

DEBATE BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, Ms. MC MASILELA, ON THE OCCASION OF A DEBATE ON 'THE REALITY OF POVERTY AFFECTING THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE IN MPUMALANGA' HELD AT THE LEGISLATURE CHAMBER, RIVERSIDE PARK, CITY OF MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Tuesday, 19 November 2024

San'bonani!

1. Honourable Speaker; thank you very much for affording me this opportunity.
2. As protocol has already been established, let me now also join the Debate in earnest.
3. Honourable Members; we all agree that **poverty is the cancer that continues to ravage our communities**, especially the black community.
4. However, it is not only poverty that is giving us sleepless nights in this Province and the country in general; it has its other two cousins; namely, **inequality and unemployment** – making them the **infamous triple challenges** which are on everyone's lips.
5. **The three are unfortunately inseparable**; you can't deal with one of them and leave the other two out of the equation. When poverty creeps in, inequality and unemployment relentlessly follow suit.

6. And although we all know the roots of these challenges, that being the **apartheid era when the economy was deliberately structured as non-inclusive**, I will, however, not dwell much on that.
7. I am avoiding to be chastised by some amongst us, who are always hurt by the truth. They often hide behind the fact that we took over government from their forebearers, a mere 30 years ago, **when the impact of their forebearers' actions was by then, rooted in the economy for over a century**. And now they want us to turn things around overnight.
8. I must, however, indicate that credible statistics reports indicate that **poverty is still much rife in the former homelands**, which includes our Province.
9. Mpumalanga remains largely rural, with the majority of its people residing in rural areas. Rural villages are extremely deprived, with high rates of unemployment and poverty, and very limited access to basic services.
10. Madam Speaker; we are, nonetheless, not cowards; our liberators have in the past faced the barrel of the gun of the oppressor, and likewise, **we have and will continue to face the ugly face of poverty, and take it head-on!**
11. According to the National Treasury, there are **eight-hundred and seventy-seven-thousand poor households in Mpumalanga**, which is more than 60% of the number of households in the Province.

12. As the caring ANC-led government, we have, since taking over government in 1994, been on an **unwavering crusade to eradicate poverty**.
13. And despite popular believe, we have undoubtedly made significant strides, in this regard. In xiTsonga, there is a saying that '***Mintirho ya hina yi tivulavulela***', which translates to 'Our work speaks for itself'!
14. Government is playing a crucial role in assisting the poor by fighting poverty. Accordingly, we are **providing social grants to just over 1, 6 million people** in our Province, and almost 75% of which are child support grants.
15. We, however, **all agree that we need to do more**, as alleviating poverty through grants is only a short to medium term intervention.
16. Our Province's **unemployment rate of 36.2% on average, and particularly the 50% youth unemployment rate**, which is propelled by the stagnant economy, is indeed a worrisome factor.
17. And according to the National Income Dynamics Study, we can, **through education and training, make more individuals more employable** and get higher levels of education which will result in better paying jobs for them.
18. This will impact positively on fighting poverty in the long term, as an educated workforce becomes more productive.

19. ***And how do we collectively intervene to eradicate poverty in our Province?***

20. Madam Speaker; there is no simple solution to eradicate poverty in the absence of accelerated and inclusive economic growth, as well as job creation.

21. Our solutions must, therefore, **strive to address Priority 1 which deals with ‘Inclusive growth and job creation’ and Priority 2 which enjoins us to ‘Reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living’**, as articulated in the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP).

22. **We commit to:**

- Invest in people through education and skills development by providing quality and relevant education and training in line with the needs of the economy;
- Accelerate and growth an inclusive economy, as well as create jobs on a large scale;
- Continue to provide a social safety net in the form of grants, and stimulus programmes, such as Presidential Stimulus Programme and the EPWP; and
- Tackle the high cost of living.

23. In doing so, the Provincial Government has, accordingly, developed various strategies and plans to drive accelerated inclusive economic growth and job creation which would be anticipated to eliminate poverty in the Province.

24. Plans and strategies worth noting, amongst others, are the **Mpumalanga Economic Growth and Development Path, the SMME Strategy, the Tourism and Development Plan, the Industrial Development Plan, the Trade and Investment Strategy, the Spatial Development Framework, the Infrastructure Master Plan, and the catalytic projects mentioned in the Mpumalanga Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (MERRP).**
25. Our priority interventions cover the **agricultural sector, agro-processing, tourism and strengthening support to SMMEs,** amongst others.
26. Through the Mpumalanga Industrial Development Plan, we aim to **develop an integrated and diversified industrial base** by leveraging on existing industrial centres of competence, including mining, agriculture and forestry, agro-processing, metals manufacturing and petrochemicals.
27. In tourism, we aim to create more jobs through:
- Tourism related infrastructure improvement at our Provincial Nature Reserves and road infrastructure development and improvement;
 - Tourism products and routes development;
 - Marketing and promotion of the Province through events and tourism tradeshow;
 - The development and support of tourism SMMEs;
 - The prioritisation of tourism safety and security; and

- The prioritisation of Township and Rural Tourism initiatives.
28. Some of the key prioritised tourism infrastructure projects, which will surely create jobs for our people, are the **God's Window Skywalk Project and the Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains World Heritage Site** that is expected to create over 5000 new jobs over a period of 20 years.
29. We are **strengthening support to SMMEs and harnessing skills** through the Social Enterprise Development Programme; the Food Nutrition Programme; the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP); the Siyatentela Roads Maintenance Programme; the National Youth Service; paving of township and municipal roads; the Emerging Contractor Development Programme; the Incubation Skills Development Programmes such as the FurnTech, the Mpumalanga Stainless Steel Incubator, and the Fortune 40 for younger farmers.
30. Madam Speaker; if I had more time, I would not stop there. As the capable ANC-led government, we have more interventions than the ones I have mentioned. Unfortunately, I am restricted by the time allocated.
31. All these strategic interventions and many others, our government have come up with, **require collaboration with the private sector**. Job creation is our elephant to tackle together; without collaboration, it would take government a very long time to deal with the **stubborn triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality** in our Province.

32. Accordingly, we will **continue to strengthen our partnership arrangements with the private sector**, as valuable stakeholder.
33. ***Leave No One Behind***, as we ***Grow Mpumalanga Together*** through poverty eradication!

Ngiyabonga!