

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION DR BLADE NZIMANDE ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES EDUCATION AND TRAINING AUTHORITY (CHIETA) BABANANGO SMART SKILLS CENTRE, ZULULAND, KWAZULU-NATAL

Friday, 1 September 2023

Programme Director;  
Zululand Mayor, Councillor Thulasizwe Buthelezi;  
Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority (CHIETA) Accounting Authority (AA) Chairperson, Ms Wezi Khoza;  
Media, Information and Communication Technologies Sector Education and Training Authority (MICTSETA) Accounting Authority (AA) Chairperson, Mr Simphiwe Thobela;  
Mthashana TVET College Principal, Mr Nhlanhla Dimba;  
CHIETA Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Mr Yershen Pillay;  
CHIETA and MICT SETA Accounting Authority Members present;  
Senior Officials from the Department and our entities;  
Distinguished Guests and Stakeholders;  
Members of the media;  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Sanibonani!!!

It is my greatest pleasure to be with you in the launch of this historic Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority (CHIETA) SMART Skills Centre here in Babanango in the Zululand District – one of the districts which still requires the massification of various forms of skills development for our young people, particularly digital skills.

Looking at the demographic data of the district, the district has a total number of 178 516 households with an average of 5 person per household. 53.8% of the households are headed by women. There are 2034 child headed households and 33.4% of the child-headed households have girls as their head.

As at 17 June 2020 there were 4 238 confirmed cases as well as 73 deaths and 2 133 recoveries in KZN. There are seven quarantine facilities in Zululand with 194 beds combined. Four of the facilities have been activated as at 29 May 2020.

The economy of Zululand district is driven by the tertiary sector, with community services having the highest contribution at 31%, followed by finance at 18% and trade at 12%.

Honourable Executive Mayor, in the available data of this District, there is no much data available about the presence of digital commerce in this area.

It is therefore not by coincidence that we have decided to build this SMART Skills Centre here at Babanango, a town which was established almost 120 years ago, although this area goes back long before that. In fact it is an area that is associated with many heroic struggles against colonialism, and Amabutho kaZulu passed here to the famous Isandlwana battlefield.

Today, this small town of Babanango is home of more or less 2,000 people.

Our democratic government took a conscious decision to prioritise the development of our rural areas and grow their economy in order to create jobs for the community around the areas.

We do this through dedicated equitable share budgets in the national, provincial and local government.

Furthermore, our government is implementing dedicated programmes such as the District Development Model which aims to improve the coherence and impact of government service delivery with focus on 44 Districts and 8 Metros around the country as development spaces that can be used as centres of service delivery and economic development, including job creation.

Just to briefly explain to our youth, who were not yet born during the heydays of apartheid, what the black people and Africans in general were subjected to especially those in rural areas or the so called "homelands".

Numerous laws were passed in the creation of the apartheid State, two of the laws which are more detrimental to many black people was and today closely related to our event is the Group Areas Act of 1950 which advocated for physical separation between races, especially in urban areas and the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act, of 1959.

This Act advocated for different racial groups to live in different areas. Only a small percentage of South Africa was left for black people (who comprised the vast majority) to form their 'homelands'. This Act also got rid of 'black spots' inside white areas, by moving all black people out of the city.

This area is also known for the most vicious and exploitative labour regimes in South African history - labour tenancy. This is a system where those staying in white owned farms would pay by providing free labour and with children not expected to go to school beyond Standard Four. Often these families were also restricted in how much animals they could keep.

Out of this explanation, one could deduce why most of areas that the majority of black people stayed, would not be prioritised for basic services which included access to clean water, sanitation, electricity and telephony, amongst others.

In 1994 our new democratic government began a process to transform the economy to undo the deep rooted structural unemployment and inequality from the long term effects of apartheid's distorted policies.

This is a story of how, working together as South Africans, we have built a country that is today a much better place to live in than it was before 1994.

No other developing country of a similar size can claim to have accomplished what we have in such a relatively short period.

It is only the perpetual ANC government detractors who still disagree with us when we say South Africa is a much better place to live in now than it was in 1994.

While unemployment and inequality have not fallen to the levels we would have liked, as government we are confident that the plans we have in place will help turn the situation around.

I however must indicate that while we have recorded many successes across a range of areas, the story of how we have transformed our economy is nothing short of remarkable.

The economy we inherited at the end of apartheid was structured to meet the needs of only a selected few.

In this context of our history, I cannot overstate the importance of this SMART Skills Centre being located here at small rural town of Babanango.

I therefore would like to congratulate CHIETA for its dedication to build this centre here because this centre will certainly bridge the digital skills divide and accelerate the development of basic digital skills among the communities of this town.

