7409 NPOs have been supported to implement programmes that are impact driven and aid our efforts to create a Mpumalanga anchored on morals and social cohesion.

THE DOORS OF LEARNING AND CULTURE SHALL BE OPENED

130. Madam Speaker and fellow citizens we have said that ***“the doors of learning and culture shall be opened to all”*** the past 30 years have been characterized by massive investment on education, creating an enabling environment for effective teaching and learning to take place.
131. Research has shown that unless concerted efforts are put on early

childhood learning, we could miss out on key growth and development of learners, resulting in future negative outcomes. It is against this backdrop that our government has continuously invested in Early Childhood Development.

132. We have also successfully transferred the ECD function from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Education.
133. We have successfully supported 1 463 registered Early Childhood Development Centres and a total of 59 825 children of 0-4 cohort are benefiting from this service. As a result, access to ECD education has increased to 79.9% for the 0-4 cohort and is at 94% for the 5-6 cohort.
134. Madam Speaker, we take pride in the performance of our learners in exit Grades. Grade 3 depicts a significant improvement, from 92% in 2019 to 96% in 2023, while Grade 6 has shifted from 94% in 2019 to 96% in 2023 and Grade 9 improved from 84% in 2019 to 86% in 2023.
135. In the 2023 State of the Province Address, I announced that we will be piloting coding and robotics subjects from grades R to 9. That pilot is progressing well and 128 schools from Grade R to 3 and Grade 7 are currently doing coding and robotics.
136. Since 2014, the Mpumalanga government's Ephraim Mogale Bursary Scheme has awarded a total of 7 916 bursaries and 451 of these have been funded through SETAs to enable our youth to study at universities. Of the 368 that studied in Russia, 80 of them have been placed in various government departments.
137. Through the ***Fundza Lushaka Bursary Scheme***, we continue to encourage Matriculants to consider teaching as a career. From 2018 to date, the scheme has produced 1200 educators in our Province.
138. The Provincial Government continues to strengthen the delivery of education in 18 Special Schools and is supporting them to serve as Resource Centres. In this regard, the priority activities include providing redress programmes to improve access, provision of specialist staff, training of teachers in specialised programmes and provision of Assistive Technology Devices. Currently, three new special schools have been built.

139. Madam Speaker, the land for the construction of the proposed School for the Deaf and Blind has been secured at Emalahleni Municipality. Once the school is completed, the 250 deaf learners currently studying in Bukhosibetfu Full Service School and the 200 in other special schools will be relocated to the new school.
140. Since 2022, in its quest to improve learner performance, the provincial government is providing all Grade 12 learners and teachers in Quantile 1 to 3 schools with tablets and laptops respectively. These devices are loaded with e-content and will be provided this year with an offline application so as to enable access learning even outside the four walls of the classroom without data or connectivity.
141. This government continues to strengthen e- learning in our schools. This year, the province will introduce the smart schools concept in eight schools where both teachers and learners will utilize technological devices and thus making the schools paperless.

WATER AND SANITATION

142. Madam Speaker and fellow citizens, the number of water and sanitation projects that have been implemented and completed through government have brought relief to millions of our people.
143. Over the past 30 years, at least R17 billion has been set aside and spent to improve infrastructure for water and sanitation from various grants which include the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG), Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant (RBIG), Water Services Infrastructure Grants (WSIG) and Integrated Urban Development Grant (IUDG).
144. Madam Speaker, some of the projects that have been successfully completed towards improving provision of water and sanitation service delivery include but are not limited to the following:
- Water and sanitation projects completed in the Ehlanzeni District Municipality which have benefitted 5991 households;
 - Water and sanitation projects completed in the Gert Sibande District Municipality which have benefitted 8139 households; and

- Nkangala District Municipality which have benefitted 13898 households on water and sanitation.

