

Honourable Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Mpumalanga Legislature;
Members of the National Assembly and National Council of Provinces present;
Members of the Mpumalanga Executive Council;
Members of the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature;
Executive Mayors, Councillors and leaders of SALGA;
South African High Commissioner in The Kingdom of Swaziland, His Excellency Mr Happy Mahlangu;
Governor of Maputo City, Ms Iolanda Seuane
Mozambican Consul of Mpumalanga and Limpopo, Mrs Esther Tondo;
Consular Attaché of the Kingdom of Swaziland in South Africa, Mr Ernest Tsabedze;
The president of the Maputo Provincial Assembly, His Excellency Joao Muringano Matola
Provincial Commissioner, Lieutenant General Bethuel Zuma;
Chairperson of the Provincial House of Traditional Leaders;
Traditional Leaders;
Chairperson of Mpumalanga Claims and Disputes Resolution;
The Director-General in the Presidency, Dr Cassius Lubisi;
The Acting Director-General, Mr Thulani Mdakane;
Chairpersons and CEOs of our parastatals;
Heads of Departments and Municipal Managers;
ANC Provincial Secretary, Cde. Mandla Ndlovu, all ANC officials and the entire Leadership of the Alliance;
The President and Deputy President of the ANCYL, Cde Collen Maine and Cde Desmond Moela;
Our special guests,
Representatives of labour, business, religious and other community-based organisations;
Distinguished Guests and all Dignitaries present here today;
Compatriots;
Comrades and Friends;
Ladies and gentlemen.

The Context

1. Honourable Speaker, I am grateful to have this opportunity to address this eminent house and the people of our Province, Mpumalanga – the place of the rising sun.
2. As the servants of the people, we are duty bound to reflect on the progress that we are making in changing the lives of ordinary people for the better, building cohesive and sustainable communities, and ensuring that we advance the national goals of building a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and **prosperous** society.
3. Ours is **a collective commitment** towards the attainment of a National **Democratic Society** founded on the core values of equality, respect, human dignity and the progressive realization of socio-economic rights.
4. We are responsible too, for building a **caring** society.
5. In recent weeks, Honourable Speaker, the media spotlight has turned to Mpumalanga in the wake of the dreadful **Lilly Mine** disaster in Barberton, and the mass **retrenchment** of workers from Highveld Steel, which finally closed its doors.
6. It would be remiss of me not to draw our attention to these two events in particular as they simultaneously highlight, quite starkly, the deep dependence that our people have on our economy, our industries and the jobs that they secure in order to ensure the safety, health and well-being of themselves and their extended families.

7. Honourable Members, our hearts go out to the families of the victims of the Lilly Mine disaster. You are not alone, you remain in our prayers. As a provincial government, we will continue to provide the necessary support to the affected families as we all come to terms with this horrific tragedy. We must, of course, also thank those who have been involved in **rescue operations** to help the trapped miners.
8. Honourable Speaker, these seemingly isolated incidents, in their own way, tell the story of our journey so far. We have worked tirelessly for 22 years to eradicate **poverty, inequality and unemployment** and whilst we have facilitated the creation of many **job opportunities** and extended the **social safety net** through our grants system – we are once again made aware that in life, there are no guarantees – we need a bolder, more resilient, more robust economy.
9. We need stronger, healthier families, we need a citizenry that is physically, socially and economically mobile, we need graduates, entrepreneurs, professionals and leaders from all walks of life to drive us forward towards the vision that we have for 2030 and beyond.
10. Honourable Speaker, I stand before you today as much to give an account of the progress made towards that vision as I do to enjoin us all to **embrace a road map** to a better future that stands firmly upon the foundations we have laid so far.
11. If we are to consolidate our efforts we must ensure that we have a **common vision** for our future. This common vision can only be forged through dialogue, through partnerships and through an honest appreciation of the lessons learned – both good and bad.
12. Ladies and gentlemen, we are entering a phase where we are called upon to do more with less, where the **burgeoning demands of a growing population** are juxtaposed with a **shrinking pool of resources**.
13. This is a phase wherein the **scaling down of costs** must be strategically balanced with the **scaling up of growth and delivery** – neither an enviable nor an easy task by anyone’s measure – but I assure you, we are up for the challenge.
14. This phase will be characterised by a culture of **evidence based planning and prioritisation, astute and judicious** leadership and a commitment to improving on what and how we deliver.
15. Our priorities, those of our ruling party, remain the same, but our **approaches and mechanisms continue to evolve**. We are pushed to innovate. We are driven to explore investments and partnerships that unlock and leverage potential. We are determined to keep this beautiful Province of ours moving forward.
16. As summed up by the His Excellency, President Zuma, in his recent State of the Nation Address, “*A resilient and fast growing economy is at the heart of our radical economic transformation agenda and our National Development Plan (NDP)*”
17. It is true that the economy remains the engine for our future, and it is with this in mind that we are compelled to ensure that our people are **adequately educated** to find their place in a growing economy, that our people are **healthy, active, and positive contributors** to a growing **multi-skilled workforce**, and that we live, engage and thrive side by side in **appropriately serviced neighbourhoods**, where we go to bed at night with our bellies full and our minds at ease.
18. This, Honourable Speaker, is the vision we continue to have in our sights. This is the future we will continue to build with, and for, our people as we **deepen participatory democracy** and **forge relationships** with our communities in their own back yards.
19. Honourable Speaker, our intentions over the past 22 years have not wavered – we have worked tirelessly in pursuit of the **betterment of the lives of our citizens**.

20. It is fair to say that we have always **exhausted all means to deliver** on our promises, and equally so, when we have fallen short of our people's expectations, and indeed our own, we have taken stock and shared our challenges and shortcomings publicly.
21. Let us remind ourselves Honourable Speaker, that 1994 was not the end of a journey, but the beginning of a mission to take our people to **the better future** we have promised. We are indeed, **proud of our track record**, but we are not blind to the challenges and constraints that continue to plague a large proportion of our population.
22. We are facing the wind and our efforts are pitted against a **global economic downturn**, a **vulnerable Rand**, increasing **youth unemployment**, especially in our contracting mining and agricultural sectors, and of course, the **devastating drought** that threatens to reverse our gains in the areas of **water provision** and **agricultural production**.
23. As daunting as these circumstances may seem, Honourable Speaker and Members, we are still able to **pronounce with confidence, that we have made significant progress** with programmes that have improved the **living conditions** of those who are particularly vulnerable in our society.
24. In the face of challenges and constraints imposed by the difficult economic environment, we have made some progress:
- There were **165 506 more people employed** in Mpumalanga at the end of the fourth quarter 2015 than at the end of the fourth quarter 2011.
 - The **unemployment rate dropped**/improved over the above-mentioned period from 27.4 per cent to 25.7 per cent. The share of the population living below the lower-bound poverty line, declined from 37.2 per cent in 2011 to 35.9 per cent in 2014.
 - The share of the population below the food-poverty line also declined from 25.3 per cent in 2011 to 24.4 per cent in 2014.
 - In 2011, **Mpumalanga's pass rate** was 5.4 percentage points below national average and by 2015 it was 7.9 percentage points better/higher than the national NSC pass rate.
 - The share of households that occupied an **informal dwelling** declined from 10.9 per cent in 2011 to 7.6 per cent in 2014.
 - More than 85% of our citizens now have access to basic services such as **water, electricity and sanitation**.
 - We have **acquired and redistributed over 30 000ha of land** as part of the land reform programme, and whilst the progress is a little slower than what we had planned, we have also **recapitalised and developed 25 commercial farms** for our people.
25. Honourable Speaker and Members, the numbers speak for themselves. We know that this is not enough. More work still needs to be done as we continue to drive our **development and socio-economic transformation agenda**.

