

Little growth forecast for Eastern Cape

CARA-LEE DORFLING

THE Eastern Cape Province's economy is not what it should be and the unemployment rate remains high.

This was acknowledged by Eastern Cape Premier Phumulo Masualle in his State of the Province Address in Bhisho on Friday.

Masualle also announced that only 1,7% economic growth was forecasted for the year.

Despite this, Masualle emphasised the development of housing and education systems, as well as the upgrading of the province's road network.

He said that although the high unemployment rate was a huge concern, the province succeeded in creating more than 508 000 job opportunities in the past four years through its extensive public works programme.

With regards to human settlements, Masualle said they had moved away from a time of underspending.

Since the 2014-'15 financial year, up until the third term of 2017-'18, a total of 47 453 low-cost housing units were built. A further 8 870 will be built in the coming financial year.

In conjunction with SANRAL, roadworks and upgrades to the tune of R7 billion were undertaken in the province.

A further R5 billion was budgeted for projects in the next four years.

Special focus was given to the N2 at Qumbu, Mthatha, Butterworth and Mount Frere.

As far as education was concerned, Masualle said he was proud of the matric class of 2017 and he was satisfied with the pass rate of 65%, compared to the 59,3% of the previous year.

He said the province would focus on the Development of Education in mathematics and science.

Professors from Cuba would be brought in to assist with the two so-called problem subjects.

Digital transformation in the Education Department would also receive attention.

According to Masualle, there was evidence that the province was winning the fight against tuberculosis (TB).

He said in 2014, a total of 697 cases per 100 000 people was reported.

In 2017, this figure has dropped to 571 per 100 000 people.

New initiatives will be launched for earlier detection and treatment of TB.

A total of 11 medical facilities in the province has been prioritised for upgrade work.

Masualle thanked the national government for making national resources available to combat the drought.

In reaction to Masualle's address, Bobby Stevenson, leader of the DA in the Eastern Cape,



Phumulo Masualle, Eastern Cape premier, and Lieutenant General Liziwe Ntshinga, provincial police commissioner, before he delivered the State of the Province Address in Bhisho.

said the Premier's State of the Province Address "lacked heart, soul and substance".

"It failed to ignite the flame necessary to bring about total change. Whatever the Premier had to say was overshadowed by two events.

"First, the impending ANC reshuffle: we were listening to a dead man walking.

"Second, the national budget has completely taken the wind out of the Premier's sails.

"There have been reductions in the school infrastructure grant and the human settlements grant.

"This means that in our province, where there are thousands of schools without running water or electricity, decent ablution facilities and mud structure schools, learners are going to continue to suffer," said Stevenson.

"The provincial equitable share is only scheduled to increase by about 5%. This means that we are going to go backwards as far as service delivery is concerned because the increase in benefits to civil servants will surely be more than that.

"What we need in this province is not patch-fixing but instead, total change that will bring

real freedom and opportunity to the people of the Eastern Cape," said Stevenson.

Bishop Lievie Sharpley, Cope leader in the legislature, said Masualle should be praised for the work and progress in the province, but that his address was almost a repeat of previous years' addresses.

"It is difficult to get excited if there is nothing new. Everyday we read about tyres being burnt in protest against poor service delivery. This is the community's way of saying they are not satisfied. It doesn't help if there are wonderful plans but no action," said Sharpley.

Sharpley felt Masualle could have expanded on his plans for better safety and policing, especially in the rural areas.

"Another problem in the rural areas is the shortage of medical infrastructure and staff," said Sharpley.

"Seventy percent of the province's population stay in the rural areas. There are clinics that are called the Panado clinics because Panado is prescribed for every illness and pain – that's if they have it in stock. The shortage in stock of chronic medication, as well as in doctors and trained medical staff, should receive urgent at-

tention," said Sharpley.

Max Mhlathi, UDM leader in the legislature, shared Sharpley's views on competent medical staff.

"If the province focussed on appointing trained medical staff, the number of legal cases against the department, which currently claims a big portion of the budget, will be reduced."

Mhlathi said it was clear to him that Masualle's watered-down speech was due to instability in the ANC.

He said Masualle should not be satisfied with the 2017 matric pass rate since the province again fared the worst in the country.

"I want to know more about what is being done than just that professors from Cuba are being asked to help to teach our learners maths and science."

Mhlathi said Masualle also neglected to give plans that would encourage the community to get involved in the agricultural sector.

"Too many people in the country depend on government grants. They should rather start projects which will help the community to use the land for food and job creation."