

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

Friday, 18 June 2021

Programme Facilitator, Mr Lemmy Mdluli;

Executive Mayor of the Gert Sibande District Municipality, Councillor Muzi Chirwa;

Executive Mayors of Local Municipalities in the District;

MMCs present;

Councillors present;

Acting HOD, 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;

Receive my warm greetings!

1. It is my greatest honour and priviledge, to be afforded this ample opportunity, to converse in this significant District Roundtable Discussion, with different social partners of Gert Sibande District.

2. I should indicate that this is the last District Roundtable engagement, as we build up to the Provincial Summit. We have already held engagements of this nature with the Nkangala and Ehlanzeni Districts, and the discussions were a resounding success.
3. Since the pandemic ravaged the economy and fundamentally destructed the lives of humanity across the globe, we, in this part of the country were not exempted.
4. And as the provincial government, we took a deliberate decision after the President announced the **National Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan** in October last year, to develop our own Mpumalanga Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (MERRP).
5. Following its Lekgotla of March 2021, the Mpumalanga Provincial Government, through Premier Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane, agreed to put together a provincial plan, called the **Mpumalanga Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (MERRP)**.
6. This Plan consolidates and focuses on impactful economic opportunities to stimulate growth and create the much-needed jobs, especially for the unemployed youth.

7. We are thus, utilising these District Roundtable Engagements to have a conversation with you our social partners; to get your inputs so that we can consolidate a firm document, which will be presented to the forthcoming Provincial Summit.
8. As a government, underpinned by the principles of participatory democracy, it was important that we involve different classes and stratas of society in this process, in order to produce an economic blueprint document, rooted in societal interests, and ultimately forge a social compact in the implementation phase of our plan.
9. Programme Facilitator, I should indicate that, these Roundtable Discussions, further embrace the newly introduced District Development Model (DDM), so as to synchronise the work of different spheres of government in a more coordinated manner.
10. In the last engagement, I said the above without any iota of doubt enhancing the Intergovernmental Relations (IGR), to implement interconnected programmes between different spheres of government.
11. The successful attainment of the goals of our Plans relies on a government which has the ability, capacity and agency to work together in unison. It is for this reason, why we need to double

our efforts in ensuring the success of the District Development Model with a leading provincial government.

12. The contraction of the economy in 2020, require us to be decisive and rigorous in our reponses, in order to mount an aggressive fight back to restore and rebuild our economy.
13. This, we do, consistent with our commitment to the long-term perspective of the National Development Plan, of eliminating poverty and reduce inequality by 2030.
14. At the centre of our collective effort to rebuild the economy of the Province, we must be mindful of the fact that the disruption of the economy by the pandemic, requires a new way of doing things. We need to catch up with the unleashed digital technology, and our plan works towards addressing this backlog in the technological space.
15. Programme Facilitator; these new realities are in the main affecting young people and women. Thus, our responses must take into consideration these realities, and the interests of youth, women and people living with disbailites should find sufficient expression in our MERRP.
16. Therefore, as we look at this MERRP, 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.

17. Programme Facilitator; the provincial government poignantly positioned itself to radically respond to the challenges created by the pandemic inline with the pronouncement of the national government.
18. Thusly, as the provincial government, we view the MERRP as an economic framework, whose primary purpose will be nothing but a complete focus on the implementation of the National Reconstruction and Recovery Plan.
19. Accordingly, the MERRP will be underpinned by the following seven (7) priority interventions which ordinarily derive from the National Reconstruction and Recovery Plan:
20. In this regards, we plan to:
 - Roll-out 'massive' infrastructure;
 - Grow industrialisation, localisation and export promotion;
 - Secure sufficient and reliable energy supply, and Green Economy initiatives;
 - Increase employment stimulus;
 - Grow and recover our tourism sector;
 - Focus on agriculture and Food Security; and

- Ensure gender and economic inclusion
21. For the Provincial Government to have a successful plan, it must be a Plan **emerging from extensive consultations with our people** – the consultation process that is directed fairly and in a transparent manner.
 22. Finally, it must be a Plan that, together, we officially **adopt as our blueprint that will guide our collective vision towards placing the provincial economy on a recovery trajectory.**
 23. Consistent with what I have just said, this consultation here today, forms part of the activities aimed at holding true the afore-mentioned principles.
 24. Thus, one is expecting, from all of us, to engage in a robust and frank discussions which must culminate into pragmatic, tangible and evidence-based solutions aimed at turning around the economy, and place it on a growth trajectory.
 25. It is my utmost wish, 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.

26. We should be putting in place **the best Monitoring and Evaluation mechanism**, so as to track the delivery and progress of the MERRP.
27. The hopes and aspirations of the people of Mpumalanga – *the Place of the Rising Sun* – are squarely on our shoulders, and we must do everything possible to ensure the success of the MERRP.
28. Programme Facilitator; I am convinced, and have no iota of doubt in my mind, that working together in a collaborative effort, we will turn the tide and get our economy back on track. Thus, I appeal that we adequately contribute constructively in this Roundtable Discussion.
29. Be rest assured that we take your inputs very seriously; we value them; hence they will all be considered for inclusion in the final document. This is our collective Plan.
30. As I indicated earlier, today's engagement is the last and final of the three (3) district consultations we had planned, which will essentially pave the way for the adoption and launch of the economic recovery blueprint by our Premier.

31. Thank you in advance, for your valuable contribution, to this life-changing document. After today, our economy will never be same again.
32. I wish you nothing but thought-provoking deliberations.
33. ***Let's continue to grow the economy of Mpumalanga together!***

I thank you!