



Shoulder to the wheel: **Sisi Ntombela vows to create jobs** **and grow FS economy**



FREE STATE PROVINCE



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2022: Free State Premier Sisi Ntombela Promises Economic Recovery and Jobs after COVID-19 Battle

FREE State Premier Sisi Ntombela has outlined her plans for economic development and job creation post the COVID-19 pandemic, saying she intends “to transform the Free State to be the growth frontier of the country”.

Ntombela, who is also the Deputy President of the ANC Women’s League, said the province was emerging from the impact of COVID-19 that saw millions lose their jobs as the pandemic battered an economy that was already on its knees.

Ntombela is serving a second term as premier of the Free State after taking the reigns in 2018 from Ace Magashule when he vacated the post to assume his duties at Luthuli House as ANC Secretary General.

She has previously served as MEC for Social Development and Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs in the Free State.

“As we emerge from the devastation

Free State premier Sisi Ntombela arrives at the Mangaung Indoor Sport Centre at the Dr Rantlai Molemela Stadium in Bloemfontein.

caused by this pandemic, our greatest responsibility is to reconstruct and rebuild our economy," said Ntombela during a recent state of the province address.

"We are eager to transform the Free State to be the growth frontier of the country. This is the time to change."

Ntombela said her priority would be to uplift young people in the Free State, including women and people with disabilities.

Ntombela has said in the past that "'most of my nights are sleepless nights because 48,5 percent of the youth in the Free State are unemployed, we are in trouble."

She has also invited investors to explore the different parts of the Free State to establish successful businesses which will increase the rate of economic growth which create much-needed jobs.

She has also made a call for the business community to make a serious effort towards absorbing young people in their numbers in the fight against poverty. She urged everybody to ensure that value is added to Free State products for the benefit of its people.

Youth unemployment in the Free State is

estimated at about 55 percent, while the official expanded unemployment rate for all age groups in the province stood at 45.8 percent in the third quarter of 2021.

"Our priority is the masses of young people, women and persons with disabilities. We want to see them thriving and successful. To create opportunities, and instil a sense of value and responsibility in them," said Ntombela.

"Our YES initiative with Standard Bank is beginning to do this. Sixty unemployed youths were offered their first job opportunities"

She said through the YES initiative, these young people will go on to become entrepreneurs and change-makers in full control of their present and future aspirations. The YES Initiative stands to benefit youth and businesses alike. Specifically, Black, Coloured and Indian youths between the ages of 18 and 35 are encouraged to apply to join the YES Initiative.

She further revealed that R10 million was spent on supporting 30 businesses in the Free State through the Industrial Support Incentive Programme.



Members of the Free State Provincial Legislature listening to the State of the Province Address.



VIP guests at the Free State State of the Province Address.

"Thirteen enterprises of these enterprises that benefited from this Incentive Programme were owned by women and six were owned by youth," said Ntombela.

"The type of support included rental subsidies, provision of equipment and setup costs for emerging and established manufacturers."

The premier said other initiatives to grow the economy in the Free State included support with tax compliance matters, funding, business plans, completion of bid documents and tender opportunities.

So far, said Ntombela, 164 jobs had been created in the Maluti-a-Phofung Special Economic Zone, which is planning to attract over R2 billion worth in investments.


"These investment plans are hampered by vandalism. If anything, vandalism robs the people of the Free State of their livelihoods. This is worsened by poor electricity and water supply," said Ntombela.

"We will never fold our arms when the hopes of people are destroyed. We will therefore work with relevant authorities to address these issues."

Ntombela vowed to place agriculture at the forefront of her economic recovery plans beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ntombela said the Free State Province's location provides opportunities for agricultural growth. It is therefore not surprising that 14.5 percent of South Africa's commercial farming activities take place in this province.

"This is an advantage we need to fully harness," she said, adding that the



dominant land use in the Free State comes with great potential for job creation, food security and rural development.

"We are humbled by the fact that on 14 January 2022, the Integrated Vrede Dairy Project, which sits on a massive 2,094 hectares of land, was handed over to its 65 rightful beneficiaries as part of growing the sector," said Ntombela.

"This project is now 51 percent owned by the Vrede Integrated Farming Trust and 583 dairy animals and nine horses have been allocated to the beneficiaries."

The remaining 49 percent will be advertised to attract investors.