I am thus extremely pleased this centre will provide tech-enabled learning programmes, such as virtual and augmented reality, robotics, and the internet of things amongst others.

Whilst CHIETA is the main stakeholder in the development of this SMART Skills Centre - by providing the bulk of the equipment and expertise for the running of the centre – CHIETA is partnering with the Mthashana TVET College as well as with the Media, Information and Communication Technologies Sector Education and Training Authority (MICT SETA), which will provide cell phone equipment.

## ABOUT THE SMART SKILLS CENTRE

Ladies and gentlemen

I want to indicate that this Skills Centre is the third and largest CHIETA SMART Skills Centre to be launched and it forms part of CHIETA's efforts to bridge the digital skills divide and accelerate the development of basic digital skills in rural communities.

The Babanango area was specifically identified for the establishment of the SMART Skills Centre because it is deep in the rural area of KwaZulu-Natal, and it is without any internet connectivity.

Our aim for establishing this centre is for our local community here, our learners, our students, job seekers and businesspeople to benefit from this centre.

The Centre will advance skills development for the unemployed youth by offering programmes based on various technologies, including VR, blockchain, AI, software development, data science and mobile repairs.

Through this centre our unemployed youth will have access to various online learning platforms to start up successful and scalable data-driven commercial businesses that will provide technological solutions.

This centre we also help us bridge the digital skills divide between urban and rural communities.

Abantwana balapha e Babanango, nabo bayofana nabantwana abasemadolobheni ngoba bayokwazi ukuthi izinga nolwazi labo ngobucwepeshe be computer buzoba ezingeni eliphezulu.

What is also so profound about this centre is that it will provide our youth with digital skills that will help to meet the demands of industries which rely on technology to grow their enterprises.

This Centre will therefore help our youth to actively participate in the digital world, seize countless opportunities and contribute to a more inclusive and digitally connected world.

Through this Centre, our unemployed youth and learners in this area will also have access to acquire online learning programmes which are related to start-up businesses, blockchain technology, artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), software development, data science and mobile repairs.

I must also indicate that this SMART Skills Centre is part of our government's bigger plans to revolutionise digital skills development in South Africa.

The Centres will also cater for SMME development because SMME play a crucial role in the growth of our economy as they make up 34% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which was valued at \$358 billion in 2019, growing at 0.8%.

Our government has recognised and emphasised through the National Development Plan (NDP) the importance of SMMEs for job creation, innovation, and sustainability of the country. One of the goals outlined in the NDP was for 90% of new jobs must be created through SMMEs by 2030.

This is on the backdrop that our country continues to struggle with the burgeoning problem of unemployment, particularly in its highly youthful population.

According to the recent youth unemployment statistics in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, nearly one in two youth is unemployed.

Spanning the age group of 15 to 34-year-olds, the data from Statistics South Africa which was released in May 2023, shows that the total number of unemployed youth stands at 4.9 million, as a result of a 1.1% increase from the last quarter of 2022, to 46.5% for the first quarter of the year. In comparison, the country's overall official unemployment rate stands at 32.9%.

When delving deeper into the data this shows that "youth aged 15-24 years and 25-34 years recorded the highest unemployment rates of 62.1% and 40.7% respectively".

Furthermore, approximately 3.7 million (36.1%) out of 10.2 million young people aged 15-24 years were not in employment, education, or training.

I am more than certain that this project will certainly give our youth and the community at large the opportunity to get or create employment because digital skills are required in

most of the occupations in the 21st century. I am also hoping that this Centre will be a catalyst to attract other developmental projects and programmes.

Now, given the successful implementation of this project, we have taken a decision to expand this project in all nine provinces of our country.

CHIETA CEO, I going forward, would like us to strengthen our collaboration with the Department of Small Business Development. In doing so, we will be fulfilling the National Development Plan envisaged creation of 90% of new jobs in the Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to talk to our youth who are the beneficiaries that will be using this centre.

I want you to see this centre as a new beginning for you to start your new careers and your new business so that you can take care of yourselves, your families and advance the economic development of our country.

To the Mthasana TVET College management, please ensure that this centre is well taken care of, it should not be vandalised and when renovations are required, they should be done on time.

To our communities, please help us to ensure that we protect this Centre and all our public facilities. Facilities such as these are meant to advance the interest of the communities and it is in the best interest of the communities to ensure their safety. Without these facilities, community develop will be impossible.

I am delighted that Ondabezitha, aMakhosi wethu wendabuko have also joined us today. This gives me hope that indeed this investment by government will be well looked after.

On that note, I would like to officially declare the Babanango SMART Skills Centre as open for business.

As we declare this Centre opened, let us embark on this journey with enthusiasm, curiosity and a commitment towards lifelong learning.

Thank you