The Mandate and the Context

26. Honourable Speaker, we have embraced the call of our ANC led government to step up our efforts in respect of the **2014 ANC manifesto**. Let us remind ourselves that as a Province, we have woven the **programmes and principles of the manifesto** into our provincial programme of action.

Among other key areas of government intervention, we will to continue to focus on:

- Improved **economic growth and employment** to ensure that we grow the economy and create much needed employment
- Improved **quality of education and training** to expand the skills base that responds to the needs of the provincial economy

- Improved **healthcare system** effectiveness to increase life expectancy and mitigate the negative impact of HIV/Aids, TB and opportunistic diseases.
- Investing in **adequate infrastructure** to facilitate the achievement of our priority development goals
- Building integrated, sustainable human settlements, including economic opportunities, social amenities and **access to basic services** that contribute towards a better quality of life.

Capable Development Oriented State

27. Honourable Speaker and Members, the current economic conditions dictate that the state must position itself differently to achieve desired results with reduced fiscal allocations to priorities.
28. Times are tough, and tough decisions are needed to save our country from the fiscal cliff.
29. **Accountability** for performance and **prudent** utilization of **public resources** are essential features of a capable and development oriented government. The capacity of the state is seriously undermined when financial resources are depleted without achieving desired development outcomes.
30. The “upgrade” of our **state machinery** that we committed ourselves to last year has been in full swing and we are pleased with the progress that we have made with respect to “honing our skills and cutting our costs”.
31. The Province in many ways pre-empted recent calls for cost curtailment and continues its proactive shift away from a **consumptive narrative** towards one that has the delivery of services as its apex priority.
32. We are continuing to release more money from the salary bill to fund infrastructure and service delivery initiatives.
33. We have indeed made progress with respect to **streamlining** our organisational structures with a view to halting **wastage and duplication**, and with the implementation of the **moratorium on filling vacant posts** we will no doubt continue to pare down the **burdensome compensation of employees’ costs** associated with a bloated administration.
34. This moratorium will continue through the coming financial year, with the exclusion of **scarce and critical posts** in the **health and education** sectors. Indeed, it will stay in place until such time as we have achieved an acceptable ratio with respect to **spending on salaries** and spending on socio-economic transformation and service delivery.
35. To augment these measures, we will take a tough stance when it comes to our **service providers** and we will be vigilant in terms of ensuring **value for money** when programmatic or technical assistance is sought.
36. As such, Honourable Speaker, we have instructed our Department of Public Works, Roads and Transport to conduct a thorough assessment of the **pricing and service models** of our service providers to ensure that we are **not paying inflated rates** in exchange for **substandard products**.
37. In 2016/17, we will continue with the **rationalization process** across the Administration to ensure the **equitable distribution** and utilization of available human resources to drive the implementation of service delivery priorities.
38. As part of cost saving measures, we will conduct a comprehensive review of the current regional service delivery model to identify and eliminate overlaps, wastage, and duplications. We will consider recommendations on a new, **cost-effective regional service delivery model** that reduces costs and enhances efficiencies, effectiveness, and public accountability.
39. Honourable Speaker, the **National Development Plan** identifies “the **deficit in skills and professionalism** affecting all elements of the public service” as a central challenge with respect to

the realisation of our vision for 2030.

40. To ensure that we continue to address this challenge, we will support **targeted learning and skills development opportunities** for our public servants in partnership with a number of tertiary institutions.
41. Over and above **technical skills**, we need a cadre of officials that is driven by the “**servant-leadership**” narrative that is at the core of a capable and effective public service.
42. In the current **socio-economic context**, there is no room for officials who seek to enrich themselves under the guise of “public service”. There will no longer be resources available to **fund mediocre or poor performance** – only excellence is expected, only excellence can be accommodated, only excellence will be rewarded.
43. As a Province we have undertaken in the past to make ourselves **accountable to the public** in our efforts to instil professionalism and eradicate **corrupt or fraudulent** activities.
44. Honourable Speaker, we will continue to ensure that we **inculcate a robust culture of performance and accountability amongst our officials**.
45. We know that we have amongst us the **calibre of professionals** that can take these stringent times in their stride and use these necessary cutbacks as a platform for excellence through innovation.
46. The **strategic leaders and thinkers** amongst us will thrive and will continue to be supported to steer our **programmes effectively and use our resources wisely**.
47. Honourable Speaker, it is within this context that I am honoured to **present a synopsis of our achievements** and to introduce our **proposed programme of action** for the 2016/17 financial year.

Economic Outlook

48. Honourable Speaker, our efforts as government are inextricably linked to the broader national and even global dynamics within which we operate. Nowhere is this more keenly felt than our **economy**. We rise and fall on the upswings and downturns that have a direct **impact on the resources available** to us to succeed in our mission of creating a “better life for all”
49. It is a well-known fact that the **global growth outlook** appears to have worsened recently and in particular, emerging markets’ growth prospects remain constrained amid persistent capital outflows.
50. Our **domestic economic outlook** also remains weak with further downward revisions predicting **growth of less than 1% this year**. **Private sector investment** continues to contract and prospects for **formal sector employment growth** remain relatively bleak.
This is further exacerbated by challenges in the **agriculture, mining and manufacturing** sectors where the threat of **job losses** remains a fundamental concern.
51. Honourable Speaker, within this **constrained economic climate** the Province has realised an **average job creation** figure of just 44 200 jobs per annum over the last four years – this means we are only achieving **approximately 55% of our job creation target**. This does not bode well for the prosperous future that we have in mind for our people – we must do more and we must accelerate and scale-up our efforts now.
52. Of even greater concern, Honourable Speaker is the fact that our **youth** continue to bear the brunt of the depressed economic climate – it is an unpalatable reality that the **youth comprise 71.2% of our unemployed**. This is an untenable situation and we aim to act decisively by boosting programmes **and mechanisms** specifically aimed at dealing with the unsustainable plight of these young people.

53. To add insult to injury, as they say, our country is facing one of the **worst droughts** in its history. This has a direct **impact on food prices**, and in particular on maize and maize products, the staple upon which the poorest of our poor depend.
54. As government, we are called upon to address the **pressing needs** of our most vulnerable citizens whilst at the same time applying policies and resources strategically in order to ensure a **more positive economic outlook** in the medium to long term.

