

Address by the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation ,Dr Blade Nzimande on the occasion of the Sekhukhune Skills Development Center SOD-Turning Ceremony in Groblersdal,Limpopo Province

Thursday , 21 October 2021

Programme Director, Mrs Makgobotloane;
Premier Stanley Chupu Mathabatha;
Sekhukhune District Mayor, Cllr Keamotseng Ramaila;
Mayor of Elias Motsoaledi Municipality, Cllr Julia Mathebe;
Our Traditional Leadership;
Chairperson of the W&RSETA Accounting Authority, Mr Reggie Sibiya and members of the W&R SETA Accounting Authority;
Chief Executive Officer of the W&RSETA, Mr Tom Mkhwanazi;
Sekhukhune TVET College Council led by the Chairperson Prof MM Kanjere;
Officials from my Ministry and the both my departments of Higher Education and Training & Science and Innovation (including DDGs: Skills and TVET, NSF Acting Executive Officer and our Regional Manager);
Principal of Sekhukhune TVET College, Mr Tebogo Kekana;
Principals of Capricorn, Waterberg, Mopani, Letaba and Vhembe and Lephalale TVET Colleges;

Chief Executive Officers of other SETAs;
Boxer Group Executive Stakeholder Engagement & Sustainability, Ms Ntombi Dlodla;
Other captains of industry present;
Student Leadership;
Community members;
Members of the Media;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning !

I am pleased to be joining you today we kick-start what will be one of the biggest Skills Development Centres in our country, in the Limpopo province and in the Sekhukhune District at large

Let me take this opportunity to thank all our partners who have been part of this project from its conception, as well as those who have committed to continue the partnership into the future.

Today I wish to particularly thank the Chairperson of the W&R Board, Mr Sibiya, all board members and the CEO Mr T Mkhwanazi for this wonderful investment into this Skills Centre and project.

To us developing partnerships is very critical and I am pleased to have received a report that this project has attracted many partners both in government and in the private sector.

As the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, I value your continued support and participation greatly today.

Re ya leboga!! Siyabonga!!

What is also impressive is that the Skills Centre to be constructed is within relatively short distance between two neighbouring municipalities. The Centre is within the Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality, and about only 30 kilometres from the Ephraim Mogale Local Municipality.

Both these municipalities will accrue immense benefit by the establishment of this centre.

I have also noted that both these municipalities' economic drivers, include amongst others: Agriculture (Maize, Sorghum, Dry Beans, Cotton, Poultry and Livestock, whilst other critical sectors, include Mining (Granite, Sand & Stone, Lime and Dolomite) and Tourism.

It makes perfect sense to me that this Centre should be located here to offer the type of training that is relevant to the economic development needs and niches of this region.

This is indeed what we mean by a 'responsive post school system'.

Ladies and gentlemen

ON THE SKILL CENTRE

The construction of this Skills Development Centre will contribute to the Department of Higher Education and Training's Decade of Artisan initiative while also contributing to developing critical artisanal skills.

To be constructed in a predominantly rural area, the centre will assist in advancing rural development while also creating sustainable livelihoods for the benefit of the youth of Sekhukhune in particular and Limpopo province at large.

As you might be aware, as a country and a government we are working to rebuild our economy after the devastating effects of the coronavirus pandemic which severely disrupted our economic activity and putting numerous investments on hold.

Our priority now is to drive the implementation of our Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan as pronounced and led by our President, Cyril Ramaphosa.

This plan, which is underpinned by the agreements and commitments between social partners, outlines key interventions to kickstart our economy.

Among other things, we are prioritising economic reforms to unlock investment and growth, driving industrialisation with a focus on growing small businesses, improving the capability of the state, and creating jobs through mass public employment programmes. This strategy also incorporates the fight against crime, corruption and gender based violence.

Another key priority intervention through the ERRP is promoting infrastructure investment and supporting its delivery.

These include large-scale build projects, community and social infrastructure, as well as infrastructure maintenance.

Throughout, our focus is on catalysing job creation and ensuring that local businesses benefit.

This, ladies and gentlemen, brings me to the reason why we are gathered here today.

We are here to break ground for the construction of this massive Skills Development centre, which will be a trailblazer in this province, and one of a kind as you can see with the buildings that are already coming up.

This project provides a platform for the implementation of artisanal training on a massive scale in view of the National Development Plan which targets training about 30 000 artisans by the year 2030.

The project involves a partnership between the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&R SETA) and Sekhukhune Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College.

This project is testament to the call I always make of ensuring an integrated, coordinated and articulated post school education and training (PSET) system which brings together all post school sectors in pursuit of our skills development mandate.

