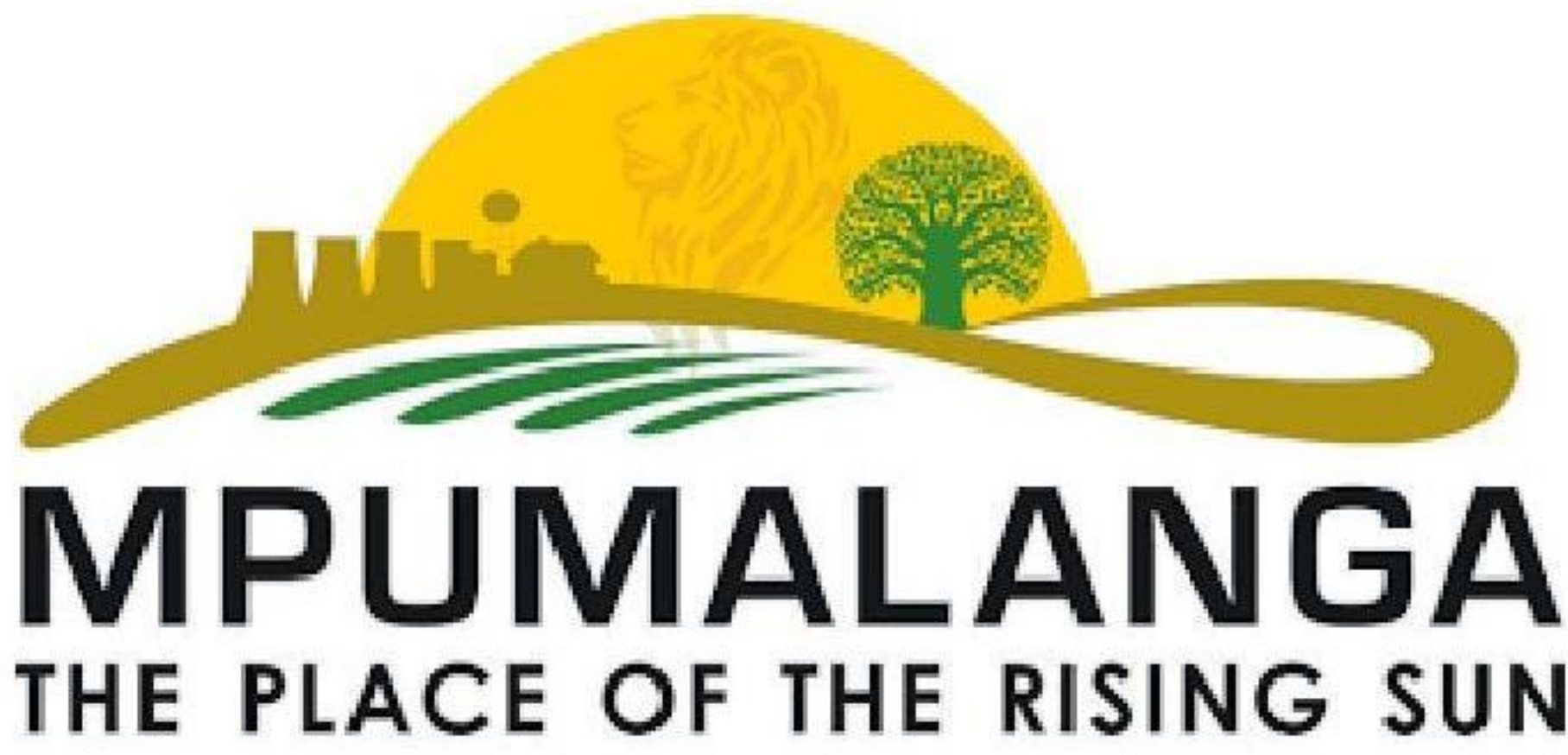




SOPA 2021



Focus on Covid-19-hit tourism industry

With Mpumalanga regarded as one of the country’s best-loved tourist attraction areas, Premier Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane announced plans to help rebuild this industry.

“The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered an unprecedented crisis in the tourism sector. The industry has been hit hard by the pandemic. Predictions indicate that the shock could translate to an 80 per cent

decline in international tourism sector.

“A significantly high number of jobs have been shed by this industry and until such time that the global vaccination campaign has reached almost every corner of the world, this industry will continue to experience difficulties.

“To cushion the burden and assist small and emerging businesses, government has launched the R1, 2 billion Tourism Equity

Fund aimed at improving the participation of black entrepreneurs in this sector,” she announced.