Towards Industrialization

55. In line with the national **Nine Point Plan**, the Province has elevated certain **tactical interventions** to bolster efforts to secure a more **progressive economic growth** trajectory and a more **positive job creation** trend.
56. Our key instrument in this regard is our recently adopted **Provincial Industrial Development Plan**. This plan, honourable speaker, is the seminal strategy for implementing high impact, integrated and diversified **industrialisation programmes** in the Province.
57. The focus of the plan includes **labour intensive manufacturing** industries and the development and **localisation of supply chains** that will provide local suppliers with access to the major industries in the Province. In addition, the Plan targets the **distribution of investment** over a range of industries, as well as **infrastructure investment** that maximises the potential of major industry sectors.
58. For this to happen, we are inviting the private sector and key industry players in the Province to join us as we catalyse economic growth and improve prospects for job creation.
59. Honourable Speaker, we plan to facilitate the establishment of “**industrial centres of competence**”. For 2016/17, we will focus on mobilising partners and private sector investment in the following **catalytic projects**:
60. A **Mining and Metals Technology Park** in the Steve Tshwete Local Municipality, a **Petro Chemical Industrial Technology Park** in Secunda and the **Agriculture and Forestry Industrial Centre of Competence** in Mbombela.
61. Honourable Speaker, this **Agriculture and Forestry** undertaking will have a relatively large footprint, which will include Sabie, Mbombela and the Nkomazi SEZ as focal points. It will have two main hubs – the **International Fresh Produce Market** near Mbombela town and the **Forestry Technology Park** in Sabie. The latter will comprise of an **Industrial Park** that will house existing and new enterprises and a **Wood SMME Incubator**.
These will be supported by the proposed **South African Forestry Technology Centre**, aimed at promoting beneficiation of forestry resources through technical training, R&D and technical services.
62. We are happy to report that **SAFCOL** has made a commitment to collaborate with the Province to establish the Forestry Technology Park in Sabie. **Thaba Chweu** municipality has committed to making land available for this initiative.
63. In partnership with **Sasol**, a detailed technical feasibility study for the establishment of the **Petrochemical Technology Park** is currently underway and is expected to be concluded before the end of June 2016.
64. Honourable Speaker, I am also pleased to inform the house that the **designation of the SEZ in Nkomazi** by the Minister of Trade and Industry is expected during the course of 2016, allowing the construction of the SEZ to commence in 2017.
65. An additional application for an **SEZ** linked to the **mining and metals Technology Park** in the Steve Tshwete municipality is also being prepared for submission to the Minister. This second SEZ is

- earmarked to host **major industrial investments** that are expected to establish themselves in the area in the near future.
66. Honourable Speaker, we continue to prioritise the **revitalisation of agriculture and the agro-processing value chain** as key economic drivers for the Province.
67. The **Mpumalanga Fresh Produce Market** remains a critical platform to stimulate agricultural production, downstream beneficiation and investment opportunities across the agro-processing value chain. At the heart of this initiative is the empowerment of emerging Black farmers to access domestic and international markets for their produce.
68. In 2016/17 we will make **resources** available to accelerate the **establishment and operationalisation** of the **International Fresh Produce Market**.
69. As part of our **youth empowerment programme**, it is our intention to ensure that our **youth** become fully active in the mainstream economy. In the agriculture sector, we will continue with the **Mpumalanga Fortune 40 Young Farmer Incubator Programme** which is poised to make a contribution to **increased agricultural production** through the **commercialisation of 20 farms** for the youth throughout the province.
70. To date, **R 14 million** has been spent on Phase One's farm development activities, which centred primarily on agricultural infrastructure and skills development. We have set aside R80 million in 2016/17 to ensure that these farms reach their maximum **production potential**.
71. Our **Masibuyele Emasimini** and **Masibuyele Esibayeni** Programmes have successfully supported numerous **subsistence farmers** and we will invest in further evolving these approaches to now support the **commercialisation** of our emerging farmers.
72. Honourable Speaker and Members, the **current drought** and the forecasts of future **climate change** and **weather extremes** have reminded us of the **importance of research** in the agricultural sector. We must be in a position to **investigate, predict and plan** for changes that could otherwise be devastating to the sector. To this end, we have prioritised the renovation and revitalisation of agricultural research institutes such as **Nooitgedacht**.
73. In the meantime we will continue to **support our farmers** to deal with the negative impact of the current drought and assist them to proactively plan for future drought conditions as we face unpredictable weather phenomena.
74. Underpinning all our efforts to support and improve the **agriculture sector** will be ongoing investment in **agricultural infrastructure**, in particular, **bulk water supply** and **irrigation** schemes.

Infrastructure Investment

75. The **National Development Plan** identifies **economic infrastructure** as a **growth catalyst** to achieve development imperatives. This, of course, goes beyond just our productive sectors, such as agriculture, and includes targeted development of strategic socio-economic infrastructure such as **health facilities, schools, electricity and water and sanitation infrastructure**, effective and efficient **road and transport networks** as well as fast and reliable **ICT** systems
76. To support development, industrialization and economic growth, investment in strategic socio-economic infrastructure is a pre-requisite.
77. Honourable Speaker and Members, we are pleased with the investment we have made in socio-economic infrastructure such as water and sanitation, schools and roads. We will continue to prioritise infrastructure to address backlogs in many parts of our Province.
78. In the past year alone, the Province invested R2.3 billion in road **construction** and **maintenance** projects spanning the rural and urban localities of Mpumalanga. In the coming year, R2.4 billion

has been set aside to **maintain and renew road infrastructure** and to **increase capacity** to meet projected **future demand**.

79. Our investment in roads infrastructure is targeting critical areas of need in many parts of the Province to enhance mobility and access. In 2016/17, these roads will, amongst others, include:

- The **coal haulage network** in many parts of the Province
- Upgrading of a road between Ximhungwe and Lisbon passing through Kildare, Lillydale, Justicia, Huntington, Metsi, Rulani and Mabharule
- Upgrading of a bridge over the Sand River near Rolle Village
- Construction of an access road to the new Traffic College
- Reconstruction of Kumani bridge near Thulamahashe
- Upgrading of a rural access road between the R40 Junction (near Bushbuckridge) and Merry Pebble
- Design for rehabilitation of a road through Newforest A to Dwarsloop towards Thulamahashe
- The 2nd phase of rehabilitation of the road between Bambi and Mashishing in Thaba Chweu Local Municipality.
- Upgrading a rural access road west of Barberton towards Umjindi Trusts.
- Rehabilitation of a rural access road between the R571 and the Samora Machel Monument in Mbuzini.
- The light rehabilitation of a road from the N2 to Klipwal (towards the KZN Boundary) as part of the Mpumalanga – KwaZulu Natal partnership programme.

80. Honourable Speaker, for the 2016/17 financial year, over R4 billion has been set aside by Provincial Government to deliver on **socio-economic infrastructure** such as roads, schools, health facilities and other critical social development infrastructure.

81. This infrastructure is critical in catalysing **local economic activities** that empower local businesses and create much needed employment.

82. Despite progress made in infrastructure delivery, there is no doubt that continued dependence on the fiscal resources to address infrastructure backlogs will take over 50 years at the current pace when matched by the current available fiscal resources.

83. We need to think differently and inventively to find new ways of raising the capital required to fund our infrastructure build programme.

84. Faced with this reality, the Province has developed **an infrastructure funding model** intended to attract private sector investment for the delivery of key provincial infrastructure. In the next few months, we are expecting the finalization of all regulatory approvals by the Provincial and National Treasuries.

