

Address by Deputy Minister of Tourism, Fish Mahlalela to SMME Stakeholder Engagement in Skukuza, Kruger National Park

18 March 2022

Tourism is a priceless resource and a significant instrument of social cohesion and a unifier on the African continent. It is so much more than generating revenue. It is the golden thread that weaves and knits together the fabric of our African society. Indeed, it resonates with the very essence of Ubuntu and the spirit of Africa.

Tourism brings people together.

There is a clear indication in current research that the travel trends and patterns for tourists, globally, particularly post-COVID-19 is linked with outdoor, adventure and ecotourism activities and product offerings. Therefore, this Maintenance Programme is an investment to the growth of a very lucrative and attractive market (domestic, regional and international) and having recreational facilities accessible to locals, ensuring that South Africa remain globally competitive.

This Maintenance Programme furthermore improves the aesthetic value of the State-Owned attractions, enhance visitor experience and provide a sense of place and pride for the local communities who are conducting maintenance work at the respective sites.

The jewel in our crown, The Kruger National Park is a major tourism attraction and it is important that we sustain our core tourism infrastructure supply through this maintenance programme to unlock the investment opportunity within and in surrounding areas of the national park.

The Department of Environment Fisheries and Forestry has the core mandate to preserve and protect our natural resources conservation, whereas the Department of Tourism respond to the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan by strengthening the supply-side through resource mobilisation and investment facilitation.

The Department of Tourism has provided funding support (R120m) for the maintenance programme in SANParks properties and tourist attractions of which R110 million were transferred. Contractors were appointed in the various parks and at some of the parks, work commenced from October 2019.

The SANParks Maintenance Programme is an initiative adopted at Presidential Jobs Summit in October 2018 with the primary objective to improve and ensure proper maintenance of National Park Assets for destination enhancement, job creation and SMME development.

SANParks has submitted both business and implementation plans to roll out the maintenance programme in 19 National Parks: Addo Elephant, Agulhas, Augrabies, Bontebok, Camdeboo, Golden Gate Highlands, Kgalagadi Transfrontier, Karoo, Knysna, Kruger, Mapungubwe, Marakele, Mountain Zebra, Namaqua, Richtersveld, Table Mountain, Tankwa Karoo, Tsitsikamma, West Coast, Wilderness.

The strategic importance and alignment to the National Tourism Sector Strategy speaks to enhancing the Visitor Experience and unlocking the potential of tourism and economic development through working with World Heritage Sites, National Heritage Sites, National and Provincial Parks. To give expression to the Tourism Recovery Plan, we will deploy an enhanced Tourism Supply Support Package to protect tourism assets and core infrastructure and support re-opening as well as to preserve tourism supply through enhancement of tourism assets and core infrastructure of the state to prepare the sector for a gradual and careful re-opening.

The implementation of the programme was faced with a number of challenges due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, but the programme management ensured that all maintenance teams adhered to COVID-19 safety regulations and provide the participants will all mandatory COVID-19 PPEs.

- For the entire programme, nationwide, participants exited the project and were replaced and the employment figures of the programme, to date are:

- o No of SMME's: 60
- o The EPWP labour force to date consists of: 821
- o Women: 305
- o Youth: 480
- o People with Disabilities: 24

Infrastructure Maintenance Programme in the Kruger National Park

- The Kruger National Park is situated within and/or adjacent to the following:
 - o 2 x Provinces
 - o 3 x district, and
 - o 9 x local authority boundaries.
- High levels of unemployment and poverty in many communities located along the park boundary with Limpopo Province: 38.2% and Mpumalanga Province: 39.4% (Recent Statistics in 2017).
- The labour statistics for this programme in the Kruger National Park is as follows:
 - o SMMEs – 38
 - o Payments to SMMEs to date- R 29,490,493.81
 - o Participants employed – 418
 - o Number of women – 162
 - o Number of Youth – 264
 - o Number of People with Disabilities- 10
- Employment from 92 villages/communities and SMMEs dedicated to most of the rest camps in the park with the following teams:
 - o 15 x General Maintenance
 - o 5 x Thatching teams
 - o 5 x Roads teams
 - o 7 x Fencing teams
 - o 2 x Carpentry teams
 - o 2 x Electrical teams
 - o 2 x Welding teams

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation has declared the year 2021-2022 as a year of inclusive growth. Inclusive growth, to our sector, means reassessing what we have and improving upon it, not for the betterment of tourism only, but for the betterment of all Africans. This also means that we have the opportunity to build self-reliant economies.

Due to its crosscutting economic nature and deep social footprint, tourism is uniquely positioned to help society and affected communities return to growth and stability. For this to happen, local economic development and tourism enterprise support and recovery strategies need to be included in the wider recovery plans and actions of affected economic sectors.

SMMEs are the backbone of the tourism economy. Township and rural economies are made up of small and medium sized businesses that are vital to the development of our tourist economy. SMMEs can aid in the sector's return to pre-COVID performance levels and its long-term sustainable growth trajectory that fully realises Africa's vast and diverse tourism potential.

I thank you.