The project was established in 2012 by the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) to empower black farmers with the knowledge and skills to operate a successful dairy farming enterprise, which would contribute to the local economy and improve the livelihoods of its communities.

However, the local community did not end up benefitting from this project as they should have.


She said the Free State would also establish its own development strategy to grow the cannabis industry during this financial year.

"We are repositioning the Free State as the cannabis hub of the country. Six sites have been identified in Kroonstad, Viljoenskroon, Bethlehem, Ficksburg, Wesselsbron and the farm in Glen," will be used as a research site.

The Free State is also committed to the acceleration of the Expanded Public Works Programme. Thus far, the province has created 54,080 jobs by the third quarter of the 2021/2022 financial year.

"Figures show that we continue to prioritise the most vulnerable. A total of 74 percent of women, 34 percent of youth and 1 percent of persons with disabilities benefitted from this programme."

"In the coming year, we will create 50,000 job opportunities through the Expanded Public Works Programme."



Education is a key Driver to spur development and growth

Premier Sisi Ntombela, who started her career with a 5-year stint as a teacher at the Department of Education for the period of five years at Mafahlaneng, Tweeling, says the Free State Government's passion for education is meant to leave a lasting legacy that will increase the number of appropriately skilled people who will meet the province's demands.

During her State of the Province Address, Ntombela said the Free State Government had targeted education, skills development and youth opportunities as their focus areas in the 2022 financial year.

The province will also focus on infrastructure maintenance.

She vowed that the Free State would retain the Number One spot this year as top-performing province when it comes to matric results.

During her State of the Province Address (SOPA), Ntombela once again praised the provincial education department for achieving the Number One spot in the 2021 matric exams.

She promised that the Free State matrices would remain at the top of the leaderboard nationally.

The province attained an 85.7 percent pass rate, the best in the country. This is the third consecutive year that the Free State has emerged as the top-performing province.

"The Free State is leading the education revolution," a jubilant Ntombela said. "We said last year that come 2021, you will





Free State MEC of Education Tate Makgoe.

still find us in the Number One spot. Our determination has been rewarded."

She said that 3,510 more girls than boys wrote their Grade 12 exam, and 2,734 more girls than boys passed.

Girls obtained 61.8 percent of distinctions in critical subjects versus the 38.2 percent obtained by boys.

"For the first time, four of our districts are on the Top 10 list of the best performing districts," said Ntombela.

"We will continue to provide bursaries to deserving learners."

MEC for Education Tate Makgoe said the province was investing in the country's future by educating children.

"The Free State province is going to provide the best-of-the-best pupils with bursaries. Among our top 100 pupils, some said they didn't have time to apply for bursaries because they were working hard to focus on their books to give us these beautiful results," he said.

"This is a serious and worthy journey that we must take as a province. It is not an expenditure. When we are paying for a child's school fees, we are investing in the future of that child. In doing so, we are indirectly encouraging other pupils to deliver better results than their predecessors. Our concern is that our children must deliver results knowing very well that the province will ensure that they will be assisted with tertiary fees."

Ntombela said the focus for financial assistance would be on the missing middle learners who are too poor to afford higher education and not poor enough to qualify for National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) funding.

"These learners come from households earning between R350,000 and 600,000 per annum," said Ntombela.

"We have partnered with the NSFAS to ensure learners from households with an income ranging from nothing to R300,000 per annum receive NSFAS funding."

She also unveiled plans to invest in education infrastructure, saying that more than R200 million has already been used to build the Ruang Tsebo Primary School in Clocolan, Mooifontein Primary in Zastron and Rehopotswe Primary School in Bloemfontein.

"It gives me great pleasure to announce that we no longer have schools built with temporary material in the Free State," said Ntombela.

"Last year we reported that the five remaining schools that were built with sustainable material were under construction. I can proudly report that these schools have been constructed with bricks and mortar."

She said that in the past two financial years, 34,470 young people in the Free State have been appointed through the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative as education assistants, general school assistants and sports enrichment assistants.

This initiative will be extended over the next two years, announced Ntombela.

MEC for Education, Tate Makgoe, said education remained a top priority in the Free State.

He said he agreed with the Premier that the Free State would retain its Number One

spot as the best performing province at the end of the year.