85. As part of this process, MEGA will, this year, establish the **Provincial Infrastructure Fund** that will crowd in private sector capital in the delivery of key infrastructure projects across all the key sectors of government work.

86. Honourable Speaker, we are pleased that our **international engagements** are indicating that our potential partners in China, Italy and Russia are ready to inject capital and work with us as we tackle some of these infrastructure delivery priorities.

87. This year, MEGA is planning to host a high impact **Investor Conference** to **showcase investment opportunities** in the province across sectors such as infrastructure, agriculture, mining, tourism, manufacture and real estate. We look forward to the positive outcomes of this promising event.

88. Honourable Members, the **Nine Point Plan** highlights the importance of investing in **broadband infrastructure** to enhance **connectivity**. As a province, we have revised our **Provincial ICT Strategy**

to ensure that ICT is appropriately packaged to enable the realisation of key development priorities in the Province.

89. The Strategy is also designed to address the **prohibitive impact** of high costs, under-investment, and the fragmentation and sub optimal delivery of ICT services.

90. In the coming years, we will use the ICT Strategy to underpin **deliberate and robust business improvements** that introduce **technology** in all aspects of our work ranging from frontline service delivery to our back end administrative and developmental processes.

Chief amongst our priorities will be:

- The expansion of the **broadband infrastructure** and services
- The establishment of an **ICT Innovation Hub** to consolidate systems and skills
- Improving our core operational functions through implementation of a shared **Enterprise Resource Planning** system to cut costs
- **Rolling-out Youth ICT Incubation Programmes** to build ICT skills and capabilities in the Province

SMMEs, Cooperatives, Township and Rural Enterprises

91. Honourable Speaker, **SMMEs** play a key role in the development of the economy and represent a **significant lever for increasing employment**. It is true to say, however, that these small businesses have not yet taken up their rightful place in terms of contributing positively to economic growth.

92. As a Province, we plan to continue supporting our existing **SMME Incubation** and **youth entrepreneurship** Programmes– but – Honourable Speaker –it is time to turn up the heat!

93. We are delighted to announce that over the next five years, **MEGA** will substantially grow its loan advances, disbursing a total of **R500 million to SMMEs, cooperatives, and agricultural enterprises**. In 2016/17, the total loan disbursements will amount to **R80 million** – a significant injection that we are sure will yield positive returns for our economy and employment rates.

94. We will continue to provide **mentorship, and infrastructure support** to ensure that we have small enterprises and cooperatives that are sustainable.

95. Part of the **infrastructure support package** will include the renovation of under-utilised industrial sites for use by SMMEs and cooperatives. In 2016/17, the targeted sites for renovations are the Small Business Parks in Kabokweni, Elukwatini, Siyabuswa and Mayflower.

96. Honourable Speaker and Members, the **tourism sector** has the potential to create opportunities for the participation of SMMEs and cooperatives. It is critical to ensure that Black owned enterprises in the tourism sector are supported by government to advance the goals of Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment.

97. As part of our strategy to **improve the tourism experience** in iconic tourism sites, such as, Blyde River Canyon, Three Rondavels, and the Bourke’s Luck Potholes, we will prioritise the upgrading and construction of key infrastructure that will consist of ablution facilities, restaurants, accommodation and other essential amenities.

98. Decent infrastructure for small businesses will also be constructed to ensure that these businesses are able to sell their products to the tourists in a safe and secure environment.

99. We feel confident that by **bringing our SMMEs and cooperatives** into the tourism sector value chain, we will be able to have the kind of positive and sustainable impact on tourism that allows us to **respond symbiotically** to the changing demands of our local and international visitors.

100. We further believe that our support to small businesses will improve **revenue generation in the sector** and provide a means for maintaining our lovely sites and attracting the larger investments that we may require for our more ambitious **tourism and conservation projects**.

101. Honourable Speaker, as part of our **partnerships programme**, we have developed sound relationships with several private sector counterparts to ensure that we implement SMME and skills development programmes benefitting local enterprises, in particular, women and youth owned companies.
102. Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge all our partners for their contributions to our collective efforts to address the challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality. A few examples of the good work will give an illustration of the efforts and impacts.
103. Eskom's **footprint in the local economy** is evident when one considers that of the 18 378 people employed at the Kusile Project, 9 865 are from Mpumalanga's local communities.
104. **SMME and Cooperatives Enterprise Development** has been the nexus of the **Kusile Project** with the socio-economic impact amounting to **R8.473billion** since inception. Further cause for commendation is the fact that 55% of those who benefited are youth and women owned companies.
105. Honourable Speaker, a further 1 724 people have graduated as engineers, artisans and technicians through the **Eskom Kusile Skills Development Programme**. The cherry on top is that **82 Small Black Enterprises** from Mpumalanga Province graduated from an intensive 9 month programme on project management, business sustainability and new engineering held by the **Eskom Contractor Academy**. We look forward to seeing the ongoing progress of these up and coming entrepreneurs.
106. **Eskom** and its partners, through their **CSI Programme**, have also committed to invest a further **R30 million** in their work on **cooperatives enterprise development**. To date, **194 jobs** have been created through these initiatives and we take this opportunity to appreciate and applaud these valuable contributions.
107. Honourable Speaker, supporting the **achievement of sustainable livelihoods** for the people of this province is one of the lasting legacies that our development partners can leave behind. SASOL is one such development partner who continues to support our vision with singular, **high impact interventions**.
108. In partnership with Eskom and Sasol, we will continue to prioritise the **fly-ash beneficiation programme** to create opportunities for youth owned businesses.
109. Our collaborations also include the establishment of an **industrial park** in Govan Mbeki local municipality; the improvement of **electrical substations** and the upgrading of sewer reticulation networks to improve the delivery of basic services. Sasol also shares our vision of a clean administration and provides its support to the "**Clean Audit Project**" – welcome contributions across the spectrum of improved service delivery and enhanced economic growth.
110. Honourable Speaker, we must also acknowledge the invaluable contribution that **SA Breweries** has made to the lives of the young men and women participating in the **SAB Kick Start Programme**. This initiative, in partnership with the provincial government established the **Mpumalanga Youth Development Entrepreneurship Programme** and provides an injection of skills training, mentorship and capital funding to support our young **entrepreneurs** on their way to making big business waves.
111. SA Breweries – Cheers to you!
112. The Province has partnered with the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services SETA (MERSETA) to **facilitate artisan training for our out-of-school youth**. There are currently **51 learners on the apprenticeship programme** with various companies in the province – a testament to the positive gains that can be made when we enter **strategic partnerships** with the private sector.

113. We are pleased with the results of our partnership with Hydra Arc on the **Artisan Development Programme** led by the Mpumalanga Regional Training Trust (MRTT) in partnership with various training providers. There are currently **1 036 learners receiving training** in various trades whilst the **first group of 329 learners** has completed institutional training and will commence with on-job training in due course.
114. In 2016/17, we will continue to roll out this programme, and ensure that more young people are trained and placed in available employment opportunities.
115. Madame Speaker, in the coming year we will be implementing the recommendations made for the establishment of the **Provincial Skills Hub** based on the feasibility study undertaken in partnership with South 32. This initiative is poised to make a positive, practical contribution in respect of the **scarce technical skills** required in our priority economic sectors.

