

# STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS (SOPA) IN MPUMALANGA



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**NELSPRUIT**– On February 22, 2019 Premier Refilwe Maria Mtshweni ascended the stage to address the State of the Province for the first time as the female premier in Mpumalanga Province. Mtshweni is currently serving as the 5th Premier of Mpumalanga since 20 March 2018. She succeeded former Premier David Mabuza after he was appointed Deputy President of South Africa.

“This is my maiden SOPA speech and it marks the end of our term as the fifth democratically elected government since 1994,” Mtshweni said. Her major focus was the economy growth wherein unemployment is at an alarming rate countrywide. However the provincial economy was resilient against all odds hence the mining sector decrease in terms of their production and employment. “What this means is that because of our robust performance by

some of our industries, Mpumalanga was spared of a technical recession,” said Mtshweni.

Unemployment has increased from 26.6% from 2014 to 32% in 2018. In her speech, she denoted the fact the province had recorded net job creation of 107 350 between 2014 and 2018. Through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) 488 000 employment opportunities were created. However the general

public is not sure in terms of comparing the stated figures and the practical metaphysical tangible jobs. The reality is that there is no employment and people rely on social grants which do not cover family basic needs. With regard to education sector, there is an increased of young people attending a TVET colleges to 40 000 annually.

The enrolment figures at TVET colleges have doubled in the last five years, “To address skills shortages from our youth we have customized the National Skills Development strategy and forged informed partnership with the private sector,” said Mtshweni. About 232 students enrolled in Cuba and 281 in Russia in order to increase the number of graduates in scarce field like medicine, veterinary science, information Technology, Aviation, Mathematics, science and Engineering. Establishment of University of Mpumalanga provides a closer door for access to higher education for the youth. Mtshweni said in the current term, special focus has been placed on incubating some of the youth through the Mpuma-

langa Young Former Incubation Programme commonly known as fortune 40, 210 youth have been incubated and have acquired amongst other both the accredited and non-accredited agricultural and business development certifications Mtshweni added.

The premier said 24 farms under management of these youth are in full production of vegetable and livestock production. The biggest challenge is that farmers face is high rate of tractor and implements breakage and they are planning to initiate an in-house tractor servicing programme to provide tractor service and repairs.

The Mpumalanga Premier said they are pleased to report that the construction of the Mpumalanga international fresh Produce market is gaining momentum. They have anticipated that the project will be completed in the second quarter of 2021.

According to the opposition parties they regard the speech as the report back in terms of achievement yet there’s lot ahead.