



REMARKS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM, MR FISH MAHLALELA AT THE AIRBNB GRADUATION CEREMONY IN WATERBERG ON 01 DECEMBER 2022

Programme Director

Clr Mataboge – District Executive Mayor

Katchie Nzama – Inspirational Speaker

Ms Velma Corcoran – Airbnb Regional Leader

Esteemed Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me express my deepest appreciation for the invite and also the privilege of addressing you today.

It is indeed a profound feeling to being part of this auspicious event as we continue to celebrate outstanding performance especially from dedicated and determined women and men who pursue excellence in their life time.

This is an important milestone in a partnership between Airbnb and the Waterberg District Municipality to build inclusive tourism, the biodiversity economy and support the just transition within the framework of the District Development Model.

The event is an opportunity to celebrate the graduates and to understand what is possible when the public and private sector work together through innovative strategic partnerships. Partnerships that can make tourism truly sustainable, domestic, diverse and inclusive.

We hope that the audience will walk away inspired and they will come together to address barriers to tourism and contribute to inclusive economic growth.

The Waterberg Municipality sits in an arrestingly beautiful region of our country, it was declared a world heritage site by UNESCO due to its biodiversity. While tourism is one of the region's key industries, its benefits are not distributed evenly. The partnership between Airbnb and the District Municipality is designed to address this imbalance.

Under this partnership, Airbnb has committed to the following

- Skills Development: Training participants from underserved rural and township communities to list their homes and experiences on the platform through the Airbnb Entrepreneurship Academy
- Digital Connectivity: Providing each graduate with free Wi-Fi and digital connectivity.
- Destination Promotion: Driving a digital destination marketing campaign to bring more visitors to the region.

The Municipality, for its part, its contribution has been invaluable in helping Airbnb align with the strategic goals of the District Development Model. They have helped to identify potential tourism entrepreneurs that could benefit from the programme, provided logistical support, and advised on potential partners.

As a result of this collaboration, Airbnb has, together with locally embedded partners, rolled out two Academy Bootcamps in which 51 participants were trained. About 40 of these participants are graduating today and will leave here with free Wi-Fi hotspots and data for them and their communities to use.

Airbnb was born in 2007 when two Hosts welcomed three guests to their San Francisco home, and has since grown to over 4 million Hosts who have welcomed more than 1 billion guest arrivals in almost every country across the globe. Every day, Hosts offer unique stays and experiences that make it possible for guests to connect with communities in a more authentic way.

The promise of Airbnb is that it can create economic opportunities for anyone. The barriers to entry are low: anybody with a space or a passion can create a listing. The reality, however, is that the playing field is not level. Especially in a country like South Africa, people living in rural and township areas face additional barriers.

These include connectivity and data, infrastructure, confidence with technology, the belief and understanding that you have something to offer that tourists want, and knowledge that you can list a Home or an Experience on the Airbnb platform.

In 2021, Airbnb made a commitment to drive economic growth through inclusive tourism in South Africa and help overcome some of these barriers. Central to that commitment was expanding the Entrepreneurship Academy, a skills development programme targeted at women and youth in township and rural communities.

The Academy is a partner-led programme consisting of a series of modules and milestones to be met that help participants create successful listings.

The Academy spreads the benefits of tourism not only for the graduates, but their communities, too. One of the Academy's most successful participants, runs a [stay](#) at her home on the border of the Hluhluwe Umfolozi Park.

The guests indeed love her cooking and they visit the village and learn from the local basket weavers. When COVID-19 hit, another Airbnb host who ran a popular tour of Soweto. Her phone wouldn't stop ringing - people in her community wanted to know why the people didn't come by their stores anymore for a koeksister or to have drinks in the tavern.

There is no doubt that the participants of this graduation will have similar success. Already, one can spend an evening eating delicious traditional food and hearing the story of how a graduate turned a former dump site into a safe space for children to play, a place for local musicians to play, and for everyone to enjoy a special meal.

One can also go hiking with a conservation expert who combines his traditional and western scientific knowledge to give you a rich experience of the South African bushveld - from its tiny creatures to the endangered wild dogs and vultures.

Another graduate in Bela Bela will put you up in her stylish home in which each of her rooms are named after popular South African politicians to hail from Limpopo.

Our hope is that others will be inspired by these graduates and by the impact partnerships like this can have on creating a more inclusive tourism economy in South Africa. We know that visitors (whether local or international) want authentic experiences that are both unique and sustainable.

Partnerships that can result in what we are seeing, show that when the private and public sectors work together, not only is a more inclusive tourism landscape possible, but South Africa's tourism offering becomes that much richer.

Let me express my words of gratitude to all those who will be certificated today and wish them well for their future endeavors.

Also, for this partnership to grow in leaps and bounds.

I thank you all