Improved Quality of Education and Training

54. Honourable Speaker, **our children are our future**, and it goes without saying that a brighter future requires bright children – shining examples of professionalism, stellar captains of industry, parents, teachers, leaders and labourers that radiate confidence and demonstrate commitment to the invaluable contribution that they make to our collective socio economic development and empowerment.
116. **Investing** in education is the single most effective way of reducing poverty.
117. As a Province, we continue to put our children first – from the **earliest days of their childhood development**, through to their preparation for our workforce. It is a long term investment that we believe will yield positive dividends for all in future.
118. To this end, the Department of Education **continues to accelerate access** to Grade R and pre-Grade R, **professionalize** the ECD sector and advocate the importance of ECD to parents and other stakeholders.
119. In 2015/16 we ensured that **77 779 learners** were able to **access Grade R** in both public and community centres, and that 57 726 pre-grade R learners were supported in community centres. In effect, the number of schools that offer Grade R has been increased **to 1 075**.
120. Whilst the progress towards completion of the **ECD Institute** has been slower than anticipated, we have nonetheless trained a total of **1 102 ECD practitioners** at various qualification levels. These numbers will be increased by an additional **1 800 practitioners** to be trained in the coming financial year. We will also complete all the renovations to ensure that the ECD Institute operates at maximum capacity, including the deployment of required staff.
121. We must appreciate the **collaborative efforts** of the Departments of Education, Health and Social Development. They have worked hand in hand to ensure that the **critical role of ECD** is placed firmly on the map – their **coordinated campaigns** have improved communities' knowledge of registration requirements, childcare, health and nutrition and overall parenting skills.
122. The **ECD Sector** is making tangible progress, and based on this progress, we are now in a position to ensure that we build on our successes by developing a **standardised model for ECD** that contributes to the **eradication of backlogs**, as well as **improved planning and resourcing** for future programmes and projects.
123. Over the 2016/17 financial year, we have undertaken to **construct an additional 7 ECD facilities** in areas of most need including Standerton, Siyabuswa, Tweefontein, Ermelo, Ogies, Mbuzini, and Manzini in Jerusalem. More importantly, we will continue to ensure that **existing sites** are adequately staffed and serviced.

124. Naturally, Honourable Speaker, our positive contributions must **permeate and span the full spectrum** of our children's **teaching and learning needs**. In essence, this means a concerted effort to **improve the teaching and learning environments** that our children encounter on a daily basis.
125. We have undertaken in the past to focus on some of the **specific challenges** that persist in our education sector. Our resources have been directed towards **improving infrastructure**, broadening and deepening **teachers' knowledge** and experience and improving **learner performance**.
126. But, Madame Speaker, we are not there yet.
127. The performance of our **Grade 3, 6 and 9 pupils** could **not be comprehensively assessed** as only a few schools wrote the Annual National Assessment (ANA) – but we are informed that **numeracy, literacy and mathematics rates** have not yet reached the desired levels.
128. Our efforts continue in earnest.
129. The importance of **secondary school education** in moulding learners into the responsible citizens of tomorrow cannot be ignored or undermined. Secondary school education provides a stepping stone into the world of work or further study – a world that should provide for unlimited opportunities for achievement, recognition and success.
130. **Mathematics and science** are critical subjects for those wishing to pursue further studies at a tertiary level; these are the **doctors, accountants and engineers** of the future – the very citizens we will rely on to take our Province's economy up to the heights envisioned for 2030.
131. Our **Maths Science & Technology Academy** provided training for **1 380 teachers** in 2015/16 and the work of renovating and refurbishing the **Academy Hub** is nearing completion. In 2016/17 we will train an additional **1000 maths and science teachers** and **broadcast lessons to all 100 MSTA linked schools** – we are truly bringing our children's classrooms into the 21st century.
132. The staff of the MSTA will take occupation of the facility at the end of February with the **official launch** of the Hub planned to take place in March 2016.
133. Honourable Speaker, we call upon our **private sector partners** to join us in our efforts to provide the **necessary tools and equipment** in our satellite and feeder schools. We must ensure that our learners have access to the computers, laboratories, interactive electronic white boards and so on that will bring their education experience straight into the 21st century.
134. Over and above the notable progress made through the Maths and Science Academy, we should acknowledge that in 2015/16 the province **increased enrolment** in both **Mathematics (42 858) and Physical Science (31 373)** in line with proposed targets.
135. Our **matric pass rate** has stabilised at **78.6%** and we look forward to increasing that to approximately **88%** in 2016/17.
136. Our scholars are definitely benefitting from access to **improved teaching and learning environments**, and adequate learning materials, but, we are not there yet. Teacher development and the implementation of the **Integrated Quality Management System** will continue to be a priority.
137. Honourable Speaker, **adequate and appropriate infrastructure** that meets the requirements of national norms and standards remains a central goal.
138. In 2015/16 so far, we have provided **8 Grade R Facilities, one special school and 29 computer centres and laboratories**. We have also commenced with the provision of basic services, water, electricity and sanitation facilities at **107** of our most needy schools.
139. Going forward we have set ourselves a target to ensure that **ALL** of our schools meet **minimum sanitation standards** by December 2016.

140. Honourable Speaker we cannot underestimate the importance of **sound infrastructure** as a cornerstone of **effective teaching and learning**. Many of our schools require our urgent attention as they are in a bad state.
141. We have allocated R200 million towards the **eradication of unsafe structures** in Bushbuckridge Local Municipality. Our investment will target **six schools** in the 2016/17 financial year. These schools are:
- Aplose Chiloane School in Newline village
 - Mapalane primary school in Acornhoek
 - Matlolane primary school in Motibidi
 - Relane primary school in gaRelane
 - Sekhukhusa secondary school in Shatale, and
 - Serisha secondary school in Shatate.
142. Honourable Speaker and Members, many of our **rural children** remain trapped in a cycle of **poverty and deprivation** due to their powerlessness to access a decent education in a beneficial, soundly constructed and adequately equipped learning environment.
143. These children are in many cases forced to attend the so-called “**farm schools**” that are barely worthy of that title. Over and above the very **basic infrastructure needs** for decent schooling, these children face the **additional challenges** of **lengthy walks** to and from school and the limited availability of **nutritious food** to build healthy bodies and attentive minds.
144. As part of a holistic response to addressing these challenges, our **Dysfunctional Farm Schools Programme** has resulted in the closure of **34 substandard schools**. Over the last few years, we have invested **over R1 billion** in the construction of **5 boarding schools** that offer a comprehensive transport, nutrition and education solution for our rural scholars.
145. These schools are Izimbali, Ezakheni, Emakhazeni, Shongwe and Steve Tshwete boarding schools, the latter of which is expected to be operationalised in the second term of the current academic year.
146. We have succeeded not only in **improving the learning conditions** of our disadvantaged farm communities but also in reducing our infrastructure backlog in terms of schools complying with the norms and standards.
147. Honourable Speaker and Members, we have previously noted our **dismay with the dropout rate** of our learners and undertook to **investigate the reasons** behind this worrying phenomenon, so that we could adequately equip ourselves to develop a **strategy to curb this trend**.
148. In partnership with the University of the Witwatersrand, we completed a study that identifies the determinants of the “drop-out” rate.
149. As predicted, the conditions of **poverty, need and neglect** that plague our learners are indeed at the heart of learner drop-outs.
150. Financial worries, out of school employment, family needs and family changes, such as child birth or marriage, coupled with **poor academic progress** and the resultant apathy are the **leading factors** preventing our children from completing their schooling.
151. As a province we recognise that this speaks to an urgent need to increase our efforts to develop and **implement holistic youth development programmes** that support the completion of **secondary education** and the **transition** into employment and / or further study.
152. To this end, the **2015 Sasol Techno X** attended by **21 300 learners** from across the province, has demonstrated its positive effects in the increased number of bursary applicants for 2016. The **career guidance** and **financial support opportunities** that were showcased opened our learners’ minds to an array of possible career paths and job opportunities.