145. In the current municipal financial year, our Municipalities have planned to deliver the following water and sanitation projects:

- In Ehlanzeni District Municipality, the installation of new raw water pumps in Hazyview and the upgrading of Suidkaap bulk supply line;
 - The repair of sewer outfall lines will be installed in Barberton and Kabokweni;
 - There will be a refurbishment of Mkhuhlu Waste Water Treatment Works and a completion of Phase 2A bulk water supply at Naas; and
 - We are also implementing the Driekoppies regional bulk water supply scheme as well as reticulation and connection of yard meters at Belfast Phase 2 in Bushbuckridge which will benefit 77 768 households.
- In Gert Sibande District Municipality 32 224 households stand to benefit from the upgrading of Phumula Outfall Sewer pipeline, construction of sewer reticulation network in Amsterdam, the upgrading of Mpuluzi Bulk Water Supply Scheme, refurbishment of Elukwatini Sewer Pump Station, refurbishment of Ekulindeni Water Treatment Works, and rehabilitation of Volksrust 2 Megalitre Reservoir.
- In Nkangala District Municipality, a total of 100 802 households will benefit from the refurbishment and upgrading of Phase 2 Waste Water Treatment Works in Delmas,
 - The replacement of asbestos bulk supply line in Ga-Phahla and Siyabuswa A;
 - The reduction of non-revenue water in Botleng;
 - The construction of Klarinet and Siyanqoba Phase 2 link and bulk water supply lines.
 - The construction of Matheysensloop to Kwaggafontein Booster Pump Station and drilling of boreholes in Marapyane in Dr JS Moroka Municipality is under way.

146. In collaboration with the Department of Water and Sanitation, the following projects will be implemented through the Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant:

- The upgrading of Vaalbank Water Treatment Works and construction of Reverse Osmosis Plant in Steve Tshwete Local Municipality where 87 872 households stand to benefit,
- The upgrading of Fortuna Water Treatment Works in order to reliably supply water in Balfour, Greylingstad and Grootvlei which will benefit 12 636 households in Dipaleseng Local Municipality;
- The Construction of Water Treatment Works, bulk pipeline, Pump Stations and reservoirs which will abstract water from the Rust De Winter Dam to supply the areas of Mathanjana and Pankop within Dr JS Moroka Municipality.
- The Department of Water and Sanitation has set aside a budget of R454, 4 million allocated for the Water Services Infrastructure Grant (WSIG) in the 2024/25 financial year for upgrading of the Standerton Waste Water Treatment Works in Lekwa Municipality. The project will benefit 4790 households.
- The upgrading of Delmas Waste Water Treatment Works with the pre-treatment system will benefit 9000 households as well as the upgrading of Water Treatment Works, construction of bulk pipeline with various reservoirs to benefit 3537 households in Nkomazi Municipality.

147. Madam Speaker, we are concerned about the Manganese contamination in water supply in Emalahleni. We have intervened by deploying 3 civil engineers, 1 environmental engineer, 2 water scientists and 2 technicians to determine the source of the problem and we have conducted exploratory tests by taking samples to determine the extent of the contamination.

148. As things stand, and in accordance with results of the tests conducted, the Manganese content in the water is below the acceptable minimum level of 400 units, which is the minimum acceptable in terms of the South African National Standards 241.

149. We will continue to improvise for further modification and upgrading of the

water treatment plant. We will also continue to take daily water samples from the plant outlets to determine the quality of water for human consumption.

150. If we find that the readings are above the minimum acceptable standards, we will immediately notify our communities and intervene accordingly.
151. The Regional Loskop Bulk scheme is under construction to service the people of Thembisile Hani Municipality as an augmentation scheme to add a further 20 mega litres per day in order to meet the demand of communities.
152. Madam Speaker, in enhancing bulk power supply to minimize the impact of municipal load reduction, a 40 MVA sub station has been constructed in Mhluzi at Steve Tshwete.
153. In Govan Mbeki, SASOL has funded the construction of a state of the art 40 MVA substations in Embalenhle extension 6 and Embalenhle main substation.
154. Whilst in Emalahleni, the construction of 40 MVA duvha substation is under construction.
155. Once all these substations are commissioned, they will ease the pressure on existing infrastructure.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

156. Madam Speaker, our Province was never spared from the catastrophic disasters that tormented our Province over the past years. We have officially become prone to inclement weather, which has unfortunately caused the loss of lives, damage to properties as well as infrastructure.
157. More than R3bn costs of damages since the beginning of this 6th Administration has been suffered, which had to be reported to the National Government for financial assistance after disaster declarations were made. To date, tranches of Municipal Disaster Recovery Grant (MDRG) have started trickling in, with the first tranche of R104m already disbursed to municipalities.

