

OPENING REMARKS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR PV MKHATSHWA, MPL, ON THE OCCASION OF THE EHLANZENI MERRP ROUDTABLE DISCUSSIONS HELD VIRTUALLY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Thursday, 03 June 2021

1. Programme Facilitator, thank you very much.
2. Let me start-off by acknowledging and extending my greetings to:
 - Our host, the Executive Mayor of the Ehlanzeni District Municipality, Councillor Jesta Sidell;
 - All other Executive Mayors of Local Municipalities in the District;
 - MMCs present;
 - Other Councillors present;
 - Acting Head of Department, Ms Gugu Mashiteng, and other Heads of Departments from the Provincial Government;
 - The MERRP Provincial Team, led by the Office of the Premier;
 - Representatives of all social partners; that is, Labour, Business and Community-based Organisations;
 - Ladies and gentlemen;

3. I feel humbled and greatly honoured, to have been afforded this opportunity to address this all-important Roundtable engagement, attended by the key stakeholders, coming from the length and breadth of the Ehlanzeni District.
4. Programme Facilitator, this crucial event is taking place on the first day of June, otherwise known as the youth month due to its historical significance of youth confrontational bravery against an unjust education system of apartheid.
5. Undoubtedly, we can indicate without any reservation that the generation of 1976 took the bull by its horns and achieved their generational mission.
6. The 1976 June 16 culminated into a turning point in the broader political landscape and gave momentum to the political struggle of the oppressed. It forms amongst important events which gave us the political freedom and ushered us into a democratic state following the 1994 democratic elections.
7. However, the political freedom which came as a result of events of this magnitude, remains hollow and incomplete without economic freedom. Thus, we have an existential obligation as government to create conducive environments

which will enable the current generation to fulfill their generational mission of economic freedom in their lifetime.

8. The above articulation, remains firmly consistent with the views of Frantz Fanon that, ***'Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it.'***
9. The democratic government has been putting plans in place since 1994 to complete the political freedom with economic emancipation of the previously disadvantage mass of our people.
10. As the government of the people was busy grappling with tangible plans and programmes of pursuing economic transformation for the benefit of the previsiously marginalized, a deadly virus of Covid-19 proliferated.
11. Therefore, on the 26th of March 2020, President Ramaphosa placed the country under lockdown as an attempt to curb the rapid spread of the Coronavirus in the country.
12. Prioritisation of protecting lives of South Africans, unfortunately, had a negative impact on the economy and livelihoods of our people, particularly the poor.

- We saw a sharp fall in GDP due to, among other things, the sharp decline in the real economy, except in the agricultural sector and unemployment figures soaring up alarmingly;
 - We further observed a high number of small businesses folding up and some big businesses also facing liquidation.
13. Without doubt, government never folded its arms, but took initiatives to mitigate the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Relief and stimulus packages were introduced, as a response to this dire situation.
 14. On 15 October 2020, President Ramaphosa delivered the National Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (NERRP) in Parliament – a Plan that aims to build a new economy and unleash South Africa’s true potential.
 15. Central to the NERRP, is that, while the pandemic has caused devastation to the livelihoods of our people and the economy, it has also brought along new opportunities, particularly in the area of technology and innovation.
 16. For instance, the World Economic Forum Report of 2020 has got this to say about Future Jobs:

- **The workforce is automating faster than expected, displacing 85 million jobs in the next five years.**
 - In essence, the Report argues that automation, in tandem with the COVID-19 recession, is creating a “double-disruption” scenario for workers. Companies’ adoption of technology will transform tasks, jobs, and skills by 2025.
 - However, the Reports also asserts that the **Robot revolution will create 97 million new jobs**. It says that **in 2025, analytical thinking, creativity, and flexibility will be among the most sought-after skills**, and that **Remote work is here to stay**.
17. Therefore, as we look at this NERRP, let us be mindful that we are indeed confronted by the dynamics of the new economy. A serious paradigm shift in our mindset will be required, if we are to tackle the new global reality meaningfully.
18. Ladies and gentlemen, immediately after the pronouncement of the NERRP, the Mpumalanga Government wasted no time but took steps to respond to the clarion call made by the President.

19. Through the guidance of Premier Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane, the Executive Council, in its Lekgotla of March 2021, agreed to put together a provincial plan, dubbed the **Mpumalanga Reconstruction and Recovery Plan**, whose primary purpose will be nothing but a complete focus on the implementation of the National Reconstruction and Recovery Plan.
20. The EXCO Lekgotla further agreed that the Mpumalanga Plan must be underpinned by the following principles:
- a) That the Mpumalanga Reconstruction and Recovery Plan must be inclusive; that is, it should be a product of individuals and organisations of the people of Mpumalanga Province.
 - b) That it must be a Plan where the **people of Mpumalanga have been afforded opportunity to contribute to the development of the Plan**, irrespective of their political affiliation or stature.
 - c) It must be a Plan **emerging from extensive consultation with our people** – the consultation process that is directed fairly and in a transparent manner; and

d) Finally, it must be a Plan that, together, we officially **adopt it as our blueprint that will guide our collective vision towards placing the provincial economy on a recovery trajectory.**

21. Therefore, this gathering here today, forms part of the activities aimed at holding true the afore-mentioned principles.
22. Of course, we are gathered together here today, basically to combine our efforts and share our wisdom in order to strengthen the Mpumalanga Reconstruction and Recovery Plan draft document, in areas where gaps and weaknesses are evident or could be detected during our deliberations.
23. Thus, one is expecting, from all of us, to engage in robust discussions which must culminate into pragmatic solutions that could assist us, as a collective, to turnaround the economy and place it on a growth trajectory.
24. I would appreciate it very much, if this meeting could take a solution-oriented posture, instead of becoming a lamenting session.
25. Fundamentally, we are expected to reach consensus on the projects that we, as a collective, are going to pursue in order to improve the economic landscape of the Province,

particularly with regard to economic growth, and the creation of job opportunities for our people.

26. I also intend to see us reaching consensus on the best delivery model, that we will be utilising to implement the agreed upon interventions, to spur or stimulate an inclusive economy.
27. Indeed, **consensus must also be reached on the best Monitoring and Evaluation mechanism**, to track the delivery of the MERRP.
28. Let us all be reminded that our people have pinned all their hopes on our shoulders, as this collective. Therefore, we dare not fail them.
29. Personally, I am convinced that we have all what it takes, to tackle this mammoth task lying ahead of us. So, let us fire with all our cylinders, and contribute constructively during this gathering today.
30. I wish you fruitful and mind-provoking discussions.
31. ***Let's grow the economy of Mpumalanga together!***

I thank you!