

# Job creation top priority

## *Plight of the youth highlighted in SOPA*

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JOB creation and poverty eradication were at the centre of Mpumalanga Premier Refilwe Mtshweni's State of the Province Address (SOPA) which she delivered at the provincial legislature in Nelspruit on Friday.

Mtshweni promised that the government would work around the clock to create more jobs.

She said Mpumalanga's high youth unemployment rate of 43.5% called for more innovative and collaborative partnership with the social and private

sectors to craft a strategy that would be more responsive to skills development, unemployment and economic growth.

"The province has an average target of 26 837 jobs per annum and achieved almost 40%. The highest job creation was recorded in finance and utility industries, with 32 264 and 22 321 jobs created respectively. However, we have recorded job losses in the mining and construction sectors during the same period," said Mtshweni.

She said the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) have created more than 346 000 job opportunities and over 142 000 full-time equivalents, which

translated into an overall figure of 488 000 employment opportunities. Of those, 328 876 were allocated to women, 292 803 to the youth and 8 872 to people with disabilities.

The agricultural sector also played a vital role in job creation and poverty eradication, she added.

"With the challenges of youth unemployment and an ageing agricultural sector in the province, the provincial government shifted the focus towards developing young farmer entrepreneurs to actively participate in the sector. Special focus has been placed on incubating some of the youth through the Mpumalanga

Young Farmer Incubation Programme commonly known as Fortune 40.

"Through this programme, 210 youth have been incubated and have acquired among others both the accredited and non-accredited agricultural and business development certifications."

Mtshweni said 24 farms under the management of the youth were in full production of vegetables and livestock, adding that training of farmers on agricultural skills continued to be the key driver for the intervention.

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