



tourism

Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

REMARKS BY MR FISH MAHLALELA, DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM DURING THE TOURISM IMBIZO IN NKOMAZI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

16 NOVEMBER 2023

Programme Director – MEC Nompumelelo Hlophe
Ms Refiloe Mtsweni – Premier Mpumalanga Province
Mr Mcebisi Skwatsha – Deputy Minister Rural Development and Land Reform
Ms Busi Shiba - MEC Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs
Cllr Phindile Magagula – Executive Mayor Nkomazi local Municipality
Councillors in our midst
Dr NP Mahlalela – Municipal Manager Ehlanzeni District
All Executives of Government Institutions in our midst
Ubukhosi bonke
Mphakathi wonke

We all gathered here to engage in a dialogue of empowerment specifically for women and youth on available programmes and opportunity in government across the tourism value chain.

This is a communication platform that enables you, to have a meaningful and direct engagement with us, as your public representatives.

Our country is faced with a huge challenge of high rates of unemployment particularly for our youth. Stats SA estimates that 34,5% of youth are unemployed, more painfully this figure includes also our graduates.

While women continue to carry the brunt of exclusion from mainstream economic activities and local economic empowerment in this democratic administration.

We therefore, chose to prioritize both women and youth, because we believe that tourism sector remains a key driver of our country's national economy and immensely contributes to economic growth and job creation.

A number of programmes and institutions will detail what assistance they provide and how to access those benefits, this includes our sister departments, district municipalities and local government

This part of our Province is strategically located from the tourism's point of view. In fact, there are very few local municipalities within our Republic that share border posts with two countries, in this case Eswatini and Mozambique.

International tourists would like to take that advantage as it gives them prospects of visiting more than one country at the time.

Tourists can visit Mozambique, South Africa and Eswatini and book accommodation in Piggs Peak in Eswatini and then visit Matsamo Cultural Village or any other attraction here, then do some shopping in Malelane after that see the Big Five at the Kruger National Park and then go to Maputo.

However, the reason for existence as a sector in general is to ensure that when tourists visit our villages, townships, towns, and municipalities stay longer and spend more of their hard-earned money.

We are also interested that they also come back. Therefore, the question we should be asking is whether we have done enough to capture the value from the movement of tourists within our borders – have we done enough in ensuring that those tourists with the means are able to spend at least two days in Eswatini, four days in the Nkomazi District Municipality and then another two days in Maputo.

Therefore, our municipalities, provincial and national government should always be bothered by the domestic and international needs of our visitors.

Most tour operators will bring more groups to South Africa; however, the focus is mainly in Gauteng and Cape Town as well as Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and Zambia. There is nothing that stops such an operator from selling a package that includes Eswatini, South Africa (Nkomazi Local Municipality) and Mozambique.

Most tourists do not just want to visit the major attractions such as Kruger but want these to be blended with other experiences within the African Diaspora market on cultural sites such as the Matsamo Cultural Village, Samora Machel Monument, the golfing experience, the casino experience in Piggs Peak and Emnotweni in Mbombela.

As indicated earlier, these insights assist us in ensuring that the infrastructure such as telecommunications, roads, accommodation, hospitals, shopping centres, national parks and cultural villages cater for the needs of the tourists as well as those of local residents.

I indicated that the basics are there, however, these needs to be enhanced as you will agree with me, we have not taken full advantage of our strategic positioning

In fact, the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), has argued that, tourism has the potential to contribute to greater gender equality and the empowerment of women in line with the Sustainable Development Goal five (5), since the majority of people employed in tourism worldwide are women both in formal and informal jobs.

The UNWTO, further argues that tourism offers women opportunities for income generation and entrepreneurship – however, for these benefits to accrue, women will have to be empowered with skills as well as market information so that they can take full advantage of opportunities presented by the visitor economy.

Women and tourism businesses in general, need to know what opportunities are presented by Matsamo Cultural Village, the Kruger National Park, the Malelane Airstrip and the Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport, the location near border posts with Eswatini and Mozambique, the Samora Machel Monuments as well as other liberation history sites.

As the UNWTO indicated, this sector has the power to liberate vulnerable groups as some of the tourists have indicated that they want to see how the money they spend benefits the most disadvantaged in our communities.

As Government we working with our key stakeholders to make significant strides in assisting tourism businesses to respond to the needs of the visitors by capitalising the Tourism Transformation Fund (TTF), the Green Tourism Incentive Programme, the Market Access Support Programme, the Tourism Grading Support Programme as well as interventions like the Expanded Public Works Programme.

We are conscious of the fact that these might not be adequate, however, we might have to agree that these are a step in the right direction – these interventions work well when blended with other government interventions such as ensuring that tourism projects are planned for in the integrated development plans of the municipalities, local communities are more welcoming to the visitors who are coming to their spaces to spend their hard earned money and are contributing to the local economy.

We should also link these interventions to efforts aimed at protecting and rejuvenating the supply base of the tourism economy to ensure that when demand returns to the pre-pandemic levels, the supply side such as airports, roads, accommodation and amenities such as broadband and health infrastructure are able to keep up with the anticipated demand in line with the objectives of the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan as well as the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan.

Some of our private sector stakeholders have informed us that they would invest more resources if some of the regulatory, financial and infrastructure barriers were addressed – these are issues such as long-term leases on state-owned land, which will unlock funding from the development finance institutions and commercial banks.

Security of tenure, is non-negotiable in accommodation establishments, airports and other amenities that are capital-intensive in nature – with return on investment taking a minimum of at least eight years.

Our municipalities can learn a lot from our entities such as SANParks and MTPA in terms of commercialization. One of the great things about commercialization is that you give a private party a long-term lease to develop and operate a state-owned asset that will be returned back to the state once a lease has lapsed without spending any government money.

It shifts the risk from government to the private party with the private party taking the risk of financial viability. In an environment, where there is limited resources from Government and where the Government have to pay more attention to immediate needs of our communities – commercialization has proven to be a very successful intervention with assets that were running at a loss – breaking even and contributing to the fiscus.

This Imbizo therefore becomes a feedback mechanism which aims to proactively keep our people abreast with the interventions and plans outlined by our government to address socio-economic challenges facing the country in a sustainable manner.

Furthermore, these mechanisms ensure that communities and government work together to accelerate service delivery and promote a culture of social partnership that affords everyone to play their part as envisioned by the NDP.

As government, we acknowledge that much has been achieved in the past 29 years of freedom and also government realizes that there are serious challenges that need to be addressed which include poverty, inequality and unemployment

We will note all issues raised during this engagement, with you all, and we undertake as government to make interventions where possible, we are determined to ensure that there are improvements in your area and will also monitor progress.

We are quite aware of the number of challenges especially facing the tourism sector in this District and government has competing demands and also limited resources hence it is important to work closely with the Private sector.

In conclusion all of us, we must participate in this democracy so that we can make our country work, as our President has stated that we should leave no one behind.

I thank you all.