

Gauteng shifts focus to small business, skills development

Newly appointed Gauteng MEC for Economic Development Nkosiphendule Kolisile has singled out small businesses, the cooperative sector, jobs and skills development as some of his department's key focus areas going forward.

Kolisile, who has been meeting with senior management to discuss the status of the department's programmes since his appointment three weeks ago, said while the department was on the right track, more needed to be done.

On Tuesday, the MEC shared with the media some of the initiatives the department was embarking on with the aim of creating decent jobs and building a growing inclusive economy.

Small business and cooperatives were key areas because many jobs were expected to be created in this sector, he said.

"This sector faces various challenges, among which is the inability to access funds. Government interventions in this sector will go a long way in unlocking economic development opportunities to foster job creation, economic growth and development," said Kolisile.

The department's agency - the Gauteng Enterprise Propeller - had just completed a major review of its funding model, following calls by the Gauteng small business sector and citizens for the department to ensure improved access to funding.

Details of the review's findings would be made available once it had been processed.

In addition, the agency is expected to introduce a new programme for businesses owned by people with disabilities. This will include a combination of business training; grant funding with subsidised business development support, and support in terms of market access and exposure of enterprises.

The department wanted to ensure that adequate attention was given to entrepreneurship development as well as SMMEs and cooperatives, Kolisile said.

Other priorities included jobs and skills development.

"If we are to improve the economy, we have to reduce unemployment in the country and the province," he stressed.

Kolisile announced that in September, he will launch a jobs campaign, where he will meet with businesses and appeal to them to help in job creation.

"I will be talking to business to seriously consider job creation and that we need to ... invest in the province. I truly believe that together we can cause a dent on unemployment and create an inclusive and growing economy in the province," he said.

In addition, the Gauteng Growth and Development Agency will be speeding up implementation on a number of projects in the automotive, economic infrastructure and export promotion as well as facilitating domestic and foreign investments.

The MEC said it was also important to power ahead with the matric/graduate placement programme. In November, the department will place 1 000 candidates in various posts and by the end of the financial year, that number will be about 8 000.

In the coming months, the department will also fast-track work on the Gauteng Smart City - a collaboration of ICT companies and institutions, which will be located at Nasrec.

Projects including a data centre, business process outsourcing centre and an electronics manufacturing and assembly centre - which collectively will create thousands of jobs - will soon be activated, Kolisile said.

With regards to tourism, a project to develop new tourism routes in the province was nearing completion.

"These routes, which form part of our tourism infrastructure development programme, include the struggle route, sports route, heritage route and mining route," he said, adding that the routes will be launched in October.

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