"This is our promise because we go the extra mile in the Free State when it comes to education. We have worked very hard to ensure that teachers and parents should work hard on the ground to improve education," said Makgoe.

He said despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the teachers and parents in the Free State vowed to improve on education and matric performance during the exams.

"Our slogan was; COVID-19 or no COVID-19 Free State must be Number One," said Makgoe.

Makgoe believes that for the country to succeed, its education must be supported to produce learners with skills.

He added that he had consulted with the premier about the funding of learners and through the premier's bursary scheme.



Guests and local residents attending the State of the Province Address.

WORK UNDERWAY TO FIX MUNICIPALITIES IN THE FREE STATE



Mxolisi Dukwana, Free State COGTA MEC.

WHILE the DA and others have criticised the cadre deployment strategy of the ANC for stripping municipalities of expertise and allowing the unabated plundering of municipal infrastructure grants and other service delivery related resources, Premier Sisi Ntombela says this was not always the case.

Ntombela said serious interventions will be instituted by the provincial government at different municipalities following a lack of service delivery and lamented the performance of these municipalities, saying that it was below the expectations of communities.

The Free State local government sector consists of constituted by the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (Bloemfontein, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu) and four district municipalities.

"Work to repair the state of our municipalities together with the newly elected councillors and South African Local Government Association (SALGA) have already started," said Ntombela.

"All we want is to get the basics right and improve service delivery."

She said the Municipal Infrastructure Grant was important for service delivery.

She said at the end of June 2021, R693 840 000 had been spent.

This was 87 percent of the total Grant allocated.

As a result, said Ntombela, 2,469 jobs were created, of which 668 were toward women.

"Five municipalities received unqualified audit opinions and seven qualified audit opinions. It is concerning that Annual Financial Statements of 10 municipalities are outstanding," said Ntombela.

"A team has been constituted by our Provincial Treasury to work with municipalities to improve these financial outcomes."

She further announced that ongoing governance and financial challenges in Mangaung Metro were being addressed.

She said the Section 139 (5) (a and c) instituted in 2020 was meant to stabilise the finances of the metro was paying off.

The metro was able to obtain an unqualified audit opinion for 2020/2021.

"An intergovernmental task team has been constituted by the Minister of Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) to provide support and resolve current governance challenges experienced by the Council."

"We will create a service delivery technical team made up of civil and electrical engineers, quantity surveyors, town planners and ICT specialists in the Premier's Office by July this year."

"As the Free State, we are on a drive to instill good governance and ethical leadership to root out corruption and maladministration. We are supporting law enforcement agencies in their fight against this problem."

Ntombela said the province was committed to property transformation and only companies with tried and tested proven track records will be appointed for all construction and revitalization programmes.

She said more than R50 million has been allocated for upgrades on gravel roads and



Free State Premier Sisi Ntombela flanked by her executive - including members of the Free State Provincial Legislature.

to the Pothole Repair Programme.

“Besides job creation, our townships revitalization programme is also facilitating local development programmes. Twelve township roads will be completed and launched at the end of this financial year. 237 jobs have been created as the results of the township revitalization programme. And 300 job opportunities will be created through this intervention.”

Ntombela said one of the worst challenges facing the province was unemployment, especially among the young people. Ntombela was referring to comments and inputs her office received from members of the public prior to the State of the Province Address.

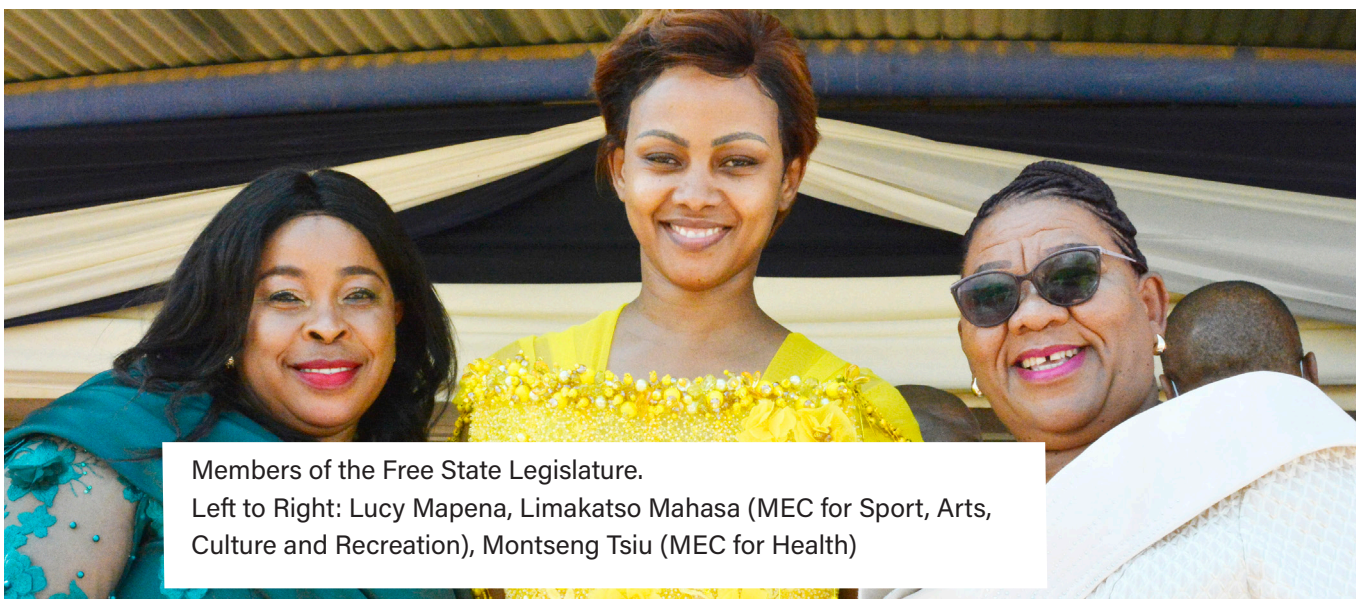
“We are pleased with developments in our Phuthaditjhaba, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu Industrial Parks to stimulate economic growth and create jobs in these disadvantaged areas. The Digital Hub in the Botshabelo Industrial Park is now open for business. The Hub is home to an ecosystem that is driven by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

Dr Roy Jankielsohn, leader of the opposition in the Free State, said one of the biggest problems in the Free State was that money was budgeted, tenders were allocated but delivery remained poor.

“Many of the developments in Maluti-a-Phofung (MAP), Qwa-Qwa and Botshabelo are dependent on sound municipal services that do not appear to be forthcoming from councils in which the ANC remain deeply divided, and undermine and even sabotage their factional opponents. These political issues remain a serious problem in the Free State,” said Jankielsohn.

“The bottom line is that similar promises were made in previous SOPAs and the lives, livelihoods and health of our people on the ground remain unchanged and have even regressed in the past year.”

He said the DA would study the Premier’s SOPA in detail, continue to make constructive suggestions and hold her accountable for the delivery of her promises in the Free State.



Members of the Free State Legislature.
Left to Right: Lucy Mapena, Limakatso Mahasa (MEC for Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation), Montseng Tsiu (MEC for Health)

MACUFE | MANGAUNG'S BIGGEST FESTIVAL TO RETURN AFTER TWO-YEAR BREAK DUE TO COVID-19 NTOMBELA



PREMIER Sisi Ntombela says the Mangaung African Cultural Festival (Macufe) is set to return after being put on hold for the past two years due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ntombela announced the return of the festival during her State of the Province Address.

"We are excited that our international festival, Macufe, will return this year after it was stopped in 2020 after the outbreak of COVID-19," she said.

"Sport, arts, and culture define the essence of who we are. We will still use these sectors to inspire and celebrate our diversity. Having witnessed the impact of COVID-19 on the creative industry, 692

artists received R5000 each as part of the COVID-19 Relief Fund” said Ntombela in her address.

The 10-day festival is usually held in October in Bloemfontein, attracting thousands of music lovers. Prominent names who in the past ascended the Macufe stage are T-Pain, Davido, Brandy, Deborah Cox, David Koz, Anthony Hamilton and local acts.

Further details about the festival are

expected to be released during the year. The saddest thing about the return of Macufe will be the absence of Bloemfontein Celtic which was sold last year to KwaZulu -Natal based businesswoman Shawn Mkhize known as MamKhize.

The festival always ended in a soccer match between Kaizer Chiefs and Bloem Celtic. It remains to be seen what organisers have in store for soccer lovers in the Free State.



Free State Premier Sis Ntombela in a group picture with her executive and members of the opposition parties.