153. The province made a positive contribution to this promising trend by awarding **730 bursaries** to **youths** completing Grade 12 in 2015, and to those already in institutions of higher learning whose studies were coming under threat due to **financial challenges**.
154. In 2016/17 we plan to scale up our contributions in this regard by making available R200 million to **increase access to post school funding** for critical and scarce skills that are vital for our **key economic sectors**. These funds will also be directed at operationalising training and skills development learning exchange initiatives with our partners in China, Italy and Russia.

Health

155. Madame Speaker, we are insistent that the province needs to drive **a radical economic transformation** agenda in order to ensure that we have the means to **improve service delivery** for our people.
156. We are equally insistent that our people, **especially our youth**, must be given both the **means and the opportunity** to contribute resolutely to their individual socio-economic development and to that of their families and communities.
157. In order to ensure that our citizens can meet these expectations, we must at all times ensure that our people are and stay **healthy**.
158. The Province has made significant progress in terms of the provisions of the National Development Plan for promoting health. We have seen a **steady improvement** in our **maternal mortality** rate, our **immunisation coverage** and our **TB cure rate**. Overall, we have also seen positive trends in terms of **increasing life expectancy** too.
159. Honourable Speaker, a thorn in our side remains the **HIV/Aids pandemic**. Our provincial HIV/Aids Strategy is yielding positive gains in terms of increasing access to ARVs, condom distribution and voluntary medical male circumcision – but we are yet to fully understand the implications of our increasing prevalence rates.
160. The **Mpumalanga Provincial Aids Council** will continue to **partner with key stakeholders** in our efforts **to reduce the incidence** of this disease, which continues to take its toll not only on the lives of the sick, but on their families and communities too.
161. Of course, HIV/Aids represents just one of the health challenges that we face as a Province. Madame Speaker, we remain committed to securing **a long and healthy life** for all our citizens and this is evidenced in our efforts to **transform the provincial healthcare system**.
162. Over the past year we have determinedly followed our **two-pronged strategy** to improving healthcare in the Province by pursuing the **NHI pilot** in Gert Sibande and through the implementation of our **comprehensive turnaround strategy**.
163. Are we satisfied about where we are now in terms of the Health Department?
164. No, we are not there yet, but through the tireless efforts of our Department of Health, I am pleased to say that we have **turned a corner** and we can now report some significant advances towards the **stabilisation and professionalization** of our provincial health department, which in turn has had a positive impact on the delivery of healthcare services.
165. Honourable Speaker, I am delighted to report that the following **hospitals have been fully refurbished**: Rob Ferreira, Themba, Impungwe and Standerton.
166. We have over the past year worked with **87 Primary Health Care facilities** in an effort to ensure that they reach **“Ideal Clinic”** status in line with Operation Phakisa 2.
167. Operation Phakisa 2 has already pronounced that all Primary Health Care facilities must reach ideal clinic status over 3 years. As we strengthen the **delivery of primary health care**, we will, over

the next three years, invest **over R470 million** in the upgrading and construction of primary health care facilities.

168. In 2016/17, we will commence with **the construction of Kanyamazane, Pienaar, Pankop, and Oakley health facilities**. These Primary Health Care facilities will be completed in 18 months to a total value of **R385m**. More importantly, 24 other primary health care facilities will undergo comprehensive renovations and upgrades amounting to **R89, 522m**.

169. Honourable Speaker, we have set aside a **budget to deal with poorly maintained facilities** and through our artisan placement programme we have to date managed to **maintain 82 facilities** in line with our provincial maintenance programme.

170. In order to improve **access to quality healthcare** we have also focused on improving and upgrading **priority hospitals** including those at Mammethlake and **Sabie**, the latter of which is now **95% complete**.

171. **Four new PHC facilities** at Ntunda, Singqobile, Naas and Wakkerstroom have been completed and operationalised.

172. However, Honourable Speaker, we cannot allow ourselves to be complacent – our resource pool is shrinking whilst our population is growing and as such we must continue to develop **pioneering approaches** to ensuring that our **health infrastructure needs** are satisfactorily catered for.

173. One such approach is the collaboration currently underway between the Department and the **Mpumalanga Economic Growth Agency, MEGA**.

174. MEGA is presently drafting an **appropriate public-private funding model** to ensure that we have adequate financing for **three high-tech hospitals** in the Province. As previously indicated, the magnitude of this work requires that the government entertains the possibility of **strategic partnerships with the private sector** and **international donors**.

175. This will be complemented by the **completion of upgrading and renovations** at our hospitals in **Bethal, and Middleburg** and the construction of a new facility at **Mapulaneng**. In 2016/17, we are investing over **R162 million** to implement these important initiatives.

176. Honourable Speaker, in our ongoing quest to improve our **service delivery and patient care**, we will commence with the implementation of an integrated **Electronic Patient Record Management System** to ensure there is a seamless management of patient information across our health facilities.

177. We firmly believe that these efforts will have a considerable impact on ensuring a long and healthy life for all the citizens of Mpumalanga.

Social Development Interventions

178. Madame Speaker, providing for the physical health and wellbeing of our people is just one aspect of the role that we need to play as a **caring and enabling government**.

179. **Poverty, inequality and unemployment**, the three ghosts of governments past continue to haunt us and nowhere is this reality more starkly illustrated than in the fact that more than **1.4 million** beneficiaries continued to **rely on social grants** during the past year.

180. Whilst we find solace in the fact that we were able to support so many, we remain disturbed by the status quo. The **reliance on social grants** visibly exposes the need for us to ensure that we can continue to **render effective social welfare services** for the needy until such time that they are able to fend for themselves.

181. Poverty, inequality and unemployment are the bedfellows of **drug and alcohol abuse**, **domestic violence** and the **disintegration of family** units. Government, through the department of social development, is compelled to assist.
182. In 2016/17 we will commence with the first phase of construction of the **Nkangala Rehabilitation and Treatment Centre** so that we are in a position to provide the assistance required for individuals who find themselves trapped in the destructive cycles of substance abuse.
183. Madame Speaker, the government **will continue to support short term relief measures** for the poor and vulnerable sectors of our society. However, we are aware that we need to re-energise our efforts to ensure that we prevent our people from falling into deeper poverty by enhancing their capabilities and opportunities through access to economic and social opportunities.
184. Key amongst our efforts in 2016/17 will be support packages and models that address the **challenges confronting our youth**, starting with a re-assessment of our youth development centres and a strategy for addressing the lamentable increase in **gender based violence**.