158. Madam Speaker, I must indicate that in as much as the aftermath usually left scars and a trail of catastrophes behind, we were nonetheless able to rapidly respond in order to restore livelihoods and to connect societal functionality through the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure.
159. We have improved our readiness strategies in order to mitigate severity of any eventuality. The capacity and capability of our teams in the disaster management centres both at Provincial and district levels have gradually improved to cope with any form of disaster incidents.
160. For this reason, we have extended our horizon by embarking on providing equipment for firefighting services for the municipalities that are severely under-capacitated and genuinely in need for rescue and firefighting tools. In this current financial year, 5 municipalities received equipped fire fighting trucks, namely, Thaba Chweu, Lekwa, Nkomazi, Dipaleseng and Chief Albert Luthuli municipalities.
161. As a caring Government, we therefore shall continue to effectively coordinate all preventative risk-reduction measures in an attempt to ensure that minimal life-threatening risks are encountered either as a result of natural or human made occurrences. We have observed that the number of human lives that are lost during such incidents is gradually decreasing, which is testament to effective strategic plans and measures that are now in place to make our Province safer to live in.

TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND INGOMA CUSTOM PRACTICE

162. Madam Speaker, this government has always been conscious of the dignity of the status of BoNdabezitha as the recognized institutions of our constitutional democracy. We have therefore vowed that no traditional leader in the Province shall operate without a proper and dignified Administrative Office.
163. In restoring dignity and ensuring infrastructure support to the Traditional Leadership, the Mpumalanga Provincial Government has invested on infrastructure through building of 13 Traditional Councils Offices. We have completed the construction of the following offices;

- ***Jongilanga,***

- *Hoxane,*
- *Mathibela,*
- *Mohlala Morudi,*
- *Mogane,*
- *Manala Mbhongo,*
- *Ndzundza Mabusa,*
- *Bakgatla Ba Seabe,*
- *Ndzundza Mpungutja,*
- *Bakgatla Ba Mmakau;*
- *Duma;*
- *Somcuba Bhevula; and*
- *Madabukela.*

164. We continue to draw *amakhosi* to take part in the advocacy against crime, Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF), drug-abuse by our youngsters and to instil moral regeneration. Together in partnership with the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, we have accepted to play a part in the capacity building ventures for all traditional leaders when rolling out the recently proclaimed Traditional Courts Act by His Excellency the state President, Cyril Ramaphosa.

THERE SHALL BE SECURITY AND COMFORT

165. Madam Speaker and fellow citizens, the freedom charter injunction that there shall be security and comfort imposes an obligation for us to decisively deal with the levels of crime in our province, especially crimes against women and children.

166. Human trafficking remains our concern especially between the borders of our province and Mozambique. We call upon the people of this province to work with law enforcement and report any incidents or suspicious activities that occur in the areas.

167. We have made some progress in our efforts to end the scourge of gender based violence. The Integrated Provincial Plan to fight gender based violence has been developed, is being implemented and monitored.

168. We have adopted the 365 days of activism against gender based violence, so that the potential perpetrators can always be conscious. We have also embarked on numerous advocacy programmes targeting the entire Province.
169. The Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) have been established in the various local municipalities which will culminate in the Launch of the Provincial Gender Based Violence Council in the months ahead.
170. Data shared by the Ministry of Police have shown that crime in our Province happens mostly from Thursday to Sunday. To stem this tide, high density and multi-disciplinary operations are being conducted in the various hotspots of the Province through operation **Siyavutsa**. These have resulted in, amongst others, the confiscation of illegal firearms, weapons and the incarceration of drivers who are above the legal limit of blood alcohol.
171. Madam Speaker, our province is endowed with various minerals such as vanadium , coal, chrome and platinum which contribute significantly to the economy of the country. This has attracted criminal elements who have infiltrated these mines to conduct illegal mining in towns such as Ermelo, eMalahleni, Pilgrims Rest, Barberton ,Graskop and Sabie.
172. The South African Police Service (SAPS), South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) has intervened to ensure that these criminal activities are halted.
173. The Province has a warm climate and an abundance of tourist attraction points which contribute to stimulating the economy and create jobs. Research has indicted that crime has a potential to drive away tourists. To ensure that this economic sector is protected, Tourism Safety Monitors (TSMs) have been recruited and deployed in the various tourist attraction points of the Province. This Tourism Safety Monitors Project has benefitted 1824 young people.
174. To inculcate the culture of responsible driving and obeying road traffic regulation to young people in the spirit of **“lugotshwa lusemanti”** various road safety programmes were implemented benefiting school learners. Competitions were conducted in this regard and I am proud that the youth of the Province have been able to bring the crown home. I encourage other young people to participate in these competitions.

