

***ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, Ms. MC MASILELA, MPL, DURING THE OCCASION OF THE MPUMALANGA TOURISM YOUTH FUND AWARDING CEMEMONY GALA DINNER HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA, MBOMBELA, CITY OF MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY***

***Tuesday, 18 March 2025***

Programme Director, Ms. Buhle Geleba;

Head of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, Ms. Immy Serakalala;

Chairperson of the Steering Committee, Ms. Jabulile Mkhwanazi;

Chairperson of the MTPA Board, Mr. Victor Mashego;

Board Member of the National Youth Development Agency, Mr. Thulisa Ndlela;

SEDFA Provincial Manager, Mr. Mandla Sibiya;

Manager for Public and Private Partnerships at Standard Bank, Mr. Lawrence Ntimane;

Government and private sector officials present;

Members of the media;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

***San'bonani!***

1. Programme Director; there is a Chinese Proverb which says, and I quote: ***“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is now”***, unquote.

2. I suppose you are asking yourself, what is the relevance of this Proverb to the event we are gathered for this evening? It is very much relevant **because tonight is our best time to plant again!**
3. As the Provincial Government, in partnership with the NYDA, **we are re-planting the seed**, which is intended to change things for the better, for our youth involved in the tourism industry.
4. Programme Director; I am therefore thrilled as I will later on, **hand-over funding worth R3.5 million to 24 successful youth businesses** involved in the tourism industry, through the **Mpumalanga Tourism Youth Fund**.
5. The awarding of the funding **follows a pitching session**, during which the youth in the tourism sector showcased their innovative business ideas to a panel of judges. Those with outstanding business ideas were then selected for funding, **for their innovation and contribution** to the tourism sector.
6. Through this Fund, established as a result of a Memorandum of Agreement entered into between our Department and the NYDA, to assist young people in the tourism sector to sustain, grow and expand their businesses, we are **positively responding to the high level of unemployment amongst the youth**.

7. This is after the realisation that there is a low number of young people doing business in the tourism industry; hence the greatest need to intensify the participation of young in the industry through an intervention like the **Mpumalanga Tourism Youth Fund**.
8. This Fund, which we launched at the Manyeleti Nature Reserve in the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality on the 19th of September 2024, aims **to empower young entrepreneurs in the tourism sector**, by providing financial assistance and resources to help them grow and expand their businesses.
9. Accordingly, the **Mpumalanga Tourism Youth Fund** will address the three key challenges faced by youth businesses; namely:
  - Inadequate access to early-stage finance for youth-owned businesses;
  - Inadequate support to youth-owned businesses in the form of mentors which creates access to networks and markets;
  - Inadequate access to working capital which is critical for business development in the Province.
10. Programme Director; the youth are in the majority in our Province; hence our **conscious decision to support and strengthen their business efforts** which contributes and will continue to contribute immensely to our economy.

11. Statistics indicate there are **well over 1.7 million young people aged 15 to 35 in Mpumalanga**, constituting 37.7% of our Province's total population, and thus making the youth the largest demographic group.
12. Ours, is an unwavering commitment towards **supporting and empowering Mpumalanga's tourism youth entrepreneurs**. We are not even ashamed that we have taken such a decision, and nothing will move us from that standpoint!
13. Through this Fund, we also **aim to unite a diverse range of partners from both within and beyond government**.
14. Our ultimate objective is for the **Fund to position itself as the largest and most comprehensive initiative in South Africa's democratic history**.
15. The bigger picture here, is to **ultimately stimulate innovation, create jobs and promote sustainable business growth**, especially in rural areas.
16. Clearly, we are justified for taking such progressive decision in establishing the **Mpumalanga Tourism Youth Fund**.
17. This is not the only intervention our government has put in place, as we also established the impactful **Mpumalanga Premier's Youth Development Fund**.

18. Likewise, the Premier's Youth Development Fund also **empower young entrepreneurs by providing financial and non-financial support**, with the goal of fostering economic growth and addressing youth unemployment.
19. During the State of the Nation Address Debate in Cape Town on February 11 this year, Premier Mandla Ndlovu announced that the Premier's Youth Development Fund has **funded 238 youth-owned enterprises to the tune of R258 million**, since its inception in 2021.
20. So, no one can dispute our **unwavering commitment towards empowering the youth, women and people with disabilities** in our Province.
21. We wish all those who will receive funding for their businesses tonight, **a huge success moving forward**. The bright future you have longed for starts today.
22. Just as an advice, you must remember that being an entrepreneur means a lot of sleepless nights; a successful businessperson does not slumber – they **must be hands-on at all times**. Success is self-earned; it cannot be delegated!
23. To those who were unsuccessful tonight, please don't despair; **you have a second chance in the next round of applications**.

24. I urge you to go back and sharpen your pitches, and let's hope you will 'wow' the judges, the next time around.
25. Programme Director; before I retreat, I would like to inform this gathering that our Province has been assigned by the Presidency, to **host the G20 Tourism Ministers' meeting on the 12th of September** this year.
26. This much-anticipated esteemed gathering would be preceded by the G20 Tourism Working Group meeting from 10 until 11 September 2025.
27. Surely, this would really be a great opportunity **to showcase our tourism products offerings**, and we believe our economy will surely benefit from hosting such international meeting and related engagements. Our people are ready to welcome the world, as we host this all-significant gathering.
28. Programme Director; I still assert that **tourism is the goose that lays the golden egg** for us; **it is our gold mine**, and we must exploit it fully to realise significant economic growth and massive job creation.
29. As I close, Scottish novelist, poet and travel writer, Robert Louis Stevenson, who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, once said, and I quote: ***"Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seed you plant"***, unquote.

30. Yes, we won't judge our interventions by what we have already planted; **we will judge them by what we are planting today** – that being the funding we have awarded to the 24 youth businesses in tourism.

31. Programme Director, ladies and gentlemen; we are **'A Province that Works for All'**; hence we will **'Leave No One Behind'** in this journey!

***Ngiyabonga!***