Integrated Human Settlements

185. Madame Speaker, it has long been **a vision of the ANC-led government** to ensure that our people make their homes in **fully serviced, fully integrated sustainable human settlements** – this will truly signal the dismantling of one of apartheid's most punitive legacies – separate and unequal development.
186. In keeping with the approach mapped in the **Provincial Integrated Human Settlements Master Plan**, the Province has made notable progress in the provision of housing and the development of human settlements that incorporate basic services, schools, libraries, clinics, parks and similar amenities.
187. In 2015/16 our total investment in strategic integrated human settlements amounted to **R492 million**. In 2016/17, the Province will invest **R545 million** in the roll out of integrated human settlements in various municipalities to ensure that we improve the living conditions and the quality of life of beneficiary households.
188. In order to ensure that we cater for the broad spectrum of community needs, **our housing product mix across settlements** provides; **inter alia, low cost housing, gap market units and social housing** projects such as the **ones that have been** completed at **Klarinet** in **Emalahleni**.
189. We are in the process of **upgrading informal settlements** such as those in Phola, Hlalanikahle and Kwaguqa and we have built 15 units for **Military Veterans**. We will also focus on upgrading **informal settlements** at **Embalenhle** and other areas like **Leandra**.
190. In our priority development nodes namely **Dr JS Moroka and Victor Kanye** we have completed approximately **996 units** and we are now planning for additional amenities in these areas.
191. Honourable Speaker we are making steady progress with our human settlements programmes and we are edging ever closer to the eradication of **marginalised and disconnected** settlements that **isolate the poor and vulnerable** and render their efforts to access employment and services too **onerous** to pursue.
192. **Ongoing and future programmes** are prioritised in areas in most need of **basic services** and in areas where we find burgeoning **informal settlements** or **rapid population growth**. Our key integrated human settlements projects are thus underway in all districts across the Province.
193. Honourable Speaker and Members, we are pleased with the progress that we are making towards the target of delivering 44 000 units over the Medium Term Strategic Framework period. To date, we have delivered over 17 000 housing units.

194. Honourable Speaker, during my visit to **eMzinoni, Bethal** in the Govan Mbeki Municipality I promised our people that we will come back.
195. In keeping with our tradition of **being servants to our people** we will be building **about 3000 units for our people** residing there, including the conversion of the **hostel** into communal rental units as well as a social housing component.
196. In 2016/17 we have made funds available for the Department of Human Settlements **Youth Brigade Project**. This project aims to support the integration of our youth into the construction sector through the provision of practical and technical skills training in collaboration with MRTT and our local municipalities.
197. Honourable Speaker, **R28.8 million** will also be allocated for the appointment of youth owned contracting enterprises for the completion of human settlements projects.
198. We want our youth to participate meaningfully in order to acquire valuable skills in the construction sector.

Access to Basic Services

199. Madame Speaker, **basic services** such as electricity, water, sanitation and refuse removal provide the glue that will hold our integrated human settlements together.
200. Plainly stated, the provision of **new services** and **addressing the backlogs** will always remain uppermost on our agenda in the context of challenges such as a growing population, rural and urban migration, safe energy generation, water scarcity and drought.
201. As we place **green and renewable energy** at the top of our sustainable socio-economic development agenda, so too must we continue to address the current pressing need of access to water and decent sanitation.
202. As a Provincial Government that works closely with our local government, we took a firm decision to **dedicate significant resources** to the eradication of **water and sanitation** backlogs in the Province.
- We further undertook to ensure that **grants allocated** to our municipalities, such as the MIG, the MWIG and so on, would be utilised to ensure the practical implementation of **high impact water and sanitation projects**.
203. The collective contributions of national, provincial and local government to this cause amounted to **R2.7 billion** in 2015/16.
204. Again, in 2016/17, we will continue to invest **over R2 billion** to improve access to clean water and sanitation.
205. We intervened in **Bushbuckridge Local Municipality** to ensure the reticulation of 14 villages and we are pleased with progress made in improving access to water.
206. **Water schemes** have been completed in KwaMhlanga and Kwaggafontien in Thembisile Hani local municipality and the improvement of the **general bulk supply system** is prioritised in the coming year.
207. Madame Speaker and Members, in 2016/17, we have assigned the Department of Human Settlements to prioritise a number of areas where we continue to experience **water and sanitation infrastructure** challenges. These interventions include:
- Bulk water supply in Bushbuckridge Local Municipality
 - Bulk sewer and water infrastructure upgrades in Emalahleni, and
 - The Water Treatment Works in Dr Pixley ka Isaka Seme local municipality
208. Alongside the efforts to address water and sanitation challenges, it is worth noting that the **drought** has had a negative impact on our progress towards **sustained water provision**.

Nevertheless, we have completed **132 newly drilled boreholes** and are currently making steady progress with an additional **40 new boreholes**.

209. In 2016/17 a further **582 boreholes** will be drilled and equipped to **augment water supply**.

210. More importantly, municipalities are expected to introduce measures to **save water** and prevent **unnecessary water losses**.

211. Honourable Speaker and Members, as we continue to accelerate service delivery, we are mindful of the plight of our farm dwellers who continue to be subjected to undignified living conditions.

212. When we addressed the Province last year we elevated the plight of our **farm dwellers** as a key concern in the Province. We further shared the desire to establish a **commission of enquiry** to investigate, thoroughly, the living conditions of our farm dwellers. We are pleased to report that the said Commission was indeed established in August last year, and that it is due complete its work by May 2016.

213. Honoured guests, it will not surprise you to hear that the work of the Commission so far has yielded some **shocking revelations** in respect of security of tenure, burial rights, visitation rights, access to basic services and living conditions.

214. These areas will be prioritised and addressed upon completion of the report and its recommendations.

215. Thankfully, Honourable Speaker, it is not all “doom and gloom”. In some instances there are **farmers working hand in glove with the farm dwellers** to improve their socio-economic status. We are hopeful that some of these instances will **provide lessons and models** of cooperation and support that can be **scaled up and replicated** through our efforts to assist this most marginalised constituent of our rural communities.

Local Government

216. Honourable Speaker, a **responsive local government system** remains the lynchpin for improving the quality of our citizens’ lives.

217. We are approaching the **2016 Local Government Elections** emboldened by the good work done by local municipalities to improve the lives of our people. In spite of challenges that we continue to deal with in local government, there has been notable improvement in the provision of basic services and our **“back to basics”** strategy has yielded positive results with respect to issues ranging from improved **financial management** to repairing potholes and refining **billing systems**.

218. We are **not satisfied** with the level of performance of a number of our municipalities. There is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that our municipalities **fulfil their legislative responsibilities**.

219. We will continue to **monitor and support our municipalities** to ensure that they reap the benefits of sound **financial and administrative systems** and bold leadership.

220. Honourable Speaker, the local government sphere is defined by **real time** interventions and events that affect the fabric of people’s daily lives and living space.

221. It is the sphere where **public participation** is an essential element of **transformation and delivery**. Our people know what they need and where they need it. Their voices are critical to an **integrated development planning** approach.

