tourism
Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

NATIONAL EMPOWERMENT FUND
Growing Black Economic Participation

MEDIA STATEMENT

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FROM SKINCARE SCIENCE TO SPA OWNERSHIP: BLACK WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR MAKES HER MARK AT ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

NEF and Department of Tourism investment supports 36 employment opportunities in the Eastern Cape

Johannesburg – Visitors to Addo Elephant National Park, best known for its wildlife and natural beauty, now have another reason to visit. The Epitome Spa & Wellness Centre has introduced a new wellness experience to the destination, while supporting employment and expanding black business participation in the tourism industry.

Behind the enterprise is Ms Lucia Ratshivhadelo, who has transformed years of academic study and professional training into a business operating within one of South Africa's leading tourism destinations.

The 100% black woman- and youth-owned spa has supported 36 employment opportunities, comprising 20 temporary jobs during construction and 16 positions associated with its daily operations.

The business received financial support from the National Empowerment Fund (NEF) and the Department of Tourism through the Tourism Transformation Fund (TTF), enabling the development of the facility, which opened to the public earlier this year.

Opening new doors in tourism
The Deputy Minister of Tourism, Maggie Sotyu said the development illustrates the importance of ensuring that tourism growth creates opportunities for South Africans.

"Behind every tourism business are people whose lives can change through access to work. The Epitome Spa & Wellness Centre demonstrates how supporting black women and young entrepreneurs can open doors to employment while creating new experiences for visitors.

"Our partnership with the NEF is about ensuring that transformation delivers meaningful results. We want to see more South Africans owning businesses, developing their skills and benefiting from the opportunities within the tourism economy. Investments such as this one show how we can build a more inclusive industry while supporting livelihoods," said Deputy Minister Sotyu.

The Tourism Transformation Fund supports black-owned enterprises seeking to establish and grow businesses in the tourism sector, including specialised services such as wellness, leisure and hospitality.

NEF Chief Executive Officer Mr Mziwabantu Dayimani said the investment reflects the importance of converting professional expertise into productive business ownership.

"South Africa has talented and capable people with the knowledge to build successful businesses. But having expertise and entrepreneurial ambition does not always translate into ownership, particularly when access to capital remains a barrier.

"Ms Ratshivhadelo's journey shows what becomes possible when that barrier is addressed. She has built an enterprise around her professional skills, creating a commercial opportunity that extends beyond her individual success.

"Development finance must achieve more than funding transactions. Its value lies in enabling sustainable enterprises, supporting livelihoods and creating opportunities for broader participation in the economy," said Mr Dayimani.

From specialist to entrepreneur
Ms Ratshivhadelo's journey began with a National Diploma in Somatology from Tshwane University of Technology in 2015, followed by a Baccalaureus Technologiae in Pharmaceutical Science in 2016.

She further developed her expertise through specialised training in skincare, body treatments, aromatherapy, beauty technology and professional product applications.

In 2024, she established The Epitome (Pty) Ltd, drawing on her scientific knowledge and industry experience to pursue her ambition of owning a professional wellness business.

"My interest has always extended beyond beauty to understanding the science behind effective treatments. Education and practical experience gave me the foundation to pursue my dream of establishing a business that combines professional wellness services with an exceptional guest experience.

"Seeing The Epitome Spa & Wellness Centre become a reality is deeply meaningful, particularly because it has created employment opportunities for others. I want our employees to have opportunities to develop their skills and grow professionally. I also hope my journey encourages other young women to believe in their abilities and pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions," said Ms Ratshivhadelo.

The Epitome Spa & Wellness Centre adds to the range of visitor experiences at Addo Elephant National Park while demonstrating how emerging entrepreneurs can establish a presence in specialised tourism markets.

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