175. Madam Speaker, we have been diligently assessing various strategies to bolster pivotal crime prevention measures. To this end and having assessed the unique nature of our challenges, we will be recruiting 1200 young people in the 2024/25 financial year. We will train them so that they can play a pivotal in ensuring the safety and security of our communities from the grassroots level.
176. We will collaborate with all stakeholders such as the SANDF , SAPS, CPF to develop an operational and legislative framework that will enable us to identify and empower individuals who will be fit for purpose and sufficiently empowered to aid our efforts to reclaim our communities from criminal elements.

CULTURE, SPORTS AND RECREATION

177. Madam Speaker, we are acutely aware of our innate responsibility to be the drivers of societal cohesion and unity.
178. This has informed our decision to align our Province with initiatives that promote societal interaction.
179. For example, our province successfully hosted the South African Traditional Music Awards (SATMAs) hosted in Mpumalanga since 2019 until 2021. This award ceremony and the related build up events afforded the province to market itself as a tourist destination of choice, thereby contributing to the local economy and showcased the diverse cultures of the province wherein local artists shared the stage with national and international artists.
180. Following the success of the SATMAs, we have also collaborated with the SABC to host the Metro FM awards since 2023.
181. This collaboration afforded both Metro FM and the Province an opportunity to inspire and empower young creatives from across the Province with exposure to the fast growing and upwardly mobile market. The awards are preceded by build-up activities that stand to benefit the local creative industry and SMME's with more than 500 temporary jobs created.

182. In order to redress the imbalances of the past and bring equal opportunities to the people of Mpumalanga in the field of education, we have built 4 new state of the art public libraries in ***Sakhile, Thubelihle, Thulamahashe and Matsamo.***
183. We are on the verge of completing another 3 libraries in KwaMhlanga, eThandukukhanya and Newtown. In addition, 6 mobile libraries have been sourced to increase access to library services across our 3 districts.
184. In 2023, our rainbow nation had the unique privilege of hosting the 2023 Netball World Cup for the first time. This world cup has had positive spin offs that benefited the province. As part of the 2023 Netball World Cup Legacy Projects, we have successfully constructed 6 state of the art sport combo courts across the 3 districts. This will go a long way to promote social integration that is an important component of social cohesion and give access to sport facilities.

THERE SHALL BE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP

185. Madam Speaker, the Province hosted successful BRICS roadshows, including the 10th BRICS Ministers of Education and Senior officials gathering and the 8th BRICS Ministers of Culture and Senior officials gathering.
186. We will continue to support our national government foreign policy that seeks to bring peace and harmony among nations. The province always kept and maintained good and cordial relations with its neighbours, the Kingdom of eSwatini and Mozambique. We will continue to forge partnerships that are mutually beneficial and promote friendship and peace among our nations.

CONCLUSION

187. Madam Speaker, despite the challenges, trials and tribulations we have encountered, this ANC led government has improved the lives of our people consistent with the commitment we made 30 years ago to provide ***'A Better life for all'***.
188. As the numbers have demonstrated, we have left an undeniable mark in changing the lives of our people for the better.

189. We have honoured the commitments we undertook in Kliptown 69 years ago when we adopted the Freedom charter and committed ourselves to create jobs and gradually alleviate poverty.
190. Madam speaker, with your indulgence, allow me to again emphasise the fact that;
- In 1994, our population was a mere 3.3 million people, today we are 5.1 million people.
 - We inherited a GDP of R46 billion in 1994. Today we have a GDP of more than R530 billion. Our GDP is now 12 times bigger than what it was and we are now the 4th largest economy in the country.
 - We inherited a workforce of 627 000 people and we have grown it to more than 1.25 million employed people in the province.
 - We inherited a Province made up of 64% of people living below the lower bound poverty line. Today the number improved to 49.5%.
191. Madam speaker, within this context, we are proud of our past and confident about what the future has in store for the people of Mpumalanga.
192. This ANC led government will spare no effort in advancing the plight of the people of Province of the rising sun.
193. We are ready and will continue to diligently tackle the myriad of challenges we face. We shall not betray the collective trust bestowed upon us by the people across the length and breadth of our beautiful Province.
194. Failure is not an option, Victory is certain and indeed, the people shall govern.
195. I thank you.