222. Honourable Speaker, to ensure that the **real-time needs** of our citizens find expression in our work as provincial government, we have successfully launched **Operation Vuka Sisebente** – Mpumalanga’s development coordinating model.

223. Operation Vuka Sisebente aims to **integrate the services of government** through the utilisation of **functional war rooms** at ward, local and provincial government levels.
224. The overall objective is to create vibrant, equitable and sustainable socio-economic communities by providing **comprehensive, integrated and transversal services** to the communities through efficient and effective partnerships.
225. In order to achieve this objective, Honourable Speaker, the ward war rooms will operate as **service delivery engines** set up by different stakeholders in order to deliver a fully coordinated and integrated basket of services.
226. Honourable Speaker, our ward war rooms are **truly representative of a participatory democracy in action** and we are sure that they will contribute positively to our ongoing efforts to strengthen local government by giving our often voiceless communities the platform that they deserve.
227. Our communities are encouraged to visit the 'war rooms' and raise issues that must be brought to the attention of government. Our public representatives must ensure that all **issues raised are responded to** within a month.
228. Honourable Members, as we tackle complex development and service delivery challenges, the **role of traditional leaders** becomes central. Within the context of our local governance framework, traditional leaders must be part of our collective response to addressing the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality as well as the negative impact of HIV and Aids.
229. One of the important areas of partnership revolves around **joint planning on land use priorities** to align development in traditional communities with government's holistic approach to the delivery of integrated and sustainable human settlements.
230. More importantly, the productive use of communal land for agriculture is essential for **local economic development and job creation**.
231. As a Province, we will continue to support the institution of traditional leadership as we deepen participatory democracy and service delivery. We would like to encourage traditional leaders to ensure that **Operation Vuka Sisebente** is accelerated in areas under the jurisdiction of traditional leadership.
232. Together we need to reach out to ordinary people, communicate and bring hope as they continue to raise their concerns and suggestions on matters affecting their lives.
233. Honourable Speaker, we will ensure that we intensify communication with our communities so that they are always informed about what government is doing.
234. **Communication** is a two-way street, and as a Province, we have sometimes been remiss when it comes to communicating our plans, our programmes and our achievements with our people. We must be proud of the inroads that we have made and we must not shy away from our successes.
235. In 2016/17 we will prioritise the implementation of a **Provincial Communication Strategy** that uses multiple media, platforms and events to ensure that our people know how far we have come and what we still plan to achieve. This strategy speaks to our intention to make the **government – citizen dialogue** more robust in order to ensure that no-one feels uninformed or marginalised.

Social Cohesion and Nation Building

236. Honourable Speaker, in his State of the Nation Address, His Excellency, President Zuma, made reference to concerns that the **social integration gains** that we seemed to have made as the much **feted rainbow nation** are being eroded by a resurgence in **public acts of racism**.

237. Honoured guests, the dictionary tells us that *racism* is “the **belief** that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as **inferior or superior** to another race or races.”
238. The definition is straightforward enough, but it is **rendered one dimensional** by the **complex, emotive history** of our country and the “second hand memories” of our **disillusioned and frustrated youth** many of whom have an understanding of race and culture shaped by images and stories that tell of the **shameful and traumatic experiences** of parents and grandparents who struggled for and against apartheid.
239. The media has been quick to **broadcast these lamentable displays of antagonism and aggression**, particularly at our **Universities**, the very institutions where the “doors of learning and culture” have been opened to all. These sporadic, headline grabbing images breed mistrust and polarisation.
240. **Racism destroys**. Whether it is whispered or shouted, it has the power to divide and conquer.
241. Honourable Speaker, let me state it plainly, **we will not tolerate racism** in the place of the rising sun. We will **not be provoked by events** such as those playing out on our televisions, but we will be **proactive**.
242. We will **build awareness**, we will **foster appreciation**, and we will **celebrate diversity** and the limitless potential it holds for our collective futures.
243. The 21st March, **Human Rights Day**, will be commemorated as a “national day against racism” – it is the first step towards our realisation of the vision of a **non-racial society** where humanity is a collective and our diversity is a source of strength.
244. As our beloved former President Nelson Mandela put it, “*No-one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.*”
245. As government we will continue to **build cohesive and sustainable communities** that represent and serve all the races, cultures and creeds of our population.
246. We will **support and initiate events** that celebrate arts, culture, language, history and heritage **inclusively**. We will continue to support the **Innibos Festival** to affirm our belief that as the people of Mpumalanga we need to foster a common sense of nationhood through the inclusive celebration of our diverse heritage and culture.
247. In 2016/17 financial year, we will launch the **Mpumalanga Cultural Festival** as one of the provincial signature events that will attract visitors to the Province to share in our inclusive celebration of culture and heritage.
248. We will support and initiate **sporting events** that in their very nature inspire the **team spirit** that crosses cultural divides.
249. Madame Speaker, the introduction of our integrated **School Sport League** will go a long way towards fostering cross-cultural interaction and communication as all our schools will be expected to participate.
250. Collectively, we must **reject racism**. Our diversity is a source of strength.
251. If I may borrow the words of the indomitable Steve Biko, Honourable Speaker, it is my wish as a leader, a citizen and a human being that “*in time, we shall be in a position to bestow on South Africa the greatest possible gift - a more **human face***”. Steven Biko

Fighting Crime

252. Honourable Speaker, it is our belief that the **fear of crime and the threat to personal safety** and security remains an impediment to our vision for a happy, prosperous and united Province.
253. Crime statistics for the previous year will tell us that the **number of crimes** committed against our people in this province is declining. However, they still remain too high for a young democracy like ours.
254. We will continue to work even harder to keep our citizens safe and secured. In the coming year we will amplify our efforts in a number of priority areas including, gender based violence and contact crime, human trafficking, cross border crime, and rural and school safety.
255. Honourable Speaker, it dismays me to state that the behaviour of some of the **drivers** in this Province borders on criminal. We will continue to take a tough stance on **reckless and negligent drivers** who rob families of their loved ones and their livelihoods through their blatant disregard for the rules of the road.
256. Our approach is still to tackle the **scourge of road carnage** through appropriate resources and mechanisms to **enforce our traffic rules and regulations**. To this end, our Traffic Training College will be completed this year, and we expect our first intake in January 2017.

Conclusion

257. Honourable Speaker, today I have had the opportunity to remind us of the **vision** that we have for the Province and to share with you **some of the strides** that we are taking towards bringing that vision to life.
258. The current **socio-economic context** is one of the most challenging we have faced.
259. It is fair to say that at the moment the world may seem like a very **unsympathetic** place to the average citizen – we are faced with a **depressed economy**, hostile **climactic** conditions and a population that is quick to **express their anxiety and dissatisfaction** through angry hurtful **words** and violent and destructive **acts**.
260. Honourable Speaker, it is our task, in this **volatile context**, to bring hope, to assure and to take the bold action necessary to yield the tangible results that our citizens crave. It is the leadership of this Province that must take our people **out of the fear of an uncertain future** and into the light of a united and prosperous Mpumalanga.
261. The American farm worker, labour leader and civil rights activist Cesar Chavez puts it best, *“We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own. From the depth of need and despair, people can work together, can organize themselves to solve their own problems and fill their own needs with dignity and strength”*.
262. **I thank you.**