She said the fund will boost black players in the industry in the next three years through grant or debt funding for companies owned largely by black women and disabled entrepreneurs.

“In the recent budget adjustment, the province has made available R20 million to

help mitigate the effects of the pandemic on this sector. As part of our plans to revive the tourism industry and attract more tourists, we will put more impetus in the public private sector partnership to develop God’s Window Skywalk Project, the Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains World Heritage Site and the Railway Heritage Tourism projects,” said Mtshweni-Tsipane.

Big boost for province’s youth

“One of our most important commitments undertaken in the last State of the Province Address was the launching and operationalisation of the youth development fund.

“We budgeted R50 million for the first phase of this programme. We called for the expression of interest from the young people of Mpumalanga. Thousands of them responded positively.

“This multiyear programme invites numerous youth-owned SMMEs to submit proposals outlining the growth and funding needs of their businesses. These enterprises are then provided with training and funding to grow the operational footprint.

“We have heard the cries of the youth and as a result, we will open the application process for more youth-owned businesses to submit their proposals. We urge our young people to continue to grab this opportunity with both hands,” appealed Mtshweni-Tsipane.

She said channelling support through existing public employment programmes such as EPWP, Sakh’abakhi, Siyatentela and National Youth Service, will allow for a more rapid response to the current economic crisis.

“As a province, we have created 19 649 jobs through the Expanded Public Works Programme. The main beneficiary of these opportunities were 12 254 women, 9 239 young people and 159 people with disabilities,” she said.

R1,3 billion needed to fix damage

The province will need an estimated R1,3 billion to fix the damage caused by the recent heavy rainfall.

This was announced by Premier Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane during her State of the Province Address (SOPA) on Friday.

The recent floods which caused havoc in most parts of the province have forced government not only to declare a state of disaster, but also to divert funds previously allocated for other service delivery purposes towards fixing the damage caused.

Local municipalities such as Nkomazi, Mbombela and Bushbuckridge were the hardest hit and will require more attention as roads and bridges infrastructure were severely damaged and destroyed.

“During the SOPA last year, we made a number of commitments and promises to the people of this beautiful province. These commitments were clearly defined, adequately budgeted for and implementation plans had been well prepared. The sudden emergence and rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic forced us to change our plans, resources were redirected to urgent and pressing issues aimed at curbing the spread of the pandemic. Every national department, provincial department and our municipalities were asked to reprioritise and focus on Covid-19 response measures,” said Mtshweni-Tsipane.

“The situation in our province has been exacerbated by the recent floods which destroyed roads and bridges, schools and clinics and blew away homes of the most vulnerable members of



our society.

“Once more, we have been compelled by forces beyond our control to divert budgeted resources and deal with this additional state of disaster.

“I have directed the Department of Public Works Roads and Transport to evaluate the extent of flood damage to the infrastructure. Preliminary assessments indicate an estimated amount of R1,3 billion will be required to commence with the reconstruction and repairs to the damaged infrastructure,” announced Mtshweni-Tsipane.

“Roads and bridges are like the arteries of our transport network, without which the economy

cannot function.

“For us to restore and rebuild our infrastructure, create much-needed jobs for our people and set this economy on a path of growth, we are committing ourselves to build and reconstruct within the next 12 to 24 months. All major provincial roads, bridges and buildings that were affected by the recent floods will be given much-needed attention. “We will support municipalities and rebuild their road networks and bridges that were destroyed during the floods, and assist the most vulnerable members of our society whose homes were destroyed by the floods,” committed Mtshweni-Tsipane.

People's Voices

Themba Nkosi, Tekwane South: “I believe government is on the right track now. We must give credit where it is due and we applaud government for moving with speed in addressing the damage caused by the floods. We only hope that the bridges and roads, especially within Mbombela, will be quickly fixed so we can move on with our lives as we know it.”

Sister Mashele, Tonga, Nkomazi: “I am only happy that the premier made a special mention of this disaster and announced plans to repair the damages caused by the floods. My wish is for people on the ground to stop interfering with the processes to have the roads and bridges fixed, because this will only cause delays in repairing what was damaged.”

William Mokoena, KaNyamazane: “We appreciate that Government is paying special attention to this problem. And as young people, we would like to be given first preference and be considered for business opportunities when fixing the roads and bridges. It would also be fair for government to consider local businesses for business opportunities rather than outsourcing the work from people outside our areas.”