

“GREENING AND CLEANING COMMUNITIES: UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL OF THE WASTE ECONOMY IN GAUTENG”

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY GAUTENG PREMIER, DAVID MAKHURA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE INFORMAL WASTE RECYCLERS PROJECT; MAKHULONG STADIUM, TEMBISA.

03 September 2017

Programme Director, MEC for Economic Development, Agriculture, Environment and Rural Development, MEC Lebogang Maile;

MMC Ndosi Shongwe, in charge of Environment in Ekurhuleni and other MMCs from Gauteng municipalities;

Simon Mbatha, SA Waste Pickers Association;

Councillors and Community leaders;

HoD Nhlakanipho Nkontwana and government officials;

Environmental activists;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Firstly, let me congratulate MEC Maile, his team and all those who have worked hard to ensure the successful launch of this important initiative; where as a province we are deepening and expanding our footprint in the growing waste economy.

Today belongs to the informal waste pickers who work so hard to earn a living out of collecting, sorting and recycling waste. They too must be included in the type of economy we are building.

Ladies and Gentlemen; one of the immediate challenges we face is that the waste economy in our country is largely informal comprising of an estimated 62 147 small scale informal waste pickers.

Today, through the launch of this programme, we are providing many of these informal waste pickers with an opportunity to be part of the economic mainstream. This we are doing in line with our ongoing commitment to building an inclusive economy; an economy where no one is left behind.

As the Gauteng Provincial Government, we have decided to invest substantial resources to ease the burden of these fellow citizens as they do the important work of cleaning and recycling waste.

We are doing this in particular to ensure that the waste economy helps us to advance our green industrialisation agenda as well economic inclusion, empowerment and transformation.

Programme Director as a major generator of waste in our country, with about 17 landfills, Gauteng has an opportunity to lead the waste management revolution. We know for instance that the management of landfill sites is estimated to be in excess of R17 billion per annum – these are resources we could spend in meeting our development needs.

Equally, on annual basis South Africa's waste growth is estimated at between 2.5% and 4%. Gauteng being the economic hub, contributes more than 50% to the country's waste.

There are more than 74 000 Informal waste pickers across South Africa and 50 000 Informal Waste Pickers and Recyclers in Gauteng. They are organized under various cooperatives and community-based enterprises.

The South African Waste Pickers Association is a very important partner in our campaign to clean and green our cities and communities and turn waste management and recycling into a sustainable economy that provides jobs and business opportunities to our people at local level.

The pilot of handing over 200 motorized three-wheeled vehicles to use them to do the job they are already. Each vehicle costs around R100 000.00 (one hundred thousand rands). This programme will generate 2000 jobs.

Through this initiative we are reaffirming our commitment to the vision of a Gauteng City Region characterised by radical social and economic transformation and sustainable green enterprises, green jobs and green industries of the future.

We are also reaffirming, unequivocally, that as the people of Gauteng we care about our environment and understand that our livelihood depends on the environment and therefore we will do everything necessary to protect it.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in January last year we relaunched the Bontle ke Botho Campaign in the township of Alexandra. We did this in line with the commitment we made that we will intensify efforts to keep our cities and towns clean and environmentally sustainable.

We used the occasion of the relaunch of the Bontle ke Botho Campaign to strengthen partnerships with communities, the business sector and all stakeholders towards a cleaner and greener Gauteng.

On that occasion we made the point that waste management and environmental sustainability are economic activities – they have massive potential to help our people build for themselves sustainable livelihoods. We said waste is money, and waste is a sustainable economic activity!

When we relaunched Bontle ke Botho we specifically committed that we will support small scale informal recyclers, found in many parts of our townships, to ensure that they derive maximum benefits from the recycling of waste, in particular and the waste economy in general. Today we are delivering on this commitment!

I want to call on all the Mayors of Gauteng municipalities to join Bontle ke Botho instead of launching their own separate initiatives.

More significantly, this occasion today forms part of our ongoing efforts to give practical meaning to our commitment to a growing, inclusive and environmentally sustainable economy in Gauteng.

Borrowing from the words of Nobel Laureate and Kenyan environmental activist Dr Wangari Mathai, as the Gauteng Provincial Government we concede that:

“Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own - indeed to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. Recognizing that sustainable development, democracy and peace are indivisible as is an idea whose time has come.”

As the provincial government working in partnership with the rest of society, we are today, through the launch of this programme, intervening to stop threatening humanity’s life support system. We are acting to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own.

We are taking a firm and practical stand for sustainable development, against environmental degradation.

We are also introducing a township based approach to waste management – we are placing our townships, who account for about 80% of Gauteng’s population, at the centre of our forward march to the green and waste economy.

Programme Director, to us transitioning towards the green economy has become an absolute imperative and not an option!

Far too many of our cities, towns and townships are dirty and environmentally unsustainable. We also know too well that a shift towards the green economy offers significant long term benefits – it offers new paths to growth and development; it can also strengthen efforts to revitalise the township economy.

We are of the view that recycling must be the “new normal” in Gauteng. The approach of throwing away waste is not sustainable. If we continue to just throw old products into landfills we are not only harming our environment but also we are missing an important opportunity to benefit from usable resources.

We differ with the notion that development is congruous with carbon intensive industrialisation. As we said when we addressed the second biannual Gauteng Infrastructure Investment Summit in July this year, the kind of industrialisation we are pursuing is one that is technologically driven and environmentally sustainable – we are for smart, green industrialisation; we see ourselves as being at the cutting edge of the forth industrial revolution.

Correctly so, as a people, we have permanently turned our backs against the kind of industrialization of yesteryears characterised by heavy manufacturing in dark, smoke filled warehouses and factories, with devastating effects on the environment.

As Gauteng, we must therefore act with urgency to upscale our waste management interventions. Together as stakeholders we must work hard to contribute to the national effort to reduce waste generation by 50% and reach the target of 20% waste diversion by 2019.

As we do this we must take full advantage of the massive economic opportunities that will arise from waste management. For instance according to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the formal waste sector in South Africa is estimated to be worth at least R15.3 billion, or 0.51% of GDP and it employs a minimum of 29 833 people.

Furthermore, the waste recycling sector has been growing at an average annual rate of 23.7% over the past few years and is a significant provider of employment for low-skilled workers. This sector will also strengthen our drive towards green industrialisation.

Considering all of this, we subscribe to the view that the waste economy is South Africa's new gold! It is about turning the things we throw away into tangible assets - remanufacturing them, remolding them and re-using them.

We have identified innovation as a key enabler for the transition from waste to production. Accordingly, we will invest in the innovation process as part of providing the requisite support, including appropriate infrastructure towards a thriving waste economy in Gauteng. The programme we are launching today is but the beginning of this process.

Programme Director, as we said when we re-launched Bontle ke Botho, the transition to the green and waste economy, will require a fundamental change in behaviour in our communities.

In the same vein businesses must also change the way they view waste – they must see waste and the waste economy as a market for secondary raw materials – a means to use and re-use natural resources more effectively and a way to make industrial production less dependent on the extraction of resources from the ground, which is not sustainable in the long-term.

Ultimately our objective is to work in partnership with the private sector towards unlocking the potential of the waste economy in Gauteng. This includes co-investing with business in new and innovative solutions to make a swift transition to a green and much more sustainable economy.

Together with the private sector, we must support the green or waste economy in order to forge resilient markets and supply chains capable of delivering a sustainable economy in the long term.

Let us all join hands towards the goal of building a clean and green Gauteng City Region that pursues a path of environmentally sustainable

growth and development. This will be the best gift we will give to current and future generations.

Thank you.