A 115-hectare land has been allocated for the construction of this Skills Development Centre.

The project has been allocated R146,9-million which will be utilised as follows:

R131 million for the building of the Skills Development Centre;
R9 million for capacitation of informal traders and construction of trading stalls for 45 informal traders operating in the surrounding areas; and
R6,9 million to construct an access road into the Centre.

The centre will comprise the following:

Administration building;
Retail Business Hub,
Engineering workshops fully equipped for technical training (trade test centre); and
Retail & Agricultural Hub for training, warehousing, farming, agro-processing, and retailing.

The Learning Programmes to be offered in the Centre, include amongst others:

National Certificate: Animal Production;
National Certificate: Poultry Production;
National Certificate: Accommodation Services;
National Certificate: Wholesale and Retail Operations: Chain Store Operations;
National Certificate: Automotive Body Repair and Maintenance;
Occupational Certificate: Boilermaker;
Occupational Certificate: Fitter and Turner;
Further Education and Training Certificate: Electrical Engineering; and the
Occupational Certificate: Electrician.

In view of the nature of Sekhukhune economic activities, the sustainability of the project requires further collaborations with other SETAs in its value chain.

As a result, my other SETAs will join in the implementation of this project.

They include the Agricultural Sector Education and Training Authority (AGRISETA), Food and Beverages Sector Education and Training Authority (FOODBEV SETA), Culture, Arts, Tourism,

Hospitality and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA), and Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority (MERSETA).

For sustainability, the project will train SMMEs through the incubation programme by the Sekhukhune TVET college with collaborations established with retailers to sell products produced from the Centre.

Additionally, the college plans to develop a multi-purpose centre and a hotel which will generate income for the Centre.

Students will receive practical training and will be placed in the multi-purpose centre and the hotel as part an exit strategy.

PARTNERSHIPS

The college has already partnered with reputable and experienced host employers who will mentor the learners and prepare them for the world of work in fields such as civil engineering, manufacturing engineering and related services, business, finance, agriculture and retail, amongst others.

The college will further ensure that it engages more host employers to make the project even more successful. The partnership with the private sector is of absolute importance and I therefore invite more companies to come and partner with us and also source skilled labour from the trainees of the Skills Centre.

I also invite both the provincial government and the two municipalities to become active partners in this project, using it as a source for some of the skills needed in both provincial and local government.

Both these spheres of government must also become partners to ensure that this centre becomes sustainable and possibly even become a full-blown college in its own right in the future.

I am also hopeful and certain that the W&R Seta wont disengage as soon as this centre takes off.

I am instead already encouraged by the commitment of W&R Seta to support the offering of the programmes needed in its own sectors through this centre.

PLANNED INTAKE AND TRADE TESTS

Based on the contracts that have already been signed with the funders, the college will have an intake of about 400 students for the 2022 academic year.

The college will provide more details through public announcements for recruitment.

As indicated earlier, the College will locate a trade testing facility within the centre to ensure that learners do not travel far to be trade tested in order to become qualified artisans.

This trade centre will also assist sister TVET Colleges in Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

FIGHTING CORRUPTION AND PROTECTING THE CENTRE

Ladies and gentlemen

We are aware of several construction projects in our country worth billions of rands that are being violently disrupted and even brought to a complete halt.

Some of these disruptions are the direct result of the scourge of corruption and state capture thus undermining government's effort to improve the lives of citizens.

My Department, working with all our partners, will at all times strive to ensure that this project is not disturbed until its conclusion and hand-over.

Again, after it has been handed over, we must ensure that this facility continuously receives proper maintenance. We must always guard our public infrastructure diligently.

In conclusion, I have no doubt that the already established relations between my department, through our SETAs, the provincial and local government in Limpopo and the private sector will ensure that we move from strength-to-strength in ensuring improved and sustainable livelihoods for the people and especially the youth of this area.

I therefore call upon the communities in which this centre is located to become vigilant and do all they can to defend and protect this centre as it is your own resource and facility.

Premier Stan Chupu Mathabatha, I would like to thank you and the entire Limpopo government, the Sekhukhune District Municipality and its local municipalities for your cooperation and support. If it were not because of your unwavering commitment and support, we would not be here today.

I also thank the W&R SETA Board, the Executive, officials from my Department of Higher Education and Training and individuals and business entities that were and are still to be involved in the construction of this centre.

The building of this centre is proof that my department and indeed this government are committed to skills development with a particular focus on young people.

With these words I wish you well.

I thank you.