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INFRASTRUCTURE

R84 million-hospital project in Nkonjeni unveiled

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THE KwaZulu-Natal Department of Public Works and Infrastructure has unveiled its plans to construct a state-of-the-art hospital in Nkonjeni, Zululand, which is expected to cost R84 million.

This initiative marks an important milestone for the department, as the entity was able to recently settle outstanding debts of nearly R1 billion it had with contractors.

Being freed from the shackles of the debt has enabled the department to renew its focus on infrastructure development in the region, which includes the Nkonjeni hospital project. Spokesperson for the department, Steve Bhengu, in sharing details about the project, said that the newly refurbished facility will include upgrades to the maternity complex, mothers' lodge, and support services.

Designed to serve rural communities, the hospital will be a 207-bed facility, with 16 residential clinics that will extend healthcare access to those in need.

"This investment will vastly improve healthcare delivery in the Zululand district," Bhengu explained. "By addressing previous debts, we've effectively created a healthier financial environment, enabling us to prioritise important projects like this hospital."

The accumulated debt reached nearly R900 million at one point, prompting the need for financial reform to turn things around. Bhengu elaborated on the proactive steps taken by the department to resolve their debt issues, which included consultations with the Provincial Treasury to earmark funds and ensure that resources

were not depleted before project completion.

Another aspect of tightening their financial act was the 'Contractors Imbizo' staged by the department, which was a road show aimed at discussing the obstacles faced by KZN Public Works and Infrastructure and its impact on contractors. Bhengu said the initiative was essential in building rapport and trust with stakeholders.

The turnaround strategy and implementation were driven by the department's executive management, under the leadership of MEC Martin Meyer. "The role contractors play in our operations cannot be overlooked," said MEC Meyer.

"They are equal partners in our success, and their stability is crucial for the functioning of the department," said Meyers, in alluding to the fact that paying contractors in a timely manner helped with the buoyancy of their businesses, paying staff, and helping them to remain competitive.

He also applauded contractors who owed the department for contributing positively towards the reform initiatives. Meyer spoke glowingly about his department receiving an unqualified audit from the Auditor General last month, with only one finding which related to late contractor payments.

"It was the first time in a decade that the department had realised such a favourable audit finding. Going forward, KZN Public Works and Infrastructure remains committed to intensifying relationships with contractors as key stakeholders while continuing to ensure that every cent is accounted for and goes towards building their communities